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THE SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTAL RITUAL
IN THE LIGHT OF
LITURGICAL RESEARCH

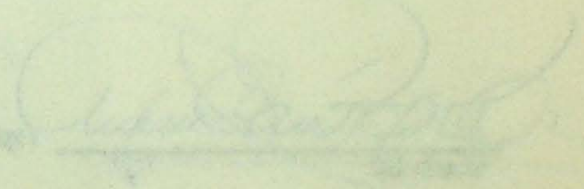
SHORT TITLE

THE SACRAMENTS IN AUGUST VILMAR

BY
AUGUST VILMAR
1903

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APPROVED BY

A large, flowing handwritten signature in dark ink, likely of a church official, is written over a horizontal line. The signature is somewhat cursive and difficult to decipher.

THE SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTAL ACTIONS
IN THE WORKS OF
AUGUST FRIEDRICH CHRISTIAN VILMAR

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

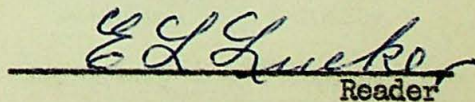
by

Edward Frederick Peters

June 1958

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Chapter		
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	THEOLOGICAL BASIS	1
	190-195	1
	195-200	1
	200-205	1
III.	THE SPIRITS AND THE CHURCH OFFICE	1
	The Spirits as Servants	1
	Ministry to the Church Office	1
IV.	THE CHURCH	1
	The Jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Church	1
	The Church as Christ's Living Presence	1
	The Church as a Visible Institution	1
V.	THE SACRAMENTS AND "SACRAMENTAL ACTS" IN GENERAL	1
	Definition of the Terms	1
	The Sacraments of the Church	1
	Validity of the Sacraments and "Sacramental Acts"	1
	The Sacraments and the Church	1
	Relationship of the Sacraments	1
VI.	THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM	1
	The Holy Spirit in Baptism	1
	Other Aspects	1
	The Sacrament and Practical Theology	1
VII.	THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST	1
	Validity of the Holy Eucharist	1
	The Holy Eucharist as Presence	1
	The Validity of the Sacrament	1
	The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist	1
	The Holy Eucharist and Practical Theology	1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	4
1800-1830	4
1831-1855	8
1855-1863	13
III. THE SYMBOLS AND THE CHURCH ORDERS	15
The Symbols as Norms	15
Adherence to the Church Orders	18
IV. THE CHURCH	20
The Formulation of the Doctrine of the Church	20
The Church as Christ's Living Presence	21
The Church as a Visible Institution	25
V. THE SACRAMENTS AND "SACRAMENTAL ACTIONS" IN GENERAL	29
Definition of the Terms	29
Not Found outside the Church	32
Factuality of the Sacraments and "Sacramental Actions"	34
How the Sacraments Work	36
Relationship among the Sacraments	36
VI. THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM	38
What Holy Baptism Is	38
Infant Baptism	43
Holy Baptism and Practical Theology	45
VII. THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST	51
Centrality of the Holy Eucharist	51
The True Bodily Presence	53
The Objectivity of the Sacrament	57
The Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist	62
The Holy Eucharist and Practical Theology	64

Chapter	Page
VIII. THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ABSOLUTION	72
Holy Absolution Must be Retained or Restored . . .	72
Holy Absolution is "Exhibitive"	76
The Office of the Keys Given to Pastors	77
The Seal of the Confessional	81
IX. HOLY ORDERS AND THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDINATION . .	83
The Ministry	83
Holy Ordination	88
Holy Ordination and Practical Theology	95
X. HOLY CONFIRMATION	98
What Holy Confirmation Is	98
Holy Confirmation and Practical Theology	103
XI. THE OTHER "SACRAMENTAL ACTIONS"	107
Holy Matrimony	107
Holy Unction	110
Other Blessings	111
XII. CONCLUSION	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY	116

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

August Friedrich Christian Vilmar was a rarity in nineteenth-century Lutheran theology. He was one of the few theologians in a rationalistic and pietistic age who took historic Lutheranism seriously. He developed his theological system in an atmosphere in which Reformed theology was dominant, and keenly sensing the danger that this foreign element would creep into German Lutheranism, Vilmar fought against it with every weapon at his disposal.

Studies of Vilmar's theology are almost non-existent, even in German, and to the author's knowledge, nothing has been written in English of any consequence on this subject. For this reason, the author felt that an objective report of Vilmar's position on the Sacraments and "sacramental actions" would be of value, particularly at the present time when foreign elements, such as Fundamentalist, Anabaptist, and Reformed doctrine and practice, with their lack of appreciation for the Sacraments, threaten contemporary Lutheran theology.

This paper is limited in its main part to what August Vilmar had to say about the Sacraments and what he termed "sacramental actions" (sakramentale Handlungen). It is difficult, in a few words, to define just what Vilmar included under these terms because in keeping with the Lutheran Symbols he did not categorically limit the Sacraments to a certain number and exclude all other acts of the Church. In certain contexts he spoke of seven and more Sacraments, and in other contexts, of only two Sacraments, placing the lesser acts of the Church into the category "sacramental

actions." In general, one might say that he thought of three Sacraments-- Holy Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and Holy Absolution--as genuinely Sacraments, and that he called some of the other actions of the Church, such as Holy Ordination, Holy Matrimony, Holy Confirmation, and Holy Unction, "sacramental actions." Vilmar's numbering of the Sacraments will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

In addition, this paper is prefaced by a biographical sketch of Vilmar's life, in order that the reader may better understand the atmosphere in which Vilmar worked, and a short discussion of Vilmar's concept of the Lutheran Symbols and Lutheran Church Orders in the life of the Church, and of the doctrine of the Church as it pertains to his discussion of the Sacraments and "sacramental actions." The bulk of this essay is then a report of Vilmar's concept of Holy Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, Holy Absolution, Holy Orders and Ordination, Holy Confirmation, Holy Matrimony, Holy Unction, and other "sacramental actions."

The sources used in this paper are those works in which Vilmar discusses the Sacraments and "sacramental actions" available to the author in the United States of America, as well as biographies of Vilmar available to the author.

It is important to take cognizance of the fact that Vilmar wrote his theological works in a very polemical atmosphere. He worked during a time in which the Prussian government was trying to force the Prussian Church on Kurhessen, a move to which he was violently opposed. For this reason, it may seem to some that Vilmar sometimes overstated his case for Lutheranism in order to combat the Reformed elements which were so prevalent at his time.

It is not the purpose of this paper either to condemn or to commend without exception Vilmar's theology of the Sacraments and "sacramental actions." Its purpose is rather to give a report of what he had to say. In spite of the fact that some members of the Church of the Augsburg Confession may not agree with everything that Vilmar had to say on this subject, they cannot deny that Vilmar had many very deep insights as to the place of the Sacraments in the Church--insights which are particularly valuable in an era in which the sacramental life of the Church is at a very low ebb in many areas.

Vilmar received a thorough and plain religious education early in life. From his father, he belonged to the generation which had been raised in the faith of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It was chiefly from his father that Vilmar learned to value Holy Scripture as a book of authoritative witness.²

As far as Vilmar's very early years are concerned, two events particularly had lasting influence on Vilmar's later life: the death of a beloved uncle in the year 1812, which evidently gave a very serious and earnest bent to his outlook on life; the fall of Napoleon-Caesar into the hands of England's forces in November 1, 1818. It was the second event in particular which opened upon him a deep sense of responsibility to his homeland and its

² See, for example, *Die Theologie des Herrn Vilmar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1897), p. 1.

³ See, for example, *Die Theologie des Herrn Vilmar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1897), p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

1800-1830

August Friedrich Christian Vilmar was born on November 21, 1800, in the village of Solz, east of Rotenburg, Hesse-Cassel, to Pastor Johann Georg Vilmar and Susanne Elisabeth, nee Giesler.¹ He was the oldest of seven children.²

Vilmar received a thorough and pious religious training early in life from his father, who belonged to the pre-rationalistic (vorrationalistisch) school of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. It was chiefly from his father that Vilmar learned to prize Holy Scripture as a book of inestimable value.³

As far as Vilmar's very early years are concerned, two events particularly had lasting influence on Vilmar's later life: the death of a beloved uncle in the year 1805, which evidently gave a very serious and earnest cast to his outlook on life; the fall of Hesse-Cassel into the hands of Napoleon's forces on November 1, 1806. It was the second event in particular which gave him a deep sense of loyalty to his homeland and its

¹Johann Heinrich Leimbach, August Fr. Chr. Vilmar (Hannover: Buchhandlung von Heinrich Fesche, 1875), p. 1.

²Wilhelm Hopf, August Vilmar: Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1913), I, 6.

³Ibid., I, 13.

lawful ruler.⁴ The Napoleonic Wars and the occupation of Hesse-Cassel by the French left a deep impression on the six-year-old August, and in later years he wrote descriptions of these times which were still vivid and detailed.⁵ As a result of the French occupation, Vilmar retained a bitterness toward France throughout his life.⁶

As Vilmar remembered his impressions of the Church in his early years, he recalled that even at an early age the Holy Eucharist and Holy Absolution were of much more importance in his mind than were sermons and prayers. Later the Apostles' Creed left an increasingly deep impression on his young mind.⁷ Furthermore, the Holy Scriptures were of the utmost importance in his thinking. At the age of twelve, in his confirmation instructions, Vilmar knew the content--verse by verse--of most of the chapters in Sacred Scripture--an indication of his astounding powers of memory.⁸

In the year 1816, the same year in which Vilmar's family moved to Rotenburg,⁹ Vilmar entered the gymnasium at Hersfeld, Hesse-Cassel,¹⁰ from which he was graduated in the year 1818, whereupon he matriculated at the

⁴Johannes Haussleiter, "A. F. C. Vilmar," Realencyklopaedie fuer protestantische Theologie und Kirche, XX, begruendet von J. J. Herzog, dritte Auflage, herausgegeben von Dr. Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), 650-51.

⁵Hopf, op. cit., I, passim.

⁶Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 10-16.

⁷Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 650.

⁸Ibid., p. 650.

⁹Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 650.

¹⁰Leimbach, op. cit., p. 23.

University of Marburg.¹¹ Here, for two years, he studied theology, the ancient classics, and philology.

At first, Vilmar disliked the university because of its extreme Rationalism. But gradually Vilmar came under the influence of the Marburg school, and he too became more and more a Rationalist.¹² By the time that he left the University of Marburg in 1820,¹³ his theology was completely rationalistic. He denied the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and any teaching that contradicted his reason as "catholicizing" Protestantism.¹⁴

Yet, in spite of the fact that Vilmar left the faith of his childhood and became more and more vehemently opposed to anything that smacked of positive religion, he never lost his strong moral earnestness and his unflinching sincere search for honest realities and reliable truth. This is attested by his correspondence at the time, in which he repeatedly discusses dogmatic and moral problems such as predestination, resurrection, immortality, suicide, chastity, marriage, etc., in the most penetrating and clear-sighted manner.¹⁵ It is primarily this longing for something absolute which eventually brought Vilmar back to a strong Christian faith.

After being graduated from Marburg in 1820, Vilmar took a position as tutor to the three children of Wilhelm Lebrecht von Baumbach, a noble family in Kirchheim.¹⁶ At the same time he served as assistant pastor to

¹¹Hopf, op. cit., I, 68.

¹²Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 24-27.

¹³Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁴Hopf, op. cit., I, 94.

¹⁵Ibid., I, 102.

¹⁶Ibid., I, 89.

his father, who had meanwhile moved to Oberaula. He was ordained into the Holy Ministry on May 13, 1821. Vilmar retained his position as assistant pastor in Oberaula for three years.¹⁷

It was during this period in his life that Vilmar began to leave his rationalistic position because he realized that it had nothing to offer but negativism.¹⁸ However, it was to be several years before he completely rejected his rationalistic principles.

On December 8, 1824, Vilmar was appointed rector of the city school at Rotenburg. This was a very happy period of his life. On March 23, 1826, he married his first wife, Karoline Elisabeth Wittekindt.¹⁹

During this period of Vilmar's development his faith in Rationalism was shaken still further when he saw what little effect his rationalistic moral system had on his pupils at Rotenburg.²⁰

On March 14, 1827, Vilmar was appointed the fourth teacher and assistant master (Kollaborator) at the gymnasium at Hersfeld, and on August 19, 1829, he was elevated to third teacher.²¹ He also became deputy for the schools in the diet while at Hersfeld.²² Here one of Vilmar's major interests was to improve the quality of education, especially the curricula of the schools, the salaries of teachers and the financial statuses of the various

¹⁷Leimbach, op. cit., p. 32.

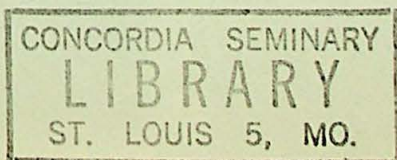
¹⁸Ibid., pp. 28-30.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 32.

²⁰Hopf, op. cit., I, 122ff.

²¹Leimbach, op. cit., p. 32.

²²Ibid., p. 43.



institutions.²³ During these years he wrote many works on education.²⁴

Likewise during his stay at Hersfeld Vilmar achieved theological maturity. Here he went from Rationalism to orthodox Lutheranism by a process that involved terrible mental anguish.²⁵ This complete reversal of position was brought about chiefly by much studying in the Lutheran orthodox dogmaticians, particularly John Gerhard,²⁶ and the early Church Fathers, especially Irenaeus, and also through Tertullian and August Tholuck's Lehre von der Suende.²⁷ Vilmar's return to Christianity is said to have culminated when he studied the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession in preparation for a paper which he read at Hersfeld on June 25, 1830, the three-hundredth anniversary of the reading of the Augsburg Confession at the Diet of Augsburg.²⁸

1831-1855

In December, 1831, Vilmar was appointed to two ministerial commissions: the Higher Commission for Education and the Higher Church Commission.²⁹

²³Ibid., pp. 72-73.

²⁴Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵Hausleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 651.

²⁶"A. F. C. Vilmar," Kirchliches Handlexikon, VII, begründet von Dr. ph. Carl Mensel (Leipzig: Justus Naumann, 1902), 104.

²⁷Johannes Hausleiter, "A. F. C. Vilmar," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, XII, edited by S. M. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), 190.

²⁸Hopf, op. cit., I, 160ff.

²⁹Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

As a member of the first of these commissions he continued his work in improving the status of the school system of Kurhessen, as well as writing books on education.³⁰ In 1832, he was appointed as assistant Referent in the Ministry of the Interior. Here it was his duty to reorganize the backward higher schools in the province.³¹ In reorganizing the schools, he was particularly interested in religious education, i.e., in making the students true members of the Church.³²

In December, 1832, Vilmar received a Ph. D. honoris causa from the faculty of philosophy at Marburg.³³ From October, 1832, until April, 1833, he was second teacher at the gymnasium at Hansau.³⁴ And on April 16, 1833, he was appointed Director of the gymnasium at Marburg,³⁵ a position which he held for seventeen years.³⁶

From 1836 to 1850, Vilmar was a member of the school commission for gymnasium affairs.³⁷

On February 27, 1833, Vilmar's first wife died, leaving four children.³⁸

³⁰Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 653.

³¹Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

³²Kirchliches Handlexikon, VII, 105.

³³Leimbach, op. cit., p. 81.

³⁴Ibid., p. 81.

³⁵Ibid., p. 82.

³⁶Ibid., p. 83.

³⁷Ibid., p. 83.

³⁸Ibid., p. 81.

On October 6 of the same year he married Sophie Theresa Frederking. This marriage produced no children.³⁹

In 1839, the battle over the Lutheran Symbols in the Church of Kurhessen broke out. At first, Vilmar remained aloof from the strife; he thought it all very disagreeable.⁴⁰ But when the theological faculty in Marburg officially decreed the mandatory use of the Heidelberg Catechism in all the schools in Kurhessen and insisted that the Church of Kurhessen was Reformed, Vilmar entered the battle and used every means at his disposal to prove that the Church of Kurhessen was Lutheran and Lutheran only, and demanded that the Church return to the Lutheran Symbols and the old Hessian Church Orders.⁴¹ This he did in his book, Das Verhaeltnis der evangelischen Kirche in Kurhessen zu ihren neuesten Gegnern,⁴² which will be further discussed in Chapter III.

During the Revolution of 1848, Vilmar's political interests came to the fore. He was adamantly opposed to the revolutionaries and outspokenly in favor of the monarchy, so much so that his life was often in danger.⁴³ This attitude his biographers trace to his experiences during the Napoleonic Wars. From 1848 to 1850, Vilmar published Der Hessische Volksfreund, a periodical directed against the Revolution.⁴⁴

³⁹Ibid., p. 83.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 103.

⁴¹Hausleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 657.

⁴²Kirchliches Handlexikon, VII, 105.

⁴³Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 106-111.

⁴⁴Kirchliches Handlexikon, VII, 106.

In February, 1850, Vilmar was given the title of Consistorial Councillor (Konsistorialrat), and was to make reports in the Ministry of the Interior. He was now assigned to take care of both Church and school affairs.⁴⁵

It was also during this period that Vilmar's interests in German literature, especially Goethe, and in Lutheran Hymnody displayed itself. He compiled, in connection with this interest, a small hymnal composed of 137 German Lutheran hymns.⁴⁶

In May, 1851, Vilmar was made deputy to the aged General-Superintendent of the Diocese of Cassel, C. F. W. Ernst. This was the most important and influential position that Vilmar ever achieved.⁴⁷ During his time in office he accomplished three things in particular: 1. he fought for an absolute subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession in the Church and maintained that the future of the Church depended upon this subscription.⁴⁸ He once again made the Lutheran Symbols meaningful to the Church of Lower Hesse, which had become very Sacramentarian;⁴⁹ 2. he showed the Church what a treasure they had in their Church Orders;⁵⁰ and 3. he fought for the freedom of the Church from the state, which was trying to make the Church Reformed.⁵¹

Vilmar also sent out many pastoral letters on subjects such as

⁴⁵ Leimbach, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴⁶ Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 654-55.

⁴⁷ Leimbach, op. cit., p. 116.

⁴⁸ Haussleiter, Schaff-Herzog, XII, 190.

⁴⁹ Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 121-22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵¹ Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 656.

confession, confirmation instruction, marriage examinations, sick calls, administration of the Sacraments,⁵² sponsors at Holy Baptism, burial, etc.,⁵³ and due to his efforts there was a tremendous revival in the Church's life.

While he was deputy Superintendent Vilmar continued his fight against the Catholic Apostolic Church (Irvingites) and its doctrine of the ministry,⁵⁴ a battle which he had begun already in the 1840's.⁵⁵

In 1855, General Superintendent Ernst died, and everyone expected Vilmar automatically to be elevated to his position. The synod of pastors elected Vilmar to the position by a vote of 110 to fourteen. But the election was subject to the approval of the elector. He refused to approve it on the advice of Professors William Mangold and Aemilius L. Richter,⁵⁶ whom Vilmar had made his enemies when he insisted that the Church of Lower Hesse subscribe to the Lutheran Symbols.⁵⁷ A factor in the elector's refusal was Vilmar's strong opposition to state control of the Church.⁵⁸ So, to please as many as possible, Vilmar was appointed as professor of theology at the University of Marburg, a position which he held from 1855 to his death in 1863.⁵⁹

⁵²Leimbach, op. cit., p. 117.

⁵³Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 659.

⁵⁴Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 119-20.

⁵⁵Kirchliches Handlexikon, VII, 105.

⁵⁶Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 659.

⁵⁷Leimbach, op. cit., p. 125.

⁵⁸Karl Barth, Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (Zuerich: Evangelischer Verlag Ag. Zollikon, 1947), p. 571.

⁵⁹Leimbach, op. cit., p. 125.

1855-1868

Vilmar's years at Marburg were perhaps the most productive years of his life. The disappointment that he felt at not being appointed Superintendent of the Church of Kurhessen was, of course, keen. But he buried himself in his work and in the care of his students and thus remained a very productive theologian for another thirteen years.

At Marburg, he was constantly at odds with his colleagues on the theological faculty, most of whom were Reformed in their theology, but he had a great deal of influence within the student body.⁶⁰ It was during his stay at Marburg as professor of theology that he prepared most of his theological books--his Dogmatik, Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik, Die Augsburgische Konfession erklart, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, Lehrbuch der Pastoral-Theologie, and Theologische Moral, most of which were published after his death by his pupil Dr. K. W. Fiderit.

While Vilmar was at Marburg, in 1866, the Church of Hesse-Cassel finally became a Prussian Union Church, in spite of him many years of strong opposition to this move.⁶¹ And this event, coupled with the death of his second wife in November, 1867,⁶² cast Vilmar into a deep depression that brought on his own death in a few months.⁶³

⁶⁰Barth, op. cit., p. 571.

⁶¹George E. Schroeder, "Hessian Confessors of Faith," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXIX (Winter, 1957), 155.

⁶²Leimbach, op. cit., p. 141.

⁶³Haussleiter, Realencyklopaedie, XX, 660.

On July 30, 1863, August Vilmar died in his sleep and was buried on August 1.⁶⁴ On his tombstone was written the epitaph: "Iche habe geglaubt eine Vergebung der Suenden, eine Auferstehung des Fleisches und ein ewiges Leben. Amen," which, many saw, summarized his philosophy of life.⁶⁵

Not many years after his death, in 1873, Vilmar's followers established a free Church called the Renitenz, in opposition to the Prussian Union, but their influence waned quickly as the Prussian Church grew in power.⁶⁶

Die Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche sums up Vilmar's character thus:

One cannot deny that in his polemics he is overly rash and exaggerates matters, in order to clarify the opposition's opinion; and so it seems as if his object is to irritate the Philistine, who is puffed up with intellectual pride, by knocking him over the head with his own highly praised trash and his scandalous "truths." One feels that these people shuddered before Vilmar and his followers, as they still do today. But granted that all this provocation, as we find it recorded in his Dogmatik, existed, he was a man that carried in his breast a German, or rather a Christian heart, whose dark side was only the reverse of the light and fire that glowed in him. Actually it often creates a moving impression when one compares the inflammatory assertions of a man who has been pushed to an extreme position with the direct, indeed naive, expressions of a childlike piety.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Leimbach, op. cit., pp. 142-43.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 154.

⁶⁶"A. F. C. Vilmar," Der Grosse Brockhaus, XII, 16. Auflage (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1957), 205.

⁶⁷[F. H. R. Frank], "Dogmatische Uebersichten und Kritiken," Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche, LXIX (1875), 136-37.

CHAPTER III

THE SYMBOLS AND THE CHURCH ORDERS

The Symbols as Norms

Whenever a theologian develops a system of doctrine, he must have some sort of norm which he follows. Some theologians will follow their own individual subjective interpretations of Scripture and so use themselves as a norm. Others will use the canons and decrees of a certain number of the ecumenical councils of the Church as a norm. And still others will make use of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent in formulating their systems. Lutherans employ as their norm for interpreting Holy Scripture the three Catholic Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols. Vilmar was a Lutheran.

His primary norm of faith, as he called it, was the inspired canon of the Old and New Testaments. And his secondary norm of faith was the Lutheran Symbols. Here, however, Vilmar made a careful distinction between the norm or guideline for Christian faith and the judge over faith. He says:

The Symbols are not judges over faith any more than is Holy Scripture, but Holy Scripture is the norm, and the Symbols are norms. Scripture is a primary norm and the Symbols are secondary norms. The only judge (over faith) is the body of teachers (Lehrstand) which has really gained possession of the content of Scripture and the experience of the Church, and which recognizes that the Church at all times is filled and borne and protected and made to grow by the Holy Ghost, so that He is a present and living Person also in the current body of teachers.¹

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), I, 133-34. Here one could say that Vilmar was unconfessional. The Formula of Concord, to which he apparently did not subscribe, explicitly says that Holy Scripture is "die einige Regel und Richtschnur, nach welcher zugleich alle Lehren und Lehrer (!) gerichtet und geurteilt werden sollen" (Formula of Concord, Epitome, "Von dem summarischen Begriff," 1.)

This was a very important concept in Vilmar's theology. The source of and the judge over Christian faith was not something dead and enclosed in the pages of a book. The real source of power in Christian faith was a living and efficacious God, a living Christ, a living Spirit, operating in and through the Church. He says:

People seem to act as if the Christian faith originally came 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. . . . And 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.²

This concept of the living, efficacious Spirit, who is in Holy Scripture and who acts in and through the experience of the Church is a basic idea that forms a vital part of Vilmar's theology. It is this concept which makes the Lutheran Symbols of such great importance and which makes the Holy Sacraments such vital powers in the life of the Church. The Symbols then are a witness to the experience of the Catholic Church, a living experience guided by a living, active Holy Spirit.

With this concept in mind, Vilmar insisted that the Augsburg Confession, in particular, was not a negative document but a positive expression of genuine Catholicity. The Augsburg Confession was not intended to separate its adherents from the existing, living Church, but rather to preserve the

²Vilmar, Dogmatik, I, 130.

order of the existing Church. It was not a polemical but an irenic document.³ In the Augsburg Confession is the totality of the teaching of the evangelical Church in its conformity to Scriptures, in its historic right and in its inner conformity to the teaching of the Catholic Church as well as its opposition to aberrations within the Church.⁴ Consequently, all Church documents must be judged by the norm of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and not the other way around.⁵

As far as the texts of the Symbols are concerned, the official text is the original, and in the Augsburg Confession the Latin text must always be compared to the German and vice versa, so that the one agrees with and explains and completes the other.⁶ And both the Latin and the German texts of the Augsburg Confession must be interpreted by the Apology for an authentic interpretation.⁷

Vilmar also made a specific point of the fact that it was the Symbols and not Luther's works which are the secondary norm of faith for Lutherans.

³Karl Range, "Die Confessio Augustana nach der Lehre A. F. C. Vilmar's," Die Hochkirche, XII (Juni-Juli, 1930), 232, which quotes A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Marburg und Leipzig: N. G. Elwert'sche Universitaets-Buchhandlung, 1870), p. 81.

⁴Wilhelm Hopf, August Vilmar: Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), I, 274.

⁵A. F. C. Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1860), p. 263.

⁶A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870), p. 85.

⁷Ibid., p. 103.

Luther, he said, was often "extravagant."⁸ The secondary norm by which the Lutheran Church must always be guided is the Lutheran Symbols, especially the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. This is a fact which Vilmar insisted upon almost with venom, because the Church of Kurhessen at his time was for the most part very unconfessional. Reformed doctrines and teaching were widespread in the churches and schools, and Vilmar insisted this was illegal. In fact he wrote an entire book (Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen) proving that his church is officially Lutheran and nothing else. His conclusion is as follows:

In spite of the widespread Reformed doctrine that is taught in the Hessian churches and schools, from the point of view of legality the whole Church of Hesse is officially Lutheran in its doctrine.⁹

This was the essence of Vilmar's whole battle with the state Church. The Church was Lutheran and not Reformed or United.

The Hessian Church Order of 1566 affirms explicitly that Hesse adheres to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments; and the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, and the Augsburg Confession as being taken from Holy Scripture and in complete agreement with the same in all points.¹⁰ And Vilmar proves in his book that this subscription had never been abrogated.

Adherence to the Church Orders

Furthermore Vilmar advocated strongly the Church's adherence to her

⁸Ramge, Die Hochkirche, XII, 230-31.

⁹Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes, pp. 283-84.

¹⁰Aemilius Ludwig Richter, editor, "Hessische Kirchenordnung--1566," Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts (Weimar: Verlag des Landes-Industrie-comptoirs, 1846), II, 293.

historic Church Orders of 1566, 1573, and 1657, because they were specifically Lutheran Church Orders composed for the situation of the Hessian Church. He constantly referred to the Church Orders in his arguments and writings. Concerning these Church Orders, Vilmar notes that the Church Order of 1657 is more specifically Lutheran in many places than were the Church Orders of 1566, and of 1573, because it speaks directly against the Heidelberg Catechism,¹¹ although without a doubt all the Hessian Church Orders are intentionally Lutheran.¹²

This then was the basis of Vilmar's theology--the Church under the guidance of the living, efficacious Spirit, with Holy Scripture as its primary norm, the Lutheran Symbols, primarily the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, as secondary norms, and the Hessian Church Orders as additional guides for the Church of Hesse.¹³

¹¹Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes, pp. 259-60.

¹²Ibid., p. 262.

¹³Hans H. Weisgerber, Jahrbuch der Hessischen Kirchengeschichtlichen Vereinigung, herausgegeben von Hugo Gruen (Darmstadt: Hessische Kirchengeschichtliche Vereinigung, 1955) VI, 7-13, has written an interesting article concerning Aegidius Hunnius and his valiant but abortive attempt to introduce the Formula of Concord into the old Hessian Church in the sixteenth century.

A very thorough discussion of the worship life in the churches of Kurhessen, which was called to the writer's attention too late to be used in this essay, is Wilhelm Diehl's Zur Geschichte des Gottesdienstes und der gottesdienstlichen Handlungen in Hessen (Gieszen: J. Ricker, 1899).

CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCH

The Formulation of the Doctrine of the Church

Not without significant for Vilmar's doctrine of the Church is his dogmatico-historic interpretation of the seven seals in the Apocalypse in a classroom lecture of 1847. Vilmar believed that the opening of each seal recorded in Revelation, chapters six through eight, was representative of a period of Church history. The opening of the first seal was the winning of the battle against heathenism and Gnosticism in the early centuries of the Church and the recognition of God the Father. The opening of the second and third seals was the recognition and formulation of the doctrines of the deity of Christ and of the Holy Ghost against Arianism. The lossing of the fourth seal represented the full realization of the two natures in Christ against the Nestorians and the Monophysites. The fifth seal was opened when the doctrine of sin and the grace of God, beginning with St. Augustine and ending with Luther's affirmation of the doctrine of justification through faith alone, was formulated. The opening of the sixth seal is coming very soon, i.e., a clear formulation of the doctrine of the Church. And the seventh seal will be loosed at the realization of the doctrine of the last things.¹

On the basis of this formulation, it has been observed that Vilmar's doctrine of the Church had two chief points: 1. Although he stood completely on the Lutheran Symbols in their doctrine of the Church, he felt

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, "Kirchliches Handlexikon, VII, begründet von Dr. ph. Carl Mensel (Leipzig: Justus Naumann, 1902), 105.

that there was to be further development in formulating this doctrine.

2. The doctrine of the Church and its ministry and the means of grace stood at the center of his theology.²

Vilmar felt that the doctrine of the Church was being formulated during his lifetime. And as he looked back at the battles that raged in the Church over the doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and Soteriology in past centuries, he felt that this battle would probably be more furious than any previous battle--this was a sign of the end, the opening of the seventh seal.³

The Church as Christ's Living Presence

As far as the doctrine of the Church itself is concerned, Vilmar insisted that it was contained completely in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, where the Church is described as the Body of Christ, with Christ Himself as the Head; and the Church is the expansion of Christ's very personality (Persoenlichkeit). That is to say, Christ actually becomes apparent in the members of the Church, who are members of His one Body.⁴ It is the task of the Church now to draw out the implications of this doctrine and to formulate them.

One fact which underlies the whole of Vilmar's concept of the Church is that the Church is the Body of Christ, an expansion of Christ's very

²Ibid., VII, 105.

³A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 181-82. In an unsigned article in Lehre und Wehre, the author takes issue with this interpretation of the Apocalypse as presented by Vilmar, in "Vilmars Lehre von Amt und Kirche," Lehre und Wehre, VI (1860), 20-21.

⁴Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 192.

Person (German). Just as the Children of Israel were a continuation of the life of Abraham, an expansion of his person, so the Church is a continuation of the existence, life, and work of Jesus Christ, an expansion of His Person. The Church is His very Ich. But His Person is a raised and glorified Person, and the means by which this glorified Person of Christ is expanded is the Holy Ghost. Therefore it is a mistake to say that Christ is the founder of the Church. The founder of the Church, one might say, is the Apostle St. Peter. But the true presence of a personal Holy Spirit and the true divine-human presence of Christ is the Church.⁵

The living presence of Christ and of the Holy Ghost is the condition for our salvation and to believe in and know of this presence is nothing else than to belong to the Church and be a member of Church. In other words, the Church is that institution through which the gift of salvation is assured, delivered, and appropriated, as it was among the early Christians. But this has happened and can happen only through the living efficacious working of the Holy Ghost and His imparting of the living presence of Christ. So one can say that the Church is that order established by the Triune God of the continual unchanging living presence of Christ imparted through Him; it is the imparting of the Holy Ghost and of Christ to men. If one expresses it in terms of human subjects, the Church is that gathering of people in which this order of God is working.⁶

The Church is not merely a gathering of people, however, but an

⁵Ibid., II, 183-84. Here again one could say that Vilmar is not using a Scriptural picture. Christ is the Head of the Church, but neither He nor His Person is the Church itself.

⁶[F. H. R. Frank], "Aus der neueren Dogmatik," Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche, LXXII (1876), 60, quoted from Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 185-86.

institution, an order, an objective establishment by God that produces a congregation--a gathering of people.⁷ The term communio sanctorum does not mean a congregation but a relationship among the members of the Church that is brought about through a relationship of those members in Christ.⁸

And now this institution of God exists, inseparably bound up with salvation--but not without specific persons being present through whom the Holy Spirit is imparted. The Word is bound to its proclamation and the Sacraments to their distribution. And this imparting of Word and Sacraments through persons comes before the existence of the Church as a congregation.⁹ This concept will be further developed in the chapter on Holy Orders and Ordination.

The essential, constant, and personal presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, which is so vital to Vilmar's concept of the Church, is an assumption that is implied on every page of apostolic Scripture; one need only be reminded of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the offices in the Church which the Holy Ghost gives (I Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4:11): baptism (Titus 3:5) and the prayer and laying on of hands through which the Holy Ghost is imparted (I Tim. 4:14 and II Tim. 1:6), etc.¹⁰

The very life of the Church is given through the outpouring of the Holy Ghost in the Word and the Sacraments. Vilmar stressed this aspect of the Church in particular because he felt that this was a teaching which had

⁷A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik, dritte Auflage (Marburg: S. G. Liesching, 1864), p. 48.

⁸Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 206.

⁹Ibid., II, 272.

¹⁰Ibid., II, 193-94

been sadly neglected in the Church for many years. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost, he said, was not meant only for the apostles but for all men who believe in the risen Christ and are baptized. These gifts of the Holy Ghost are the charismata of which St. Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Romans, chapter 12, and in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 12. The reason that the Church has lost so many of these gifts, which were often given through the laying on of hands in the New Testament, is not that they were taken away but rather that the Church has become indifferent and has lost her faith in these gifts.¹¹ (He also mentioned this in Lehre vom geistlichen Amt.)¹² When faith in the Church is reawakened in the Church's teaching, then faith in the gifts of the Holy Spirit will also be reawakened.¹³

Vilmar felt very strongly that the doctrine of the Church in the Lutheran Symbols was not complete. This was something still to come in the future. But the Symbols were correct as far as they went. However, the mistake that so many theologians had made in the past was to limit the Symbols' doctrine of the Church to Articles VII and VIII of the Augsburg Confession and Article VII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. If one was to have a correct doctrine of the Church, one had to accept everything that the Symbols say about the Church.¹⁴

¹¹Ibid., II, 188-90.

¹²A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Marburg und Leipzig: N. G. Elwert'sche Universitaets-Buchhandlung, 1870), p. 17.

¹³Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 191.

¹⁴Ibid., II, 198.

The Church as a Visible Institution

Most vehemently Vilmar asserted that the Church, according to the Lutheran Symbols, was not invisible. To him an invisible Church was an abstract theory which was invented by post-Reformation theology.¹⁵ To prove this, he pointed out that Article VII of the Augsburg Confession does not say that the Church consists in the fact that the Word of God and the Sacraments are rightly received and used, but rather that the Word of God is rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. If the Church consisted only of vere credentes, then the Symbols would have to say that the Church exists quo Verbum Dei recte docetur et accipitur et recte administrantur et accipiuntur Sacramenta.¹⁶

It is for this reason, Vilmar pointed out, that Article VIII of the Apology says that mali et hypocritae are members of the Church according to the outward fellowship. Those in whom Christ does not work are not members of His Body.¹⁷ But mali et hypocritae are members of the Church, even though they are not vere credentes, because Christ is continually working on them through the Word and Sacraments. Furthermore, the fallen are part of the Church because they are part of those who need daily repentance and absolution.¹⁸

One must remember, Vilmar said, that in the Apostles' Creed the terms

¹⁵Ibid., II, 203.

¹⁶Ibid., II, 200-01. A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870), p. 88.

¹⁷Vilmar, Doctrinik, II, 197-98.

¹⁸Ibid., II, 201.

communio sanctorum and sancta ecclesia catholica are not synonymous. The first term refers to the relationship between the members of Christ's Body and the second refers to those who are gathered around the Word and Sacraments.

The description of the Church in Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession as "the congregation of saints and true believers" is what Vilmar called a pedagogical (paedagogisch) definition of the Church. On the other hand, if the Church as vere credentes were a complete definition of the Church, one would logically have to arrive at sheer predestinationism. One cannot say then that mali et hypocritae are members of the true Body of Christ, but one must say, for the sake of educating the people, that they are members of the Church and that they belong to the Church (according to the outward fellowship) as long as they have not been excommunicated.¹⁹

Following this argument, Vilmar concluded that the Church, pedagogically speaking, includes all those who gather where the Word of God is taught and the Sacraments administered and have not been excommunicated. This is the Church of this present aeon. It is only on the Last Day, when pedagogy will end, that the vere credentes will be known, but until then one must define the Church as visible and as including mali et hypocritae.²⁰

They Symbols recognize (anerkennen) the fact that only the vere credentes are true members of the Body of Christ in the eyes of God, but they do not know (verkennen) who these vere credentes are.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., II, 199-200.

²⁰ Ibid., II, 202-03. ✓

²¹ Ibid., II, 202.

Vilmar furthermore stressed the dependence on God and corporeality of the Church. The Church, he said, is not a free, independent club that forms itself around some central point; rather it is formed as a unit in itself. The Church does not gather itself; it is gathered by the Holy Ghost.²² And the fact that it is gathered shows that a Christian is never alone, he is always in the group, in the Church.²³ Furthermore, this gathering does not start from the bottom, from individual men; it comes from above. As long as men try to build the Church from the bottom up, from individuals, they are making a mistake. The Church comes from above, through the Holy Ghost Himself, through Christ Himself, through His Word, His Sacrament, and His ministry.²⁴

Those who make up the Church are the baptized, and they belong to it as long as they do not expressly speak against it or obviously oppose it.²⁵ And Baptism and the Christian calling, illumination and repentance, justification and holiness, are given to the individual solely by the Church, into whose membership the individual is taken. All of these things are imparted to the individual by the Church. This means, therefore, that an individual who has been converted knows that he cannot separate himself from the established order of the Church without falling away from salvation.²⁶

²²Ibid., II, 184-35.

²³Ibid., II, 186.

²⁴Ibid., II, 212.

²⁵Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 89.

²⁶A. F. C. Vilmar, Theologische Moral (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1871), II, 222.

All the baptized are members of the Church, and the individual who is reborn and converted must know that he is one with all of them at all times. For also the unconverted, the mali et hypocritae, are what he, the converted, once was; and they are to be, or at least can be, what he is now. So whoever in this world makes a practical difference between the two, as though the unconverted did not belong to the fellowship to which he belongs is arbitrarily loosing the bond of completeness and in endangering his own membership in the Body of Christ.²⁷

* * * * *

It seems then that Vilmar stressed two things in particular in his concept of the Church; 1. that the Church is the Body of Christ, an expansion of the Persoenlichkeit of the very God-man Himself, which is gathered and kept and nourished by the impertation of the Holy Ghost in Word and Sacraments, and 2. that the Church, at least as far as men are concerned, is visible and only visible, consisting of all those who have been taken into the Church through Holy Baptism and have not renounced their membership.

There are some who might think that Vilmar overstressed these two points in certain instances, but one must always keep in mind the fact that he was vigorously fighting to keep his Church Lutheran against the Calvinists and Zwinglianizers who are propounding their theory of the invisible Church and their degradation of the Church and her Sacraments so extensively.

²⁷Ibid., II, 224.

CHAPTER V

THE SACRAMENTS AND "SACRAMENTAL ACTIONS" IN GENERAL

Definition of the Terms

When it came to a definition of the word "Sacrament," Vilmar followed Article XIII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession very closely. He noted that the meaning of the word sacramentum cannot be derived either from its original sense of Succumbenzgeld (in legal language, a fine paid for a frivolous appeal), that which was put into a holy place and used for a holy purpose, or from its ecclesiastical meaning, which has become vague. The Itala and the Vulgate use the word sacramentum for the Greek mysterion, and St. Augustine said, "Sacramentum est gratiae invisibilis visibilis forma," so that eventually all symbolic actions in the Church were termed sacramentum.¹

The Apology, however, in speaking of the number of Sacraments, is fortunately much more positive than negative, a fact which reveals most eminently that the Apology belongs to a creative period; whereas an ingenious and penetrating (although unproductive) era is characterized by a strong negative emphasis instead of a positive outlook.² However, Vilmar noted, in the sixteenth century most practical theologians considered the Sacraments of Holy Baptism, the Holy Eucharist and Holy Absolution of equal rank.³

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 223-24.

²Ibid., II, 225.

³A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870), p. 125.

To begin with, Vilmar noted that all of the seven Sacraments which Peter Lombard numbered have this in common, that in them man is given something by God, and by this fact these acts differ from all other holy acts in which it is man who performs something. Therefore, one cannot disapprove fixing the number of the Sacraments at seven as the Apology tries to do by then including such things as magistracy, etc., for in these acts performances and obligations of men are involved, which is not the case in the seven Sacraments.⁴

In another instance, Vilmar seemed to speak of five Sacraments: the Holy Eucharist, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, Holy Confirmation, and Holy Ordination. These acts, he said, are positively enough separated by Christ Himself or by apostolic ordinance from the other acts of the Church. However, the three instituted by Christ Himself have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. With this qualification Article XIII of the Apology is correct when it is less exact (weniger genau) in its designation of Holy Confirmation and Holy Orders, and when it designates Holy Confirmation and Extreme Unction as rites accepted by the Fathers, but assigns Holy Orders a much higher position because it has the command and promise of God as the ministry which offers the Word and Sacraments. Thus it can be reckoned along with the three main Sacraments as such. However, an unqualified equating of Holy Confirmation and Holy Orders with the three main Sacraments cannot be justified.⁵

The three main Sacraments then were established immediately by the

⁴Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 224. Here it is doubtful that Vilmar caught the full implication of the Apology's assertion.

⁵Ibid., II, 226.

the command of Christ: Holy Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and the Sacrament of the Forgiveness of Sins. Two other Sacraments: the communication of the Holy Ghost after Baptism and the communication of the Holy Ghost for the performance of the office of the ministry, both through the laying on of hands and prayer, presuppose the outpouring of the Holy Ghost and thus appear in the Church, not as intrinsic institutions, but as acts in which the outpouring of the Holy Ghost results of itself by necessity.⁶

However, even among the three Sacraments specifically instituted by Christ, a difference must be made. Two of them, Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, are clearly separated from the third one, in that the former permit one to take part in the grace of God through a living, creative act of God. The visible world and the world of divine powers--the two sides of nature--are both connected in one saving act, and eternal life is imparted to man; whereas Holy Absolution does not in itself contain the full creative power of God. It does not create anything new, but rather it removes the impediments to eternal life. So then the Christian Church has the two chief Sacraments, which Christ instituted as the most important Sacraments (although the evangelical Church in its practice has adopted them as its only Sacraments). But certainly nothing hinders a person, on the basis of the Lutheran Symbols, from calling not only Holy Absolution, which is included among the Sacraments by the Augsburg Confession, but also Holy Ordination, Sacraments.⁷

So then, although Vilmar did not explicitly restrict the number of the Sacraments, one could say that in general he referred to Holy Baptism, the

⁶Ibid., II, 225.

⁷Ibid., II, 226-27.

Holy Eucharist, and Holy Absolution as Sacraments, properly speaking. The other holy acts of the Church he then categorized as "sacramental actions."

"Sacramental actions" he defined as those acts by which God (not man) through the medium of an act performed by man, connected with the Word, does something for the salvation of the world. So then these acts are God's condition (Bedingung) for imparting salvation. In this category Vilmar listed Holy Confirmation, Holy Ordination, the Consecration of a Marriage, and other consecrations (e. g., of a Church, of a cemetery, the churcing of women, etc.), and Holy Unction.⁸

In fact, in one instance Vilmar even included Holy Absolution under the "sacramental actions" when he said that one can call Holy Confirmation, Holy Absolution, and Holy Orders "sacramental actions" because they are preparations and conditions for the power of eternal life which God imparts. However, one dare not ignore the "sacramental actions" because they proceed from God.⁹

Not Found outside the Church

One fact which Vilmar emphasized a great deal is that salvation is not found outside the visible Church. He says that it is an almost universally forgotten fact that justification through faith alone is not at all an isolated act of the individual, as if justification were a crassly subjective act, but it is accomplished in the Church and only in the Church (for Luther, he said, this was an absolute, self-evident presupposition).¹⁰ The

⁸A. F. C. Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), pp. 126-41.

⁹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 227.

¹⁰Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 71.

appropriation of salvation, as Luther discovered and taught, is not accomplished anywhere outside the Church, so that the objective power of grace is given up and the individual is put in place of the Church, as the Romanists and the "silly, subjective fools among us drivel," but the appropriation of salvation comes only as a result of and through the power of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Justification by faith alone is nothing else than a return to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, full appropriation of the forgiveness of sins offered in Baptism, justification and eternal salvation. This is accomplished only in the baptized and only in the Church (it is not found outside the Church, but is then rather a Satanic aping, from which eternal damnation comes). It is imparted through the power of Absolution and the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, both of which, like the Word, do not exist outside the Church. If, on the contrary, the doctrine of justification is taught as an abstract, theoretical, philosophical, arbitrary doctrine, then one must call this nothing less than absurdity. And, of course, the old orthodox dogmatics is not the least bit guilty of this absurdity.¹¹

Vilmar furthermore said that without Baptism in its proper sense, without the preached Word, without Absolution, without the Holy Eucharist, justification cannot exist. This must be emphasized especially and most strongly against the Roman Catholics' conception, to whom the Lutheran teaching on justification is only a theory and a speculative, philosophical thesis.¹²

¹¹A. F. C. Vilmar, "Confessionelle Friedensstellung nach Recht und Wahrheit," Kirche und Welt, oder die Aufgaben des geistlichen Amtes in unsrer Zeit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), I, 85.

¹²Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 71.

Furthermore, justification and eternal life are dispensed through the office of the ministry. Through the Sacraments the pastor works in his people the very preparation (Zurichtung) for the resurrection. When a pastor administers the Sacraments, he is standing in place of the Lord, the Savior and Judge of the world, and he is looking upon the Lord. The pastor sees the Lord as His garments fill the temple and hears the angels cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." He hears the cry of the prophet Isaiah: "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." And then the pastor learns that he must have his lips cleansed with burning coals taken from the altar. The burning flame of the Holy Ghost must first cleanse him and give him temperance, discipline, chastity, composure and earnestness, without which he can administer the Sacrament only to his own shame and judgement.¹³ This, of course, does not infer that a pastor without these virtues would administer an invalid Sacrament, as the Donatists taught.

Factuality of the Sacraments and the Sacramental Acts

Above all Vilmar insisted that the Sacraments and "sacramental actions" were facts. He discussed this particularly in his Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik. He was very much opposed to the theory that when a pastor baptized or distributed Holy Communion or absolved or ordained or confirmed, etc., he was only declaring the grace of God. This was an idea that the Reformed and the Pietists had invented.

¹³Wilhelm Hopf, August Vilmar: Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), II, 227-28.

No, when the pastor performs a Sacrament or "sacramental action" he is performing a deed of God. He is imparting the Holy Spirit. This concept will be taken up in greater detail in the chapters on the specific Sacraments.

Vilmar asserted, too, that anyone who insisted on the factuality of the Sacraments had to recognize that in the Sacraments God gives something, because one can grasp the deeds of God only in God's giving them for his salvation. There are no other acts of God for men than his giving to men freedom from sin and death. And these gifts of God in the Sacraments belong to men only inasmuch as they receive them not inasmuch as they cooperate with them.¹⁴ For sure, certain, unchangeable facts are to be sought and found only in God as facts of God. The will and thoughts of men are not facts, and the deeds of men which come from their will and thoughts are changeable. If pastors then want to keep their congregations and hold them in the Church, they have to separate absolutely from the Sacraments any mixture of man's will, understanding, thoughts or deeds. If they want to destroy their congregations and the Church, then they have to mix the Sacraments with men's doings.¹⁵

Furthermore, Vilmar was opposed to placing Word above the Sacraments. In fact, he said the Sacrament is much more specially a singular work of God than is the Word. This is because the Word works on men through the Holy Ghost from above. The Sacrament, on the other hand, is a corporal (leiblich) act of God upon man. It works from below through corporeality

¹⁴A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik, dritte Auflage (Marburg: S. G. Liesching, 1864), p. 70.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 70.

upon the whole personality of man, body and spirit (or if one prefers, spirit, soul, and body) to free the whole man in spirit and body.

Therefore, one must distinguish between Word and Sacrament, between the indubitable fact of the proclamation of the Word and the working of the Word, and the fact of the Sacrament and its working, which is just as indubitable.¹⁶

How the Sacraments Work

In discussing how God works through the Sacraments Vilmar pointed out that in Holy Baptism the Christian has implanted in him the germ of both the power over death for the propitiation of sins and power of life to overcome sin. In appropriating the grace of Baptism and in the return to Baptism, i.e., repentance, is the battle which the Christian must fight in his following of Christ, the terrible battle in which eternal death and eternal life struggle with each other. In Holy Absolution the Christian receives the power over death for the propitiation of sins. And in the Holy Eucharist he receives the power to overcome sin, the powers of the world to come, and the resurrection of the dead to eternal life.¹⁷

Relationship among the Sacraments

Before a person can receive any of the other Sacraments, of course, he must be baptized. In addition, Vilmar says, it is an established fact in the Church that Confession and Absolution must precede the reception of

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷ A. F. C. Vilmar, "Ueber das Verhaeltnis der Absolution zum Sakrament des Altars," Kirche und Welt, I, 333.

the Holy Eucharist. The person whose Christianity has ripened to the point where he can fully recognize that he is living in a time of fulfillment, not in a mere time of promise, where he is dealing with the living God and He with the Christian, where he is dealing with actual realities, will also recognize that in Holy Absolution there is a real, not only a promised forgiveness of sins, just as in the Holy Eucharist there is a real, not just an ideal or futuristic partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ.¹⁸

Forgiveness of sins is offered both in the Holy Eucharist and in Holy Absolution. Why then, asks Vilmar, is the forgiveness of sins given and received twice? He answers the question according to Luther. Luther said that Holy Communion is the sign and seal of the forgiveness of sins: "As certainly as Christ feeds me with His true Body and Blood, so just as surely He gives me the forgiveness of sins, which He has won for me by offering the same Body and Blood on the Cross." (This formula, Vilmar notes, stands in direct opposition to the Calvinist and Crypto-Calvinist formula: "As certainly as I partake of bread and wine, so just as certainly Christ feeds my soul with His Body and Blood.") According to Luther's doctrine then the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is an intensification (Steigerung) of the forgiveness of sins, and the difference between Holy Absolution and the Sacrament of Holy Communion is purely a difference in degree. The full possession and indwelling of the forgiveness of sins is imparted to me through my full bodily association with the humanity of Christ, which was sacrificed and glorified on the Cross.¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid., I, 324-25.

¹⁹Ibid., I, 325-26.

A Lutheran cannot say then that in Holy Absolution and the Holy Eucharist there are two actual "exhibitive" acts of forgiveness of sins, only one of which is an act of God, the former being only a preparatory act. One cannot say (and Vilmar felt that in his day popular opinion was extremely close to this idea, in fact to the point where it could hardly be avoided) that Absolution is only a declarative act and that the "exhibitive" (exhibitiv)²⁰ nature of Absolution must be denied. This false theory is a departure from Lutheranism into the "thin, life-destroying air of Crypto-Calvinism, even Zwinglianism."²¹

Vilmar then did not limit the Sacraments to a specific number but rather took a very positive point of view and pointed out the benefits and blessings that God bestows through the Sacraments. In opposition to the theories that were so widespread in his day (and are still widespread today), Vilmar vehemently insisted that the Sacraments were not merely declarative but were "exhibitive" (one of his favorite words). The Sacraments do not only tell the Christian of the grace of God, they actually give him the grace of God, give him the outpoured Holy Ghost, and give him the power to be the Christian that God made him. This emphasis will be taken up in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

²⁰By the term "exhibitiv" Vilmar wishes to stress the actual imparting of grace and the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments and "sacramental actions" as opposed to the Reformed idea that the Sacraments, in particular, Holy Absolution, only declare the grace of God.

²¹Vilmar, Kirche und Welt, I, 327.

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

What Holy Baptism Is

In Vilmar's discussion of the doctrine of Holy Baptism, one notices in particular his stress on the objective, "exhibitive" character of Holy Baptism, a fact which he stressed throughout his sacramental theology.

In his discussion of Article IX of the Augsburg Confession he said that the core of the article on Holy Baptism is found in the words recipiantur in gratiam Dei. In these words Holy Baptism is shown to be an act of God in which He bestows something; an objective act of God which is entirely independent of the subject. In this way the article proves that Baptism is necessary to salvation.¹

Article IX also shows that a baptized person need never fear that he will be rejected from God's grace by actual sin as long as he grasps the grace of God. One does not have to hope for the forgiveness of sins because it is already efficacious in Baptism, and all one has to do is to hold on to this fact.²

One must insist that the grace of God and rebirth given in Holy Baptism is given irrevocably, and that therefore in all circumstances and at all times, a return to Holy Baptism is needed for one's return to God. God promised grace to sinners in all its universality already in the Old

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870), p. 98.

²Ibid., p. 99.

Testament; He gave it to the sinful world in Jesus Christ; and He appropriates it to each individual in Holy Baptism. From this it is clear how extraordinarily important a correct understanding of Holy Baptism is.³

In "The Declaration concerning the Confessional Stand of the Lower Hessian Church," for which Vilmar was largely responsible, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is summarized thus:

We teach concerning Baptism that it is the first Sacrament, in which the Lord Christ washes us from all sin, gives us new birth, incorporates us into Himself, clothes us with Himself, gives and imparts to us the Holy Ghost, makes us children and heirs of eternal life, all of which is truly given and imparted to us when we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and thus cleansed from sin, freed from the old Adam, and buried into the death of Christ, raised with Him to righteousness and a true godly life, and are transplanted and elevated to a heavenly existence. Expressing this pure doctrine of Baptism, we bless our baptized children with the words: "Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten you anew through water and the Holy Ghost, and has forgiven you all your sins in Christ Jesus, anoint (salben) and strengthen you with His healing grace to eternal life. Amen."⁴

Baptism then is described as a work of God, through which a complete cleansing is effected, through which not only original sin, but also actual sin in all its forms, is removed as though it had never existed (Micah 7:19), and through which one is filled with a new life, with the substance of an original godly life, with the power of God, with faculties which did not exist in him before, and so he is filled with a new consciousness (I Peter 3:21).⁵

³A. F. C. Vilmar, Theologische Moral (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1871), II, 83-84.

⁴Wilhelm Hopf, August Vilmar: Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), II, 453-54. This is really historical Confirmation.

⁵Vilmar, Theologische Moral, II, 9.

However, after Holy Baptism concupiscence and defect remain, although they are suppressed. Here Vilmar quotes a statement that he attributes to Luther: "Spiritus Sanctus, datus per baptismum, incipit mortificare concupiscentiam et novos motus creat in homine."⁶

Nevertheless, since Holy Baptism is the implanting of the Triune God into the baptized Christian and the very power of eternal life, then it must be recognized as the act which is the foundation of the Church.⁷

Holy Baptism has its roots already in the Old Testament. First of all, it is the one act which is analagous to the original act of creation: the body was created, and then the spirit and soul were breathed into the body. As the spirit entered the body, so the Holy Ghost enters the water and through the water enters into the body, soul, and spirit of man.⁸

Secondly, a type of Baptism is found already in Genesis 35:2 ("Put away strange gods that are among you, and be clean and change your garments."). In general, in the Old Testament, washing was to free something from uncleanness. Without this concept in the Old Testament, both John's Baptism and Jesus' Baptism would have been, if not an enigma, at least a vague symbol. But the Baptism of Christ brought these Old Testament typical baptism to a true fulfillment.

However, in the New Testament Christ speaks of two kinds of baptism.

⁶A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 239-40. This is not a literal quotation from Luther but a reproduction of Apology, II, 35, which summarizes Luther's observations in "De captivitate babilonica ecclesiae preeludium," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Herman Boehlau, 1888), VI, 534.

⁷Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 237.

⁸Ibid., II, 238.

In John 3:5, He is speaking of Baptism after the Resurrection. But in John 3:26 and 4:1-2, He is speaking of John's Baptism. The difference lies in the fact that John's Baptism was a symbol; but Christ's Baptism is an act in the fullest reality, an act of the Christ who is Himself present, through which He builds His Body. That is why Christ's Baptism could be instituted only after the Resurrection: it is a means of rebirth from death.⁹

In keeping with his emphasis on Baptism as a concrete act of God, Vilmar developed a somewhat unusual concept of Holy Baptism when he said that the working of the Holy Ghost in Holy Baptism is concrete in that He introduces and implants the transfigured Christ into the center of the baptized Christian. But if the working of the Holy Ghost in Baptism is the forgiveness of sins, then the Christ who died on the Cross is the Christ who is implanted in Holy Baptism. So one could say that Holy Baptism is a high-priestly act of Christ and that it is actually the blood of Jesus Christ that is the materia coelestis in Holy Baptism.¹⁰

In Holy Baptism faith, of course, is essential. Vilmar said that without a believing reception of Holy Baptism (in infants this occurs later in life), it brings about an even more certain rejection.¹¹

In his Dogmatik, Vilmar discussed the relationship between Holy Baptism and the preaching of the Word of God. He said that Holy Baptism is the fulness (das Ganze) and that preaching is the explanation of this fulness

⁹Ibid., II, 233-36.

¹⁰Ibid., II, 238-39.

¹¹Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 127.

in its parts; Baptism is the power and principle of life and preaching is the application of this power of life. The Word in Holy Baptism is, so to speak, the root of the Word, which develops into trunk and branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruit. So then in all the sects and fragments of the Church in which Holy Baptism has been reduced to a symbol or completely done away with, preaching is weakened; it either becomes mere oratory or is completely ignored.¹²

Vilmar also discussed the question of missions and their relation to Holy Baptism, a relationship which was forgotten in many areas during Vilmar's age. The purpose of foreign missions, he said, is that the heathen may accept the calling of Christ and, of course, inseparably bound to that, may be baptized. The purpose of the Innere Mission, on the other hand, is to recall the baptized to their Baptism that they may appreciate the grace of Holy Baptism. The Innere Mission deals only with those who have forgotten their Baptism or are in danger of forgetting it. The reason that this emphasis was so neglected at his time, Vilmar believed, was due to the rationalistic concept of the Church and the ministry which was so popular.¹³

Infant Baptism

Being a Lutheran, Vilmar, of course, insisted that infants must be baptized. In infant Baptism, he said, children are snatched away by an

¹² Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 237.

¹³ A. F. C. Vilmar, "Das geistliche Amt und die innere Mission," Kirche und Welt, oder die Aufgaben des gesittlichen Amtes in unsrer Zeit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), I, 135-36.

irrevocable act of God from the will of their parents and from the world.¹⁴

Infant Baptism, Vilmar asserted, was of the very earliest origin--as soon as there were whole families in the Church. Already in 252 A. D., the Council of Carthage decreed that children should be baptized at the latest within eight days of their birth.¹⁵ This is a practice which was followed throughout the history of the Church; but in very recent times, he complained, this practice had been largely ignored because of the Rationalism which had influenced the Church to so great an extent.¹⁶

The importance which has always been given to infant Baptism in the Church was degraded by the Anabaptists. They insisted that the child of Christian parents who dies without Baptism suffers no damage to his estate of bliss, and therefore immediate Baptism is not necessary. However, Vilmar insisted, Christians have been given no covenant of God except the New Covenant, which is first established through Holy Baptism. If God permits an infant to die without being baptized, one must entrust the situation to the mercy of God and not make the exception the rule itself.¹⁷

Vilmar was, of course, very much opposed to the theory that infant Baptism is nothing more than a symbol. It is wrong, he says, to assert that Baptism is only symbolic of the forgiveness of sins, or that it is only the assurance of the forgiveness of sins (i. e., that there is another

¹⁴Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 100.

¹⁵Joannes Dominicus Mansi, editor, "Cypriani Epistola ad Fidum, de Infantibus baptizandis," Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio (Florence: Anthony Zatta Veneti, 1759), I, col. 901-02.

¹⁶Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 242-43.

¹⁷Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, pp. 101-02.

action of God besides the act of Baptism), or that rebirth has its source not in Baptism but merely in the working of God's Word. These ideas are the teachings of the Anabaptists, the Zwinglians, and the Calvinists.¹⁸

Holy Baptism and Practical Theology

Vilmar had a deep appreciation for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as the means by which one entered into the fellowship of the Church. Therefore the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, along with all of the other Sacraments, were acts which took place within the fellowship of the Church. In fact, Vilmar said that the common teaching of the Lutheran Church is: Sacramenta sunt nervi publicorum conventuum.¹⁹ For this reason, he asserted with the Church Order of 1566, that Holy Baptism should, if at all possible be performed with the congregation present.²⁰

The Church Order said:

Baptism is to be administered with the congregation present. Those who administer it without necessity outside the church are justly to be regarded as people who wantonly desire to separate themselves from the communion of the Church.²¹

At any rate Baptism should be performed in the church building--in summer in the building proper, and in winter at least in the sacristy, if it can be heated. If necessary, it may be performed in the pastor's home or

¹⁸Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁹A. F. C. Vilmar Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), p. 116.

²⁰Ibid., p. 109.

²¹Aemilius Ludwig Richter, editor, "Hessische Kirchenordnung--1566," Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts (Weimar: Verlag des Landes- Industrie-comptoirs, 1846), II, 294.

in the school, and only as a last resort in a private home. (Illegitimate children, however, may be baptized outside the church.)²² Ordinarily, Baptism is to take place in the presence of the congregation during the morning service, according to the Church Order.²³

As far as emergency Baptism was concerned, however, Vilmar disagreed with the Church Orders. According to the Church Orders of 1566 and 1573, laymen were permitted to baptize only in extreme emergencies. In the Church Order of 1566, midwives were permitted to baptize in extreme necessity, but in 1573, even this was forbidden. In the Church Order of 1657, all emergency Baptism was forbidden, and if no pastor were available, those laymen present were only to pray for the child. This practice, said Vilmar, arose from the extremely dubious theory that Holy Baptism can be accomplished through prayer, and that the pastor could then come after the infant had died and assure the parents of the child's salvation. Vilmar, however, insisted that emergency Baptism should be performed by a layman if it is necessary, and then the pastor should ratify the Baptism if the child lived; or if a mistake had been made, should administer the rite.²⁴

(Vilmar discussed this same issue in his Geschichte der Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen.)²⁵

However, Holy Baptism must never be arbitrarily repeated. On the

²²Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 109.

²³Richter, Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts, II, 294.

²⁴Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 114.

²⁵A. F. C. Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1860), pp. 255-56.

basis of the essence of Baptism it stands to reason, he says, that Holy Baptism cannot be repeated, because it is a rebirth, an implanting into the Body of Christ, which can happen only once. If Baptism is repeated arbitrarily, then this repetition is blasphemy against God.²⁶

When a child is to be baptized, it is the duty of the father personally to report the birth to the pastor and ask that the child be baptized, according to the Church Order. Then the proper arrangements must be made by the pastor.²⁷

As far as sponsors are concerned, Vilmar says, it ought always to be remembered that they are co-parents (Miteltern). They are designated as such and serve as such. They are the ones who are to be responsible for the Christian education of the child along with the parents. Therefore, according to the Church Order, no one should be a godparent who does not know the catechism and have a respectable calling. The pastor is to determine this through an examination in the catechism, for the sponsor is to support the child with his faith and confession. If the godparent is not firm in faith and confession himself, then his acting for the child is a mere empty ceremony. If the sponsor is from another parish, the baptizing pastor is to get a certificate from his pastor asserting what the sponsor's status is. An individual under church discipline must never be allowed to serve as a godparent.

It has been asked ever since the sixteenth century whether a Roman Catholic may be permitted to serve as a godparent. It was Vilmar's opinion that this could be permitted since both churches have the Apostles'

²⁶Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 240-41.

²⁷Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 107.

Creed as their basis, and both churches recognize Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity as valid. However, since being a sponsor also includes the responsibility of Christian education, at least one sponsor should be Lutheran.²⁸

The Church Order of 1566 says concerning godparents:

Sponsors should be just, true, pious, Godfearing, believing persons, who above all understand what Baptism is all about and who realize what they are promising in the stead of the child; then the pastor is to make sure that they will carry out what they have promised in the stead of the child. For this reason, the pastor should be notified who the sponsors are.²⁹

It is also worth noting that Vilmar believed (without giving any reason) that, if at all possible, a pastor should not baptize his own children but have them baptized by another pastor.³⁰

Vilmar, being a Lutheran, did not insist, of course, on one particular form of Baptism, although he seems to have favored immersion. He said, immersion is not absolutely necessary in Baptism; washing (Abwaschen) is quite sufficient (Mark 7:8 and Acts 16:15, 33). However, the symbolic meaning of Baptism is eliminated with aspersion (adpersio), i. e., being buried with Christ by Baptism into death, but to put the same weight on the symbolic implications of the Sacrament as on the substance of the act will lead to a symbolic interpretation of the Sacrament itself.³¹

Vilmar also discussed the significance of giving a child a name at Holy Baptism. He realized, of course, that this was not at all essential

²⁸Ibid., pp. 107-08.

²⁹Richter, Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts, II, 294.

³⁰Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 114.

³¹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 241.

to Holy Baptism, but he felt that this was an aspect which should not be overlooked. As far as giving a child a name is concerned, Vilmar said, it should not be done lightly. In Holy Baptism a child is given the name which he is to carry as a Christian. Giving a child a name is in no way something incidental or indifferent. The baptismal name is the name with which the child is to be inscribed into the Book of Life. By this name the child is to remember his Baptism in his future life. Therefore, this baptismal or Christian name is to be chosen carefully. After all, one's family name is only a civil matter ("Ich heisse Johannes; ich schreibe mich aber Schmidt.") So the pastor, too, ought to see to it (although not too rigorously) that proper names are chosen; he must refuse names in bad taste and worldly names (e. g., Bluecherhilde, Gneisenaude, Wellington, Wallenstein, or even Proudhon, Robert Blum, etc.) and other oddities. The old literary names, common in the sixteenth century (e. g., Doralice, Arthur, etc.), were put up with at that time, he said. One ought to consider the meaning of the name chosen in order to use it in the child's training. In addition, since so many names are unusual, it is well for the pastor to have a piece of paper on which the name is written at the altar and then read the name from that.³²

* * * * *

In general, one might say that Vilmar had a very high regard for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, for its "exhibitive" nature, for its being the entrance into the Church, the implanting into the Body of Christ. He also

³²Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 108-09.

had a deep appreciation for baptismal practices that were traditionally Lutheran and that reflected good Lutheran theology as opposed to the gross disregard often exhibited by the Calvinists, Crypto-Calvinists, and Anabaptists.

The strongly Reformed tradition that Vlieter had to fight vehemently in the Lutheran Church of Amsterdam, was that of the Calvinists concerning the Holy Eucharist deals with those aspects in which Lutherans and Reformed differ concerning the Sacrament. For this reason, Vlieter's theology of the Holy Eucharist is not complete, although what he does say is inherently Lutheran. And the aspects of this sacrament are of particular value today at a time when so many Reformed practices and concepts are often incorrectly promulgated in churches which hold themselves Reformed. It is in the theology of the Holy Eucharist in particular where the differences between Lutheran and Reformed come to the fore.

In discussing the Holy Eucharist, Vlieter raised three points of contention: 1. the actual presence of the true body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament, 2. the objectivity of the Sacrament, and 3. the nature of the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist.

Centrality of the Holy Eucharist

First of all, Vlieter insisted that the Holy Eucharist be not seen as the center of Christian life. This was an important issue since what had been recognized in the Church throughout her whole history was that the Evangelists and Calvinists perverted the Church and when the Holy Eucharist of secondary importance. In the Holy Eucharist, Vlieter says, lies the deepest meaning of life; in fact it is the very heart of the Church of

CHAPTER VII

THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Because of the strongly Reformed tendencies that Vilmar had to fight vehemently in the Lutheran Church of Kurhessen, the bulk of his discussion concerning the Holy Eucharist deals with those aspects in which Lutherans and Reformed differ concerning the Sacrament. For this reason, Vilmar's theology of the Holy Eucharist is not complete, although what he wrote is vehemently Lutheran. And the aspects of this Sacrament are of particular value today at a time when so many Reformed practices and concepts are often ignorantly promulgated in churches which call themselves Lutheran. It is in the theology of the Holy Eucharist in particular where the differences between Lutheran and Reformed come to the fore.

In discussing the Holy Eucharist, Vilmar stressed three points in particular: 1. the actual Presence of the true Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament, 2. the objectivity of the Sacrament, and 3. the nature of the Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist.

Centrality of the Holy Eucharist

First of all, Vilmar insisted that the Holy Eucharist is and must be the center of Christian life. This was an incontrovertible fact which had been recognized in the Church throughout her whole history until the Zwinglians and Calvinists perverted the Church and made the Holy Eucharist of secondary importance. In the Holy Eucharist, Vilmar said, lies the deepest meaning of life; in fact it is the very heart of the Church of

Christ and of the Christian life.¹

The fact that the Holy Eucharist has always been the most profound center of the Church's life is shown by the fact that all parties in the Christian Church have fought so zealously (often forgetting all Christian love in the Sacrament of Love) over the Holy Eucharist and are still fighting today. Even those sects which do not give the Holy Eucharist a central position in the Church, acknowledge by their ceaseless efforts to take the Sacrament out of its central place that it is in the Holy Eucharist that the essential differences in the Church and in her relation to Christ lie.²

Since, therefore, Holy Communion is the central point of the life of worship, and since worship is possible only through union with Christ, then it must follow that Holy Communion belongs to every complete cultus. It is an established historical fact that in the Lutheran Church (as distinguished from the Zwinglians and Calvinists), Holy Communion must be celebrated at least every Sunday, even when only one is present (i. e., besides the celebrant).³

The Church Order of 1566 directs that Holy Communion be celebrated on all Sundays, on the feasts of Christ, on the day following these feasts,

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Praktische Erklahrung des Neuen Testaments (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1879), I, 326.

²A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 245.

³A. F. C. Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), p. 118.

and on Maundy Thursday.⁴

The Holy Eucharist is a grave necessity, said Vilmar, and when faith has been awakened in a person, it is taken for granted that he earnestly desires that this power for eternal life be nurtured. So one dare not defend the opinion, as the ignorant do, that the Holy Eucharist is profaned through frequent use. It is characteristic of the Reformed Churches that they look upon the Sacrament as an out-of-the-ordinary, periodical ordinance as opposed to "regular worship," which consists only of a sermon and prayers. It is for this reason that the Reformed Church Orders have established a certain limit to the number of celebrations of Holy Communion. In the Lutheran Church, however, it is celebrated frequently, also on special occasions, such as weddings; for Holy Communion is the proper way in which to hallow the entrance into married life.⁵

The True Bodily Presence

Vilmar asserted positively that those churches and churchmen who truly adhere to the Augsburg Confession and its Apology cannot but confess the true, in particular the objective, bodily presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.⁶ The Lutheran Church stands directly opposed to the opinion that there is no real bodily presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, and in this she agrees with the tradition of the Church and the unanimous

⁴Aemilius Ludwig Richter, editor, "Hessische Kirchenordnung--1566." Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts (Weimar: Verlag des Landes- Industrie-comptoirs, 1846), II, 295.

⁵Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 113.

⁶A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870), p. 107.

opinion of Holy Scripture that there is a real partaking of the real Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.⁷

Furthermore, it is the traditional opinion of the Lutheran Church that there are both bread and wine and the true Body and Blood of Christ, and one is not distributed without the other, and one is not received without the other.⁸ Bread is bread and at the same time Body; and wine is wine and at the same time Blood.⁹

However, Lutherans must not make the mistake that the Calvinists and the sects do and say that in the elements no change takes place. In Article X of the Augsburg Confession, Vilmar said, the words unter der Gestalt des Brots und Weins are used specifically so that the change of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ are not excluded.¹⁰ However, Luther's Smalcald Articles call the papistic doctrine of transubstantiation "subtle sophistry."¹¹

⁷Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 249-50.

⁸Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 106.

⁹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 252.

¹⁰Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 105. One ought to note that the words unter der Gestalt used in the Augsburg Confession are the same words which the Roman Catholics use in describing their theory of transubstantiation. Neither the Augsburg Confession nor the Apology explicitly deny the theory of transubstantiation (which, of course, is something different from saying that a change occurs). Although the Roman Catholic theory of transubstantiation, that the substance of bread is changed into the substance of Body but the accidents remain, cannot be called a Lutheran doctrine, neither can the Calvinist theory, that no change in the elements occurs, be called Lutheran. Blessed John Gerhard refers to this change in the elements as sacramentalis panis mutatio, "De Sacra Coena," Loci Theologici, edited by Ed. Preuss (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1867), V, 135, 153 (Locus XXI, cap. XII, pars. 136, 153).

¹¹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 251-52.

In discussing the term unio sacramentalis Vilmar pointed out that it does not mean that the materia coelestis and the materia terrestis are mixed, which would only lead to another form of transubstantiation; nor is it a side-by-side existence (Nebeneinander) of the two materiae (consubstantiation), nor the changing of the Body and Blood of Christ along with the earthly elements into a single substance (impanation). In the last analysis, one can look upon the unio sacramentalis only as a mystery.¹²

Vilmar also stressed the fact that one cannot say that he receives the Body and Blood of Christ as a natural, creaturely food. This must be rejected as blasphemy. For both Lutherans and Roman Catholics teach that the reception of the Body and Blood is a mystery. The earthly elements are, of course, received in a creaturely way, but the Body and Blood are not. One must differentiate between a manducatio oralis physica (of the elements) and a manducatio oralis hyperphysica (of the Body and Blood of Christ).¹³

In the final analysis, from the point of view of dogmatics one can only say that the mode of the true presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, i. e., how the bread is the Body of Christ, and how the wine is His Blood, is a question of secondary importance in the theology of the Holy Eucharist.¹⁴

At times, the question is asked as to how Christ could give to His

¹²Ibid., II, 258.

¹³Ibid., II, 253-54.

¹⁴Ibid., II, 250.

disciples His transfigured Body and Blood in instituting the Sacrament before His Resurrection. The answer (or rather parallel) that Vilmar gave is that He probably did this in the same way in which He imparted the Holy Spirit to His disciples before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. In his earthly appearance (Erscheinung) Christ had both His earthly Body and His transfigured Body at the same time. But above all, it must be remembered that the Holy Eucharist is an act of the majesty of God, through which the deity of Christ is manifest.¹⁵

Basically then the two main differences in the concepts of the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist which are found in the Christian Church are the following: one party considers the material principle as an organ of the spiritual which is created by God. They say that the material influences the spiritual. According to this conception, spiritual without material is impossible. The other view holds that material and spiritual are basically separate and denies that the material can be in any way an organ of the spiritual. The first opinion sees in the Holy Eucharist both a material and a spiritual act in which the Creator works materially on the body and through this, works spiritually on the spirit. The other view sees in the Holy Eucharist only a spiritual act in which the material pertains only to the body and does not reach into the world of the spiritual. The first view sees the Holy Eucharist as a real imparting of the Body and Blood of Christ, which is received bodily and through the body works on the spirit or, more correctly, on the whole man. The second view sees in the Holy Eucharist

¹⁵Ibid., II, 265. This page number in this edition is misprinted as "365."

only a spiritual imparting of the Person of Christ in which the body of the recipient is not involved at all. The first view is basically the view of the Church in history, which can be traced back to St. Ignatius; the second view is that of the Calvinists and sects, which goes back to Origen and Clement of Alexandria.¹⁶

The Objectivity of the Sacrament

Another large rift between the Lutheran and the Calvinists in the theology of the Holy Eucharist is the question of its objectivity. Lutherans believe that there is nothing whatsoever in man which can effect the validity of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Neither the faith or character of the person who received the Body and Blood of Christ nor the faith or character of the pastor who consecrates and administers the Sacrament affect the presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Sacrament. Nothing in this world can be more powerful or more sure, says Vilmar, than receiving Christ's Body and Blood. One never has Him closer to himself than in this Sacrament.¹⁷ Calvinists, on the other hand, believe that the unworthy recipient receives only bread and wine and not even the spiritual Person of Christ, much less His Body and Blood. To the Calvinists the validity of the Sacrament depends upon the faith of the recipient.

Vilmar insists, however, that the Holy Eucharist is unconditional. Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is not dependent on one's faith.

¹⁶Ibid., II, 245-46.

¹⁷Vilmar, Praktische Erklarung, II, 462.

Whether He comes or does not come depends not on the human being but on God Himself. What depends on the recipient's faith is whether or not he benefits from the Sacrament. The Holy Eucharist is also an excluding work of God. Here Holy Communion is the same as all other theophanies-- in Holy Baptism, in the Word and in the laying on of hands, i. e., where God appears, He appears to separate: some to salvation and some to judgment--in one and the same manifestation.¹⁸

The effectual working of the Sacrament then is dependent upon the recipient's faith (i. e., whether or not he benefits from the true Body and Blood of Christ which he receives), but the presence of Christ's Body and Blood and his receiving it are in no way dependant on his faith.¹⁹ So the use of the Sacrament is objective as far as its validity is concerned in that God awakens (!) and strengthens faith in the believer through the Body and Blood of Christ, and it is subjective in that the recipient must benefit from this act of God through his faith.²⁰

In other words, the worthy receive the Body and Blood of Christ to their benefit, and the unworthy to their judgment. But then one may well ask, "Who is worthy and who is unworthy?" Vilmar answers that he is worthy who receives Christ as He comes with His Body and Blood. This Body is given and broken for him and this Blood is shed for the forgiveness of his sin, and whoever receives the forgiveness of sin through the Body and Blood of Christ is worthy. But whoever does not know about it or does not concern himself about it or does not want to know about it is

¹⁸Ibid., II, 205.

¹⁹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 258-59.

²⁰Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 127.

unworthy.²¹

The unworthy person's receiving the Body and Blood of Christ is no different from the application of Holy Baptism on the unworthy or the hearing of God's Word by the unbelieving. They receive both actually and really, not only water and not only empty grammatical parts of speech. But as believers receive them for life, so the unworthy receive them for judgment and death. The worthy at the Sacrament of Holy Communion, however, are all those who with either a little or with much recognition of their sinfulness, long for the forgiveness of their sin through Jesus Christ, who died on the Cross.²²

Unworthiness does not lie in one's past sins. One can and should come to the Holy Eucharist with all his sins; and only when one does not want forgiveness is he unworthy. The fatal contradiction lies in the person who receives the Body and Blood of Christ, yet resists it.²³

Since Vilmar stressed the objectivity of the Sacrament so vehemently, one might ask what he had to say about the theory that the Sacrament works ex opera operato. He said that the idea that the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist works ex opera operato must be considered an error when the term is used in the ordinary sense to mean that the Sacrament works salvation purely objectively without the recipient's willing reception (Empfaenglichkeit). However, the Sacrament (as well as the Word of God) does work ex opera operato in that it works either salvation or judgment. It is never without effect.²⁴

²¹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 259.

²²Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 113.

²³Vilmar, Praktische Erklaerung, II, 205.

²⁴Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, pp. 126-27.

As much as Vilmar insisted on the objective presence of the true Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament, however, he nevertheless insisted that one receives only the Body and Blood of Christ and not the Christ or the Word. The reception of the whole Christ, he said takes place at rebirth--at Holy Baptism and at the return to Holy Baptism--repentance. Of course, the whole Christ is present at the Sacrament, but He gives us only His Body and Blood to receive. It seems that Vilmar insisted on this distinction because he said this was one of the differences between the teaching of the Augsburg Confession and of the Calvinists, and Vilmar did not want to be mistaken for a Calvinist.²⁵

On the other hand, in spite of the fact that it is often associated with Calvinism, and in spite of the fact that Luther at times rejected it,²⁶ Vilmar insisted that John 6:32-63 can refer to nothing else than the Holy Eucharist--where Christ says that the bread which He gives is His Body and that whoever eats His Body and drinks His Blood will be raised on the Last Day. If Christ had meant only a spiritual eating and drinking, Vilmar said, the people would not have been so angry and so many would not have left Him.²⁷

Vilmar asked another question which might be asked in defense of Calvinism, and which relates to the objective nature of the Sacrament.

²⁵Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 260.

²⁶Luther refers to John 6 several times in speaking of Holy Communion. Cf. "Das diese Wort Christi," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Herman Boehlau Nachfolger, 1901), XXIII, 254.14-29, and in the same edition, "Von Abendmahl Christi Bekenntnis," XXVI, 367.9-368.13.

²⁷Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 255-56.

If the Body and Blood of Christ are signs of the forgiveness of sins, as Luther so often insisted, and if the forgiveness of sins is actually to be sought in the Word, then are not the Word and a declarative form of Absolution the chief acts and the Sacrament of the Altar only an accompanying act? Is not the power of the Sacrament to be reduced to a mere external working, which helps the weak Christian's power of comprehension and merely strengthens his intellectual understanding of the Word, which reaches out to him? In some Lutheran circles, said Vilmar, this seems to be the interpretation. But if the Body and Blood are mere signs of the forgiveness of sin, then one is unavoidably near the idea that the elements are only signs and nothing else. If Christ's Body and Blood have no real effectual power on the one who receives, then the Sacrament is only something visible and nothing else, something by which only one's understanding is propped up so that it in turn can prop up the faith of the individual. If this is true then one is a Calvinist.²⁸

Another difference between Lutherans' concept of the Holy Eucharist and Calvinists' concept, Vilmar said, is the fact that Lutherans believe that in the Holy Eucharist the resurrection from the dead to eternal life is imparted. This Vilmar corroborated with references to St. Justin Martyr, St. Ignatius, St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and Martin Chemnitz. It is very fortunate, said Vilmar, that, if nothing else, Lutheran formulas still contain the words "eating and drinking of the Sacrament to eternal life."²⁹

²⁸A. F. C. Vilmar, "Ueber das Verhaeltnis der Absolution zum Sakrament des Altars," Kirche und Welt, oder die Aufgaben des geistlichen Amtes in unserer Zeit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), I, 327-28.

²⁹Ibid., I, 331-32.

The Life germ concealed in our present body, the germ of our new life, as St. Paul says, is maintained and has its existence only through the Body and Blood of Christ. We receive the Body and Blood of Christ, of course, with our earthly mouths, but this Body and Blood does not really belong to our earthly bodies, which are constantly dying, but rather to this concealed germ of eternal life. So then the oral reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is not a natural event, but a mystery, a projection of the world to come into the world of death.³⁰

The Christian carries in himself a corporeal germ of the resurrection, and the feeding of this germ with the Body and Blood of Christ is the essence and the power of the Holy Eucharist, so that one's vile body will become like the glorious Body of Christ (Phil. 3:21).³¹

In this way the receiving of the Body and Blood of Christ has a direct connection with the redemption, and therefore it is not to be equated with receiving creaturely food.³² That the eating and drinking of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist brings redemption can be proved without a doubt from the Words of Institution, as can the fact that this Sacrament of Redemption, of Eternal Life, is to be repeated and be a rite of the Church.³³

The Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist

Again in opposition to the Calvinists, Vilmar asserted with the

³⁰Ibid., I, 334.

³¹Ibid., I, 335.

³²Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 255.

³³Ibid., II, 255.

Lutheran Symbols that the Holy Eucharist is a sacrifice.

St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter ten, shows without a doubt that the Holy Eucharist belongs in the category of sacrifice, Vilmar insisted. And the institution shows that it belongs to the Passover. However, the Holy Eucharist is not a propitiatory sacrifice, i. e., it is not a repetition of the crucifixion of Christ. The once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross cannot be denied. The Passover sacrifice, however, was not propitiatory but rather a thankoffering for God's sparing His people from a great calamity when He "passed over" them. In this sense, the Holy Eucharist is indeed a sacrifice, i. e., participation in the sacrifice which Christ made and the appropriation of the same. Christ was the Passover Lamb, and we take part in this Passover Lamb thankfully as did Israel. Only we take part through the Body and Blood of the Passover Lamb. That is how the word "Eucharist" is to be understood. The fact that Christ is living in the congregation is here bound to the Holy Eucharist in that the "aliveness" of His members is bound to the corporeal reception of His Body and Blood. It is impossible to deny this because of the Old Testament implications.³⁴ This same thought is found also almost verbatim in his Dogmatik. Here Vilmar also added that since the Holy Eucharist is a meal of thanksgiving, the prayer of thanksgiving dare not be omitted from the celebration without endangering its very essence. For most Lutherans, he wryly commented, this thanksgiving is restricted to the Our Father.³⁵

³⁴Vilmar, Praktische Erklahrung, II, 201.

³⁵Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 268. Cf. infra, pp. 62-63.

Vilmar carefully distinguished, on the basis of the *Apologetik*, between the two kinds of sacrifice which exist in the Church. The first kind of sacrifice, the sacrifice for sin, is Christ Himself, who was offered once and for all. The second kind of sacrifice, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, offered by the righteous in recognition of the grace which God abundantly bestows, can be found in the Mass, when one considers the whole action of the Mass, and therefore the Mass is called "Eucharist." But along with this the prayers in the Mass are also meant, an unbloody latreia, as the Greek canon of the Mass calls it.³⁶

In addition, Vilmar notes without committing himself either way, that many prominent Lutherans (Hoefling, Loche, Alt, Abeken, Hengstenberg, Schoeberlein, Koenig, Otto, etc.) have approached the opinion of Doellinger (then a Roman Catholic) that in the Mass the sacrifice of Christ is not repeated but pleaded before God. Then it is no sacrifice but an oblation, an opinion condemned by the Council of Trent (Session XXII, Canon 3). For example, he quotes Otto as saying:

In the sacrifice of the Eucharist the Church offers Christ, i. e., she brings Christ and His service to mankind in prayer before God, she thanks God the Father that He sent His only-begotten Son into the world and made Him a sacrifice on the Cross for us as a propitiation for our sins.³⁷

The Holy Eucharist and Practical Theology

As was mentioned before,³⁸ Vilmar took for granted that in the

³⁶Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 182.

³⁷Ibid., p. 185.

³⁸Supra, p. 52.

Lutheran Church the regular Sunday-morning service, at least, is Holy Communion. Only in Zwinglian and Calvinistic Churches is it an occasional thing, a special act added on to the regular service.³⁹

The question then arises as to who is to be permitted to receive Holy Communion in a Lutheran Church. All Lutherans who are not under church discipline are, of course, to be permitted. Vilmar also approved Roman Catholics' (in the diaspora) receiving as long as they received both the Host and the chalice. The Reformed he also permitted to receive Holy Communion if they believed in the real bodily presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and if they accepted the Lutheran form of confession or preparation. This Vilmar took from Klaus Harms. In this manner, Vilmar said, there is often a communion fellowship among the various Churches. However, communion fellowship between those who believe in the real bodily presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and those who do not is impossible. Therefore, a member of the Reformed Church who accepts his church's position must for the sake of his own conscience absent himself from a Lutheran Eucharist.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the sick, especially those with such loathsome diseases as cancer, syphilis, a flowing of saliva, a chronic cough (Stoszhusten), etc., should preferably be given private Communion. The mentally retarded may be admitted under certain conditions to the public celebration as long as they do not disturb the celebration and they desire to receive. In many cases it depends on the pastor's judgment as to whether that desire

³⁹A. F. C. Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1860), pp. 261-62.

⁴⁰Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 123.

is really there. Many times the desire is present in a most astounding way, and it is surprising how often the feeble-minded recognize the benefit of the Sacrament in their condition.⁴¹

Vilmar believed that before one can receive Holy Communion fruitfully, it is necessary (unerlaesslich) that Confession and Absolution precede, because death must first be dismissed before one can have the powers of eternal life sown in him, and this dismissal of death is accomplished through confession and forgiveness of sins. It is a contradictio in adiecto if one wants to give someone the powers of eternal life (for the resurrection of the body), when he does not acknowledge his sins, Vilmar said. However, he insisted, it is only in this respect that confession is necessary before Holy Communion.⁴²

Vilmar suggested having either a confessional address or an exhortation, with either private confession, according to the Church Order of 1573, or general confession, according to the Church Order of 1657, following, and then formal absolution. Particular sins, however, according to both Church Orders, should be confessed privately.⁴³

As far as the consecration of the elements is concerned, it consists of two parts: the prayer⁴⁴ and the Words of Institution. In the prayer Christ is called upon to perform here what is necessary. The prayer was

⁴¹Ibid., p. 117.

⁴²Ibid., p. 116.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 116-17.

⁴⁴Supra, p. 63.

expressly instituted at the first celebration of Holy Communion and is recorded in Matthew 26:26 (eulogein over the bread and eucharistein over the wine); in Mark 14:22, Luke 22, and I Corinthians 11. Furthermore, at the consecration something is done to the elements; it is not merely an abstract setting aside of bread and wine for a special use. The teaching of the Lutheran Church is that the Words of Institution must be repeated. For in this way, the pastor, not in his private person but as an instrument of Christ, speaks these words, and Christ repeats what He did at the first Holy Eucharist: He makes bread and wine bearers of His Body and His Blood.⁴⁵

Here Vilmar quoted Chemnitz who said:

Therefore in our Lord's Supper the Words of Institution are recited not only historically, but in order that the Church may be shown through the words connected to His command and promise that He is present in the action of the meal and exhibits the power of His word to those eating and drinking His Body and Blood. For it is He Himself who has them distributed through His ministry; it is He Himself who says, "This is my Body"; it is He Himself who is efficacious through this word, so that bread is His Body and wine is His Blood. So in this way we are certain and we believe that in the Supper of our Lord we eat not common bread and wine but the Body and Blood of Christ.⁴⁶

Although the Words of Institution are indispensable to the consecration, other things are not, e. g., the sign of the Cross when the pastor says, "This is my Body" (This is done so that those who cannot hear the words know that they are being spoken); nor is the elevation of the Host and chalice absolutely necessary, even though Luther vigorously defended it against Carlstadt (in any case, the elevation should always

⁴⁵Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 119-20.

⁴⁶Vilmar identifies this quotation from Chemnitz as "Th. II p. 76. 87b." The writer was not able to identify it.

be performed reverently); nor is it necessary to consecrate each chalice separately. One may consecrate all the wine intended for the celebration at one time. However, Vilmar pointed out that wine that is brought forward after the consecration, if what has been consecrated should not be sufficient, must be consecrated.⁴⁷

The Reformed, Vilmar said, are wrong in making the breaking of bread an essential part of the Holy Eucharist. But if they think of it only as an integral part of the celebration they are not wrong, since the breaking of bread is closely connected with the act of thanksgiving in the Eucharist.⁴⁸

As far as the elements themselves are concerned, Vilmar said that the pastor should take special care to use the best. Unleavened Hosts are to be preferred to leavened bread, and it is well that they be stamped with some emblem such as a crucifix. The bread should be made of the finest white flour. The wine must not be adulterated, sour, or sulphurated; French wines are the best. The chalice and flagons should be made at least of silver and should be kept very clean. The pastor should also take care when bringing the elements to the altar. And as for the altar itself, it should never have bottles (Bouteillen) on it and should always have a clean white altar cloth and corporal on it for Holy Communion.⁴⁹

Self-communication by the pastor is absolutely necessary according to

⁴⁷Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 120-21.

⁴⁸Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 269.

⁴⁹Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 122-23.

Vilmar. The pastor must receive with his congregation and must make his confession with them. If he is the only pastor in the congregation, he is to have a neighboring pastor come in as his confessor.⁵⁰

Vilmar also noted that the custom of bowing before the reception of Holy Communion is not directed toward the pastor but toward the personally, really present Lord Jesus Christ. It was for this reason that Landgrave Maurice of Hesse, a Reformed prince, tried to do away with this custom. Furthermore, the reason for which the congregation should remain during the entire celebration of Holy Communion is the fact that the Lord Christ Himself is present (K. O., 1657, 204-05).⁵¹

That the chalice is to be given to all, Vilmar said, is an essential part of the Sacrament. The doctrine of concomitance in the Roman Catholic Church is post factum formulation. The Blood of the Holy Eucharist is not in the Body as the Roman Catholics teach, but the Blood in the Sacrament is that Blood which was shed for us, not the Blood which remained in the Body. In fact, one might go a step farther and say that Christ feeds our body with His Body and our blood (i. e., the soul) with His Blood.⁵²

As for the Words of Distribution, Vilmar favored the words prescribed in the Church Order of 1657 (before this no Words of Distribution had been prescribed); "Take and eat, this is the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, given for you," and "Take and drink, this cup is the New Testament," etc.⁵³

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 123.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 122.

⁵²Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 269.

⁵³Vilmar, Geschichte der Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen, p. 258.

However, this formula should not be weakened. For example, the Union Church uses the formula: "Jesus said: 'Take and eat,'" etc., so that it is only a reference to the original institution, and it is left up to the judgment of the communicant as to the meaning, and then doubt arises.⁵⁴

The crumbs from the Hosts are properly caught in a corporal and burnt, and if any of the wine has been spilled, it may be absorbed with charcoal (Kohlen). However, the vestrymen or treasurer, etc., should not be permitted to come in after the Eucharist and consume the contents of the chalice at the rectory or even at the altar. Whatever cannot be reserved should be given to the sick and the rest reserved for later sick Communion.⁵⁵

According to the Church Order of 1657, said Vilmar, those who are not receiving Holy Communion are to remain to the end of the service and not leave beforehand as they do in the Reformed Church.⁵⁶

Private Communion in homes is not the custom in central Germany, said Vilmar. In northern Germany and in Saxony it was formerly customary, but this had ceased at Vilmar's time. Often whenever there was any trifling reason not to go to the church, parishioners would request the pastor to bring the Sacrament to their house. But when such a thing is demanded without a good reason it is to be sternly refused. Holy Communion, as the word itself shows, belongs to the whole congregation. However, this does not apply to Holy Communion for the sick. When one

⁵⁴Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 121-22.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 125.

⁵⁶Vilmar, Geschichte der Konfessionsstände der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen, p. 262.

cannot receive Holy Communion in the church because he is too weak, then it is to be administered in the home, especially when one is on his deathbed, but only after a confession of sins, although this should be short.⁵⁷

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In summary, one might point out that in his discussion of the Holy Eucharist, too, Vilmar emphasized its "exhibitive," real, concrete nature. This is not something vague and uncertain, not a promise for the future, not a sign or symbol, not a declaration of grace. The Holy Eucharist is the distribution of the same Body of Christ that hung on Calvary and the same Blood of Christ that was shed on the Cross. It is the imparting of Christ Himself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and a God-given power which is imparted to the believer that gives him eternal life hereafter. In addition, Vilmar stressed particularly those aspects of the Holy Eucharist which set it apart from the practices of the Reformed Church, which were so seriously weakening Lutheranism in his beloved Hesse.

⁵⁷Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 124.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ABSOLUTION

The Sacrament of Holy Absolution in the Church during Vilmar's time was sadly neglected. Here again the influence of the Reformed Church and of the Pietists was prevalent. For this reason, in discussing this Sacrament, Vilmar stressed four aspects in particular against this non-Lutheran influence: 1. the fact that private confession and Holy Absolution must be retained or restored in the Lutheran Church, 2. the fact that Holy Absolution is "exhibitive," 3. the fact that Holy Absolution is part of the office of the ministry, and 4. the importance of the seal of the confessional.

Holy Absolution Must Be Retained or Restored

Being a Lutheran, Vilmar, of course, pointed out that the Lutheran Symbols insist on retaining private confession and Holy Absolution in the Church,¹ and that by their position in both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, the articles concerning confession and Absolution show that the reformers considered Holy Absolution a Sacrament comparable in rank to Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, along with the statement to that effect in Article XIII of the Apology.² Furthermore, the theologians of

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Lehre von geistlichen Amt, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Fiderit (Marburg und Leipzig: N. G. Elwert'sche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1870), p. 66.

²A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Fiderit (Quetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 124.

the sixteenth century generally considered these three Sacraments of equal rank.³

However, to understand these articles in the Symbols (particularly Article XI of the Augsburg Confession) one must remember several presuppositions which were taken for granted in the sixteenth century, but at Vilmar's time were all but forgotten: 1. the command by Christ to forgive sins, 2. the necessity of articulating one's sins, and 3. the importance of the seal of the confessional, a corollary of private confession.⁴ Unless these presuppositions are granted, the teaching of the Lutheran Church concerning confession and Absolution is not complete.

Vilmar emphasized the fact that for preserving the integrity of the Church retaining private confession and Absolution is absolutely indispensable, so where they have been dispensed with, they must absolutely (schlechtdings) be restored.⁵ He said the same thing in his Dogmatik and added that where there is no appreciation for the necessity of articulating sins it must be awakened. Sin cannot be fully recognized, much less repented of where there is no verbalization of sins.⁶

He realized, of course, that it would be difficult task to instil into people once more an appreciation for private confession and Absolution (particularly confidence in the seal of the confessional), but pastors must take the greatest pains to reinstate private confession

³A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1870), p. 125.

⁴Ibid., pp. 115-116.

⁵Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 115f.

⁶Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 116.

and Absolution in all its fulness, and then people will once more have the confidence which they have lost.⁷ But, said Vilmar, if a pastor is seriously interested in the various needs of his individual members, it is absolutely necessary that private confession and the seal of the confessional be reinstated.⁸

To illustrate his insistence of the necessity of private confession and Absolution, Vilmar recounted the example of a noble lady who, realizing the necessity of seeking Holy Absolution, went to one of the pastors in her village, a man of the "Supernaturalist" school. He told her that she should be satisfied with the "admonition" (Vernahnung) that is the custom according to which the pastor delivered an address before the celebration of the Sacrament and then had the verger write down the names of those who wished to receive Holy Communion as they left. This act did not even include a public confession of sins, let alone an Absolution. The woman was little comforted by this counsel, so she went to the second pastor in the village, who was a Rationalist and a Kantian. He informed her, "We Protestants have no forgiveness of sins and Absolution. Absolution is 'Catholic.'" Vilmar decried the fact that because of pastors such as these two, even the most well-informed Roman Catholics could say that Lutherans have no Absolution, and then, of course, they pointed to this

⁷A. F. C. Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), p. 157. Dr. C. F. W. Walther insists upon the same thing in his Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1906), pp. 155ff.

⁸Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 155.

as an indication that the Lutheran ministry lacks a priestly quality.⁹

The doctrine of the Office of the Keys in the Lutheran Church, Vilmar said, is, of course, much more significant and all-inclusive than it is in the Roman Catholic Church, since Roman Catholics teach that Absolution forgives sins only before the Church and not before God.¹⁰ But in the Lutheran Church, Holy Absolution is a mandate from God, and the forgiveness of sins proclaimed in the Office of the Keys is a voice from heaven, through which sins are forgiven in time and in eternity. However, private Absolution is absolutely necessary (schlechterdings notwendig) because such forgiveness of sins cannot be spoken in a general Absolution, for it cannot then be appropriated. If it is a general Absolution, it is conditional, and it is left up to the person himself to appropriate it.¹¹

The people should, of course, be instructed to confess individual sins, but it must be remembered that a confession of all individual sins is not necessary for forgiveness of sins and salvation.¹² Nor should anyone be forced to confess his sins or receive Holy Communion at any

⁹A. F. C. Vilmar, "Confessionelle Friedensstellung nach Recht und Wahrheit," Kirche und Welt, oder die Aufgaben des geistlichen Amtes in unsrer Zeit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), I, 74.

¹⁰Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, op. cit., p. 115. Many Roman Catholics would disagree with this premise. Cf. Joseph Fohle and Arthur Preuss, The Sacraments (St. Louis: Herder, 1933), III, 15f; Ludwig Ott, Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, translated by Patrick Lynch (St. Louis: Herders, 1954), 415-16; "Absolution," The Catholic Encyclopedia, I (New York: Appleton, 1907), 63.

¹¹Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 115.

¹²Ibid., p. 115.

specific time (such as once a year), lest someone unworthy be forced to receive a Sacrament.¹³

Finally, he says, a distinction must be made between private confession and auricular confession, in which forgiveness of sins depends upon a more or less imperfect memory of individual sins, as well as an imperfect recognition of sins.¹⁴ A real sincere confession that one is truly a sinner is the really necessary thing. In most cases this is even better than seeking out some individual sins, while other sins are forgotten. For by a constant remembering of individual sins one might involuntarily get the idea that sinfulness consists of an aggregate of individual acts, whereas sin must be recognized as a condition.¹⁵

Holy Absolution is "Exhibitive"

Besides the statements in the Lutheran Symbols, Vilmar pointed out, the Hessian Church Order has a form of Absolution which is explicitly "exhibitive," whereas most other Church Orders have only declarative forms.¹⁶ So one must insist with the greatest earnestness that Holy Absolution has the power actually to take away eternal death and give back eternal life. Holy Absolution is an "exhibitive" and absolute act of the

¹³Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁴One could well ask whether there is any essential difference between "auricular" and "private" confession. Vilmar is obviously trying to make some sort of distinction between Roman Catholic and Evangelical private confession.

¹⁵Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 116.

¹⁶A. F. C. Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagshandlung, 1860), p. 261.

grace of God. The forgiveness of sins in Holy Absolution that is sought here in this life on earth is taken along into the life between death and the resurrection and also into the life hereafter.¹⁷

Holy Absolution is an act accomplished in God's stead which gives actual forgiveness of sins and removes not only temporal, but also eternal punishment, in full measure and without any doubt, as God granted it through Christ.¹⁸

When forgiveness of sins is pronounced then it must not be understood only as an announcement of (enuntiativ) forgiveness of sins, which would be nothing more than a vocatio, but Holy Absolution bespeaks an entirely different, much more advanced stage of Christian life--repentance. And the reality of this stage must have another reality that corresponds to it, i. e., Holy Absolution must be "exhibitive." It must really impart the forgiveness of sins and be appropriated to a person without conditions.¹⁹

The Office of the Keys Given to Pastors

Vilmar was very much opposed to the theory that the Office of the Keys was given to the whole Church in the sense that it can be practiced by anyone and everyone. There are, of course, a few exceptions that may be granted in extreme emergencies where a layman may be permitted to absolve, but, Vilmar pointed out, the exception does not make the rule.²⁰

¹⁷A. F. C. Vilmar, Praktische Erklahrung des Neuen Testaments (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1879), I, 129-30.

¹⁸Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 122.

¹⁹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 230.

²⁰Supra, p. 46.

He points out that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession explicitly says:

Nam et nos confessionem retinemus praecipue propter absolutionem, quae est verbum Dei quod de singulis auctoritate divina pronuntiat potestas clavium. Quare impium esset ex ecclesia privatam absolutionem tollere. (Apology, XII, 99-100)

And later it says:

Itaque ministri in ecclesia habent mandatum remittendi peccata, non habent mandatum cognoscendi occulta peccata. (Apology, XII, 105)

So it is the bearers of the ministerial office who are representatives of Christ as direct successors of the apostles, to whom the office of forgiving sins is transmitted (as it was given to the apostles) with the same power that Christ had and that He gave to His apostles.²¹

It is true, said Vilmar, that forgiveness of sins belongs to God alone and that the man who in his own person wants to usurp the authority to forgive sins by himself blasphemes God. Hence, he says, Absolution cannot belong to the whole Church, for if it belongs to the whole Church (and is not only meant for the whole Church), i. e., if it proceeds from the Church and is carried out by the Church, then it must follow that the power of Holy Absolution belongs in and for itself to each individual in the Church and can be used by each member for each member. But the individual Christian is nowhere given the power to forgive another's sins (for that would be Anabaptist insanity); then the forgiveness of sins would be reduced to "brotherly admonition" as in the Reformed Church.²² Rather Holy Absolution is administered through the office of the

²¹Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, p. 66.

²²Vilmar, Praktische Erklserung, I, 130.

clergy in the Church by virtue of the command of Christ.²³

Holy Absolution cannot belong to the whole Church and only be carried out in her name by the clergy. This theory would lead to a mere "enunclated" Absolution, or even worse, to the idea that the Church forgives her own sins. This is a contradiction in itself, just as when one says that forgiveness of sins is a matter between himself and Christ, and he does not need a pastor. These ideas go back to a disbelief in the direct working and personal presence and activity of Christ and of the Holy Ghost in a real world. Therefore, whoever permits Holy Absolution to be dispensed with has fallen from the position of the Lutheran Symbols and the Lutheran Church.²⁴

Holy Absolution is a power which Christ Himself gave to His apostles (Matthew 16:19 and 18:18--the promise, and John 20:22-23--the actual imparting). This is one of their functions as shepherds. The theory that this function is to be practiced by the whole Church is absolutely false. On the basis of this false idea, the Reformed Church has done away with Holy Absolution and has changed it into a mere "conversation between brethren." But repentance is not only an inner act, but a verbalization and acknowledgement of sin, and to this verbalization belongs Holy Absolution, i. e., the verbalization of the forgiveness of sins. Whoever thinks that he can both confess sins and receive Holy

²³Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 122.

²⁴Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 230. The Symbols, however, say, "Huc pertinent sententiae Christi, quae testantur claves ecclesiae datas esse, non tantum certis personis: 'Ubiunque erant duo vel tres congregavit in nomine meo,' etc." (Tractatus, 68). Cf. also Smalcald Articles, Part III, VII, 1; and Augsburg Confession, XII, 2.

Absolution in silence between Himself and Christ lives in that vague distorted concept of an invisible Church, if he knows of any Church at all, and reduces the Church to individuals who put themselves into some kind of an arbitrary relations to Christ.²⁵

The theory that connects private Absolution with seeking advice from one's neighbor (as it appears in the Marburg Articles) was deliberately omitted from the Augsburg Confession and explicitly rejected in the Apology, since Holy Absolution as well as hearing private confession belong to the ministerium ecclesiasticum, and seeking advice from one's neighbor belongs not to the Church proper but to private Christian life.²⁶

Finally, Vilmar said that pastors have been entrusted with the Office of the Keys, through which the Lord Christ gave His servants the power to bind and loose sins, and on the basis of the Hessian Church Order of 1566, they carry out this office, so that they retain the sins of the unrepentant and unbelieving, but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by His command and by virtue of His word, when He said, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained," as called and ordained servants of the Church of Jesus Christ, they forgive the sins of the believers, so that they are richly and completely forgiven, as Christ Jesus earned through His suffering and death, and commanded that this Gospel be spread throughout all the world.²⁷

²⁵Vilmar, Doctrinik, II, 229.

²⁶Vilmar, Die Augsburgische Confession, p. 113. The article from the Marburg Articles referred to reads: "Die Beicht oder Ratsuchung bei seinem Pfarrer oder naechsten wohl ungeszwungen und frei sein soll. . . ." "Marburger Gespraech und Marburger Artikel," D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Herman Boehlau Nachfolger, 1910), XXX. III, 166.

²⁷Wilhelm Hopf, August Vilmar: Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), II, 454-55.

The Seal of the Confessional

Vilmar greatly deplored the fact that in the Lutheran Church at his time an appreciation for the seal of the confessional was almost completely lacking and that therefore the people had little confidence in the clergy as discreet confessors.²⁸

Already at the end of the eighteenth century the seal of the confessional was abused in an inexcusable manner. The Rationalists violated it as servants of the state or as policemen in black uniforms. If members are once more to put their trust in the clergy, Vilmar insisted, then such practices must absolutely be stopped. But there is another practice which tends to degrade the seal of the confessional, namely, the pietistic inclination of many pastors to lay bare the experiences of their own souls, as well as the experiences of others. For the good of his own soul, Vilmar said, the pastor must make it a law to be as quiet as the grave about that which has been confided to him.²⁹

A pastor must never reveal:

1. what is dealt with in the confessional proper,
2. anything else that is designated by the pastor or by the penitent as a secret,
3. any dealings between a pastor and a prisoner,
4. anything that is apparently said in despair, from terrors of conscience, either in tristitia Dei or in tristitia mundi (e. g., incest, arson, murder, etc.),
5. anything revealed to the pastor in articulo mortis.³⁰

²⁸Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 157.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 155-56.

³⁰Ibid., p. 156.

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Because of the particular degeneration that had befallen the Sacrament of Holy Absolution at Vilmar's time through the influence of the Reformed Church, Vilmar fought particularly hard to reinstate this important aspect of the Church's life into its proper place once more. Once again he emphasized the "exhibitive" and sacramental nature of this act, which was commanded by God and therefore dare not be ignored. To some it might seem that Vilmar sometimes overstated his case, but again one must keep in mind the deplorable circumstances in which he was working and the terrific opposition that he encountered in trying to keep the Church of Hesse Lutheran.

CHAPTER IX

HOLY ORDERS AND THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDINATION

The Ministry

The Lutheran Symbols, said Vilmar, are very explicit concerning the doctrine of the Holy Ministry. Article V of the Augsburg Confession, for example, teaches that God instituted the office of the ministry and bound to it the faith and salvation of His people, i. e., the continuation of the Church, so that the Christian community is built on and preserved through the office of the ministry.¹ And Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession states that the right publicly to teach and administer the Sacraments is bound to being rightly called. And if anyone tries to imagine that "rightly called" refers to a call from a congregation, he has only to look at the common usage of the term in the sixteenth century. It meant that bishops could be "called" only by bishops, and that thus the holy office continues from person to person. Furthermore, the Variata added a phrase to Article XIV to clarify the meaning of rite vocatus: sicut et Paulus praecipit Tito, ut in civitatibus presbyteros constituat. It is very unfortunate, Vilmar said, that this phrase was not included already in the Invariata, so that the possibility of all the modern theories about the office of the ministry could be stamped out.²

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Quetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 275.

²Ibid., II, 276.

(He pointed this same fact out in his Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt.)³

Furthermore, Article XIV of the Apology calls the holy ministry (ordo) a Sacrament, although it cannot be equated with Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, said Vilmar, Holy Orders may be called a "sacramental action." Holy Orders are not to be looked upon, however, as a Levitical propitiatory priesthood.⁴ (Vilmar also pointed out this designation in Article XIII of the Apology in his Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt.)⁵

Faith and salvation then are bound up with the presence of the ministerial office in the Church. The lay congregation does not have and does not give the means of salvation. It only receives them.⁶

The basic questions behind the doctrine of the Holy Ministry, as well as behind the doctrines of the Sacraments and the Church, are, "Is the Holy Ghost really, personally present among us? Is Christ really, personally, bodily present among us? Or is it only acts and powers of the Holy Ghost which are released by Him and which we have, although He is far removed? Is it left up to men themselves to help themselves by to help themselves by means of these powers as best they can?" No, said Vilmar, the functions of the holy ministry must be recognized as functions of Christ Himself.⁷ The ministry is from Christ, according to Article XIV

³A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Lehre vom Geistlichen Amt, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Piderit (Marburg und Leipzig: N. G. Elwert'sche Universitaets-Buchhandlung, 1870), p. 75.

⁴Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 277.

⁵Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, p. 72.

⁶Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 275.

⁷Ibid., II, 281.

of the Apology (Habent episcopi verbum . . . quod acceperunt a Christo.)⁸

The Church does not even exist unless there are persons through whom the gift of salvation is imparted. And this imparting through persons precedes the existence of the Church as a congregation.⁹

This office of the ministry was instituted by Christ through the apostles, especially St. Peter, and the office of the bishop (both episkopoi and presbyteroi) directly succeeds the apostolate. The office mattheusian is transmitted to the bishops, and this office is to be continued through them.¹⁰ Therefore, the apostolate is the irremovable foundation of the Church, i. e., the apostolate as such is not continued or renewed.¹¹ The Roman Catholic Church errs in the doctrine of the Church not when she insists on the primacy of St. Peter--for the primacy of St. Peter is irrefutable--nor when she says that he was the first Bishop of Rome--for this is corroborated by good historic tradition--but she errs when she insists on the succession of the Roman bishops in the apostolate. This must be denied. The apostolate includes the offices of a bishop, but the episcopacy does not include the apostolate.¹² The propagation of the office goes from person to person. But the office of a bishop did not develop out of the apostolate, but under the apostolate.¹³

⁸Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, p. 69.

⁹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 272.

¹⁰Ibid., II, 274.

¹¹Ibid., II, 272.

¹²Ibid., II, 195-96.

¹³Ibid., II, 274.

Bishops then have the authority from Christ to preach publicly and administer the Sacraments, and also to guard and preserve Christian doctrine.¹⁴ Furthermore, Christ is the Judge over the Church and over the whole world in the office of the ministry, and according to St. Matthew 16 and 25, the masses will be judged according to their relationship to the bearers of this office.¹⁵

One theory that Vilmar was particularly opposed to was the idea that the office of the ministry comes from the congregation. He said that this theory was contrary to both Scripture and tradition and became popular at the beginning of the eighteenth century, at the same time that there arose the nonsensical theories that the Church is a mob (Haufen) that had to be established in a certain logical order out of an enthusiastic chaos by mere human reason, and that the Church is an invisible group of people who already have within the group the Word and Sacraments, and that the means of grace proceed from this group; and about the same time the even more marvelous theory arose that each one was permitted to do what the whole Church, all of the people, could do; however, no one was allowed to do it without the permission of the group lest chaos result. The exponents of these theories have seldom taken the pains to try to establish them from Scripture and have never established them on the basis of the Lutheran Symbols.

There are some, said Vilmar, who try to appeal to I Peter 2:9, to prove that the ministry comes from the congregation. But they forget that

¹⁴Ibid., II, 274.

¹⁵Ibid., II, 322.

¹⁶Ibid., II, 278-79.

this verse is a quotation which comes from Exodus 19:6, in the Old Testament, where a divinely established order of priests existed, and that when one of these "royal priests" and his cohorts endeavored to usurp the office of the priesthood, the earth opened up and swallowed them. (Numbers 16).¹⁷

These same people also argue that the ministry is derived from the "royal priesthood" for the sake of decency and order. But if disorder is possible in the "royal priesthood" that has to be corrected by human order, then disorder comes from God and order comes from man. Furthermore, if the ministry comes from the congregation, then it also comes from the mali et hypocritae, for they are mixed into the Church.¹⁸

If one looks upon the ministry as coming from the congregation, then one must consider the Word and Sacraments personal entities which are able to gather the Church. But the Word and Sacraments without persons to administer them can gather the Church as little as the Holy Scriptures qua book can gather the Church.¹⁹

The congregation must not be allowed to think of the office of the ministry as somehow her power and a command to her. Rather she knows that the one who bears the office has the right and the power to forgive sins, as the doctrine of the ministry teaches, i. e., that it is from God and cannot be communicated by the congregation.²⁰

The relationship between presbyters and bishops and their congregations

¹⁷Ibid., II, 279.

¹⁸Ibid., II, 279.

¹⁹Ibid., II, 279.

²⁰A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik, dritte Auflage (Marburg: S. G. Liesching, 1864), p. 95.

was established by the apostles and was unchanged in post-apostolic times, i. e., that teaching, administration of the Sacraments, and discipline were not the possession of the congregation but of the clergy.²¹

Furthermore, the differentiation between bishops and presbyters (although it is not of divine origin²²) comes from about the year 150 A. D. This is historically undeniable.²³

Then in Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession the term "power of the keys" is used as a synonym for "power of the bishops" when it says, "[Nostris] sentiunt potestatem clavium seu potestatem episcoporum, iuxta Evangelium . . . administrandi sacramenta." (par. 5) So the office of the keys belongs not to the congregation but to the clergy. And the Symbols say later, "Evangelium tribuit his, qui . . . sive Presbyteri sive Episcopi."²⁴

Holy Ordination

Vilmar was very insistent upon the fact that it is through the laying on of hands that the office of the ministry is transferred from person to

²¹Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, pp. 51-52.

²²Ibid., pp. 40-42.

²³Ibid., p. 53.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 66-67. The last quote is from Melancthon's Tractatus, 60-61. The two parts of the quote separated by the three dots are from two different paragraphs. They read: Evangelium enim tribuit his, qui praesunt ecclesiis, mandatum docendi evangelium, remittendi peccata, administrandi sacramenta, praeterea jurisdictionem, videlicet mandatum excommunicandi eos, quorum nota sunt crimina, et resipiscentes rursus absolvendi. Ac omnium confessione, etiam adversariorum liquet hanc potestatem jure divino communem esse omnibus, qui praesunt ecclesiis, sive vocentur pastores, sive presbyteri, sive episcopi.

person. This is the act which conveys the mandate of Christ and imparts the Holy Ghost in all reality.²⁵

Holy Ordination is not a ceremony without content as the unbelievers and ignorant assert; anyone who ordains believing this is nothing but a hypocrite.²⁶ One must insist most positively that Holy Ordination imparts special gifts which cannot be obtained in any other way. In Holy Ordination one receives powers that no other office has, but it also carries a responsibility such as rests on no one else. Holy Ordination separates one from the world. Therefore, one has to prepare earnestly for Holy Ordination, especially through prayer.

But one need not take offense if the ordinand is in some way not completely in the faith. This error of the Donatists, who did not properly separate the person from the office, must be completely rejected. The efficacy of the ministry does not depend upon the personal virtue of a man but upon the office itself. (The formula for Holy Ordination, said Vilmar, in the Hessian Church, expresses itself very clearly on the essence of ordination, thanks be to God, even in these barren times.)

The laying on of hands and prayer, however, do belong to the essence of Holy Ordination. After receiving it, even the coarse and stupid man experiences the effect. He feels that something special has happened to him and that through Holy Ordination he has become a different person. It is then with Holy Ordination and not with the reception of a benefice that the rights and duties of the Office of the ministry begin.²⁷

²⁵Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 277.

²⁶A. F. C. Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Gutersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), p. 134.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 38-39.

This power, received in Holy Ordination, can, as any power, be received only from those who possess it. Therefore only a bishop (or pastor) can ordain.²⁸ This goes without saying. Ordination by one who is not ordained is without question invalid and void. The fact that once in the Reformed District of Oberhessen a Doctor of Theology (H. O. Dusing) was considered qualified to ordain even though he was a layman, is, said Vilmar, one of the grossest abuses that has ever happened in the history of the Christian Church.²⁹

However, in spite of the fact that Holy Ordination by one who has been ordained is necessary for the office of the ministry, Vilmar noted that Holy Ordination, although it is a Sacrament, is not equal to Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist because these Sacraments impart salvation.³⁰

That the above is the doctrine of Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Symbols, and the whole history of the Church, Vilmar holds, is past doubt. The laying on of hands without an effect is unknown to the Holy Spirit and to the Holy Scriptures.³¹

In the New Testament when hands are laid on someone, the Holy Ghost or the gifts of the Holy Ghost are always imparted:

1. Acts 13:3-4. Hands were laid on Paul and Barnabas in sending them out by the Holy Ghost.
2. Acts 8:17. Peter and John laid hands on the baptized and they received the Holy Ghost.

²⁸Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 277.

²⁹Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 134.

³⁰Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsachen, p. 60.

³¹Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, p. 25.

3. Acts 8:18-19. Simon wanted to receive the power of the laying on of hands.
4. Acts 9:12-17. Ananias laid hands on St. Paul that he might see and receive the Holy Ghost.
5. Acts 19:6. St. Paul laid hands on the Ephesians and they received the Holy Ghost.
6. Acts 28:8. St. Paul healed Publius by the laying on of hands.
7. Heb. 6:2. The laying on of hands is called a basic doctrine.
8. Luke 4:40. Christ laid on hands and healed.
9. Luke 13:13. Christ laid hands on a diseased woman and healed her.
10. Matt. 9:18 (Mark 5:23). Jairus said, "Come and lay hands on her and she will be healed."
11. Mark 7:32. Christ laid hands on a dumb man and healed him.
12. Mark 8:23. Christ laid hands on a blind man and healed him.
13. Mark 10:16. Christ laid hands on children and blessed them.
14. Mark 16:18. "You will lay hands on the sick and heal them."
15. Mark 6:5. Christ laid hands on the sick and healed them.³²
16. I Tim. 4:14. "Neglect not the gift which is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."
17. II Tim. 1:6. "Stir up the gift which is in thee by the laying on of my hands."³³
18. I Tim. 5:22. "Lay hands suddenly on no man."³⁴

(St. Paul here infers that the laying on of hands is necessarily bound to the bestowing of offices in the Church.³⁵ This passage shows that

³²Ibid., p. 22.

³³Ibid., p. 27.

³⁴Ibid., p. 29.

³⁵A. F. C. Vilmar, Praktische Erklahrung des Neuen Testaments (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1879), II, 32.

Timothy, not an apostle, possessed the power to lay on hands, i. e., to bestow gifts of grace for the office of the ministry upon a particular member of the congregation.³⁶⁾

Vilmar stated that if the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands was not continued but rather died out with those upon whom Timothy laid hands, then the whole dependence of the Church on the New Testament is nothing more than a huge farce. For who gives one the right to continue the doctrines of the New Testament but to cut off the gifts of the Holy Ghost in this continuation, when both parallel each other so closely in the New Testament?³⁷⁾

The stability of the office of the ministry is established by the continuation of that office. Through the charismatic gifts Timothy is to continue the evangelical office of the pastor and thus also continue the Gospel.³⁸⁾

If the laying on of hands, Vilmar said, does not belong to the Church and does not impart something then one is denying 1800 years of Church History, not to mention the Old and New Testaments. If the laying on of hands in the Old Testament (Exodus 29, Leviticus 8, etc.) or in the New Testament (passages cited above) was an empty ceremony, if these things

³⁶⁾ Ibid., II, 391. An article in Lehre und Wehre, by Prof. Friedrich August Cramer, entitled "Ueber die sacramentale Auffassung der Confirmation," VIII (1862), 114, took issue with Vilmar's concept of the laying on of hands and said that just because the apostolic Church laid on hands at ordination (although on the preceding page of this same article the author stated that the New Testament nowhere reports the laying on of hands at the choosing [Wahl] of a presbyter), it does not mean that the Church had to do this throughout history.

³⁷⁾ Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsachen, p. 62.

³⁸⁾ Vilmar, Praktische Erklarung, II, 399.

are only figures of speech and not a real imparting of the Holy Ghost, but only a pious practice, through which something good is "waved at" someone, then the whole of Scripture is one long figure of speech, a book full of deceptions and tricks.³⁹

Furthermore, Vilmar pointed out that the Lutheran Symbols (Apology, XIV) explicitly state that it is the wish of the reformers to retain the canonical form of Church government.⁴⁰ And when Melancthon's *Tractatus*

³⁹Vilmar, *Die Theologie der Thatsachen*, pp. 60-61. *Lehre und Wehre*, in an unsigned article entitled "Vilmar's Lehre von Amt und Kirche," VI (1860), 18-23, said that if Vilmar is correct in saying that a pastor can impart the Holy Ghost only when he has the Holy Ghost himself, then every pastor must be a true Christian and the whole history of the Church depends on this fact. This, however, is the Donatist heresy, which Vilmar explicitly rejected (Cf. *supra*, pp. 34, 57, and 89). *Lehre und Wehre* furthermore said that Vilmar believed that pastor himself imparts the Holy Ghost not from the Word and Sacraments but from himself and that souls receive life and salvation from him and only he can give them because he is in Christ's stead as a minister of the Word and Sacraments (VI, 20). Vilmar certainly did not believe that the ministry and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the ministry are in any way separated from God. The pastor imparts the Holy Spirit only because he has been given the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Holy Ordination (I Tim. 4:14). That this gift was received from the apostles (I Tim. 1:6) and continued in the laying on of hands by the presbytery (I Tim. 4:14 and I Tim. 5:22) is undeniably a doctrine of Holy Scripture. The ministry comes from Christ (Cf. *supra*, p. 84). That the imparting of the gifts of the Holy Spirit occurs outside of the Word and the Sacraments according to Vilmar is ridiculous, since both the Lutheran Symbols and Vilmar agree both Holy Order (Cf. *supra*, p. 84) and Holy Ordination (Cf. *supra*, p. 90) are Sacraments. *Lehre und Wehre* also accused Vilmar of not taking I Tim. 4:14 into consideration along with II Tim. 1:6 and thus laying aside an essential part of apostolic example (VIII, 114). Vilmar cites both passages together as proving the same thing (Cf. *supra*, p. 23). Finally *Lehre und Wehre* said that Vilmar's doctrine of the ministry and of Holy Ordination was sheer Romanism and not in accordance with the Augsburg Confession (VI, 20). Vilmar, of course, explicitly rejected those concepts concerning the ministry and Holy Ordination in which the Roman Catholic Church errs (Cf. *supra*, pp. 84 and 89). He insists that his concept of the ministry and Holy Ordination is the teaching of the Lutheran Symbols (Cf. *supra*, pp. 84, 85, and 88).

⁴⁰Vilmar, *Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt*, pp. 69ff.

states that it was the right of the people to choose bishops and that ordination was nothing more than an approval of this choice, he shows that he was not sufficiently clear on this matter, since this theory was censured already in the third century and from the fourth century on was forbidden on the ground that it was antisciptural. This was an influence from the secular order, but from the standpoint of Church order it is a historical and legal error. And this does not agree with Apology, Article XIV, which insists that the reformers want to retain the canonical form of government.⁴¹

Furthermore, the section in the Tractatus which quotes I Peter 2:9, does not prove that the ministry comes from the people but rather emphasizes the necessity of the Church's having a ministry ordained by pastors because the bishops refused to do so. But it does not say that the placement and ordination of pastors stems from the lay congregation as over against the clergy. The antithesis is not between lay

⁴¹Ibid., p. 91. Here Vilmar's understanding of the Tractatus could be questioned. Tractatus, 70, says that this right is a gift properly given to the Church, which no human authority can take from the Church. It should be noted, however, that this is given to the "Church," not to the "laity." As far as Vilmar's understanding of the phrase "nothing else than such a ratification" is concerned, Dr. Arthur Carl Pienkorn, in an article entitled "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Symbols and Liturgy of the Church of the Augsburg Confession" (Una Santa, XII, [St. Michael's Day, 1955], 9) writes: That the Church clearly has the right to elect and ordain ministers "a very common custom of the Church testifies. For formerly the people elected pastors and bishops. Then came a bishop, either of that church or a neighboring one, who confirmed the one elected by the laying on of hands; and ordination was nothing else than such a ratification. Afterwards new ceremonies were added, many of which Dionysius describes." It should be noted that the "custom" here referred to was not Ordination, but the post-apostolic mode of electing the pastor or bishop and of ordaining or consecrating him. The first antithesis is between an election of the pastor by the people of the parish or diocese an arbitrary selection of the pastor by higher authority; the second antithesis is between the simple rite of Ordination or Consecration by the Laying-on of Hands on the elaborate ceremonies into which Ordinations and Consecrations have developed in the late Middle Ages.

congregation and clergy but between the Church (including pastors) and bishops.⁴²

Holy Ordination and Practical Theology

The formula for administering Holy Ordination which Vilmar favored was the traditional form that had been used in the Church of Kurhessen. This form, he said, originates with Luther and is a masterpiece which ought not be discarded.⁴³ It clearly shows what the essence of Holy Ordination is.⁴⁴

As for the place, Holy Ordination should take place before the altar, although whether or not the congregation is present is immaterial, since this is primarily an act between the ordinator and the ordinand.⁴⁵

As for the time of Holy Ordination, Vilmar noted that the Roman Catholic Church ordains on Ember Saturdays. These four great seasons were designated for penitence and prayer, to pray God to give His Church worthy priests. This is, said Vilmar, a fine example of the catholicity of the Church: where priests all over the world are ordained, and the Church all over the world prays for them. In our Church, the situation, he said, is all broken up, mangled, and individualized. We need to adopt such a practice as the Roman Catholic Church has.⁴⁶

⁴²Vilmar, Die Lehre vom geistlichen Amt, pp. 90-91.

⁴³Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 134.

⁴⁴Supra, p. 89.

⁴⁵Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 134. This practice is not in keeping with the historical Church.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 134.

The bestowing of ordination as such, said Vilmar, belongs for the most part in the realm of Church law. On this basis, ordination must be performed only by the superintendent of the clergymen in question, both as far as recognition and the actual performing of the act are concerned. No mixed lay and clerical consistory and especially no secular authority is to become involved in this. The responsibility for ordinations must rest personally with the head of the church body. Therefore, even though each pastor has the spiritual power (geistliche Macht) to ordain, he may not actually do because he is not in a position to assume the responsibilities connected with it. The examination of the ordinand then must be authorized only by the one who is in a position to oversee the whole church body and has the spiritual position to guide and guard the ordinand, even though the actual examination of the ordinand's knowledge be performed by someone else.⁴⁷

Another theory to which Vilmar was opposed is the idea that only one who receives a call into a parish is to be ordained. Ordination, he said, customarily demands the so-called titulus, i. e., a sufficient cause to ordain a candidate. In just what this titulus consists in the Lutheran Church is often very unclear, and even in recent years the most absurd assertions have been made in this respect. The designation originated in the medieval Church where a guarantee was demanded that no penniless beggars be ordained either to put the holy office to shame or to bring upon the domus emeritorum a burden too heavy to carry. The titulus is of three kinds: 1. the titulus mensae (that the bishop will care for the support of the ordinand), 2. the titulus patrimonii (that the ordinand has

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 131-32.

sufficient means to live on), or 3. the titulus beneficii (that he has a place to maintain himself). Therefore, it follows that not every candidate that seeks ordination should be ordained, but that only those be ordained for whom the Church can provide. An ordained candidate cannot abandon himself to poverty but must be able to support himself. It follows then also that those candidates who teach in the public schools should be ordained because they have a titulus mensae. Furthermore, he said, an ordained man teaches differently from an unordained man. But it is very absurd that the idea persists in the Lutheran Church that one can be ordained only when he receives a church, as though ordination were determined only by the titulus beneficii. The Roman Catholic Church ordains immediately as soon as she can use a candidate in a position in that Church--and rightly so. The Lutheran Church must do this too.⁴³

* * * * *

Again not everyone will agree with everything that Vilmar had to say about Holy Orders and the Sacrament of Holy Ordination, but considering the low point to which the doctrines of the ministry and Holy Ordination had sunk in the Lutheran Church and the insidious influence that Reformed teaching had had on these two areas of doctrine, Vilmar did the Church a great service in pointing out once more some of the Scriptural and Confessional principles that govern Holy Orders and Holy Ordination.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 132-33.

CHAPTER X

HOLY CONFIRMATION

What Holy Confirmation Is

Holy Confirmation is the first of the actions of the Church discussed so far in this paper which Vilmar did not insist was a Sacrament, although he did use the terms here at times. This, of course, is in keeping with the Lutheran Symbols.

Nevertheless, Vilmar said, Holy Confirmation is not an empty ceremony. It has its Scriptural basis in Acts 8:14-17 and 19:6. It is the laying on of hands for the imparting of the Holy Spirit with prayer. Holy Confirmation follows Holy Baptism to strengthen the life germ implanted in Holy Baptism (to use an apostolic picture: the watering which follows the planting). Holy Confirmation is not only the external confirmation of Baptism but particularly the imparting of a "charisma"; therefore, it can only be imparted to and received by those who are ready to use the grace imparted at Holy Baptism.¹ (Vilmar repeated this idea in his Praktische Erklarung des Neuen Testaments.²)

Confirmation, Vilmar said, has been looked upon in the Church then as the entrance into the militia Christi, the entrance into the ranks of mature Christians. The Lutheran Church in general, however, has handled no holy action so carelessly as Holy Confirmation, and this carelessness is a sign

¹A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Fiderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1874), II, 227.

²A. F. C. Vilmar, Praktische Erklarung des Neuen Testaments (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1879), II, 33-34.

that she has forgotten to far too great an extent the essence of the Church--the personal presence of the Holy Spirit. Only a few provincial churches have retained in their Church Orders the essence of Holy Confirmation in its Scriptural and traditional significance--above all others, the Church of Hesse.³

One cannot decry the fact enough, Vilmar remarked, that in so many evangelical territories dead Orthodoxy and Pietism and unbelief have become so strong that the reality of the imparting of the Holy Ghost with the laying on of hands has been forgotten, so that now Holy Confirmation in many churches is nothing more than a "fatherly exhortation," i. e., a talk by the pastor to the children who stand around the altar and have sentimentally handed out to them Bible verses and pious thoughts.⁴

Today, complained Vilmar, people no longer believe in a real imparting of the Holy Ghost, and therefore, they interpret Holy Confirmation as a renewal of the baptismal vow or (as in the Pomeranian Church Order of 1568) as a sign to the confirmands that they are really baptized, or as a vow by the confirmands. In general, too, the Evangelical Church has, by an undue emphasis on Holy Confirmation, degraded the meaning of Holy Baptism.⁵

Holy Confirmation is not a renewal of the baptismal vow. Holy Baptism needs no confirmation. It is true that Holy Confirmation involves in a sense a promise (but not a vow)--a promise to submit oneself to the obedience

³Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 227-28.

⁴A. F. C. Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsachen wider die Theologie der Rhetorik, dritte Auflage (Marburg: S. G. Lissching, 1864), p. 60.

⁵Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 228.

of the Church, which is nothing else than an expression of one's willingness to have the Holy Ghost imparted to him. Nor is Holy Confirmation an entrance into the adult world; rather it is an entrance into the militia Christi,⁶ for which gifts of the Holy Spirit are bestowed. But one should never consider this act the most important act in the life of a Christian, and give Holy Baptism and Holy Communion a secondary place. For this reason, all of the fanfare that is often associated with Holy Confirmation should be eliminated.⁷

Furthermore, in order to receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the confirmand must have a right will and not reject the Holy Ghost in order to benefit from this laying on of hands. But if it should happen that the pastor is an unbeliever, this does not invalidate the imparting of the Holy Ghost.⁸

The formula for bestowing Holy Confirmation in the Hessian Church Order of 1573, read thus: "Receive the Holy Ghost, defense and protection from all evil, strength and aid for all good from the merciful hand of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."⁹ (In 1657, a second form was added: "God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit give you His grace, defense and protection from evil, strength and aid for all good, for the sake of the precious merit (Verdienst) of our only Redeemer. Amen."¹⁰)

⁶Supra, p. 98.

⁷A. F. C. Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastortheologie (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), p. 130.

⁸Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 228.

⁹Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastortheologie, pp. 130-31.

¹⁰A. F. C. Vilmar, Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen (Marburg: N. G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1860), p. 256.

The question now arises, said Vilmar: is this formula, "Receive the Holy Spirit," etc., only an empty phrase or is it the sign of an actual fact that occurs at the moment that it is spoken? The "rhetoricians" do not hesitate for a moment. They say that it is an expression, a formula and nothing more; it is a wish, a nice thought, and the laying on of hands is nothing more than a ceremony, some sort of an involuntary movement of the hand, a sort of rhetorical gesture by which one points out the individual to whom he wishes his "X." In a word, the confirming pastor who lays on hands and imparts the Holy Ghost is considered nothing more than a rhetor. To Vilmar this was an abomination, not only because of what the Church Orders say, that they appeal to the "prophetic and apostolic Church," but also because the imparting of the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands is in Holy Scripture. Vilmar considered it godless to think that these are figures of speech and empty ceremonies because the Church knows, he said, that she has inherited through the generations the imparting of the Holy Ghost directly from the life of Christ in the Flesh and from the apostles, and because she knows and has experienced that those who are confirmed (and pastors who are ordained) really receive the Holy Ghost and that pastors really impart the Holy Ghost when they do it according to the orders of the Church.¹¹

¹¹Vilmar, Die Theologie der Thatsechen, pp. 57-58. An article in Lehre und Wehre, by Professor Friedrich August Graemer, entitled "Ueber die sacramentale Auffassung der Confirmation," VIII (1862), 110-16, took issue with Vilmar's concept of the rite of Holy Confirmation. The author said that Vilmar was wrong in saying that the laying on of hands in Holy Confirmation makes the confirmand a worthy guest at Holy Communion. (To the author's knowledge, Vilmar nowhere spoke of Holy Confirmation in terms of making anyone worthy.) Nor did Prof. Graemer agree that Holy Confirmation is based on Hebrews 6:2, Acts 8:14-17, or Acts 19:5-6. (It is true that

the rite of Holy Confirmation as the Church has it today does not go back in an unbroken line to the Book of Acts. Vilmar himself admitted that Holy Confirmation as such, according to the Lutheran Symbols, is a rite received from the Fathers (Cf. supra, p. 30). But Vilmar's basic argument is the fact that nowhere in the New Testament are hands ever laid on anyone without an imparting of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The laying on of hands is never an empty ceremony (Cf. supra, p. 90). Vilmar also reminded the Church that the laying on of hands, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, is a basic doctrine (Cf. supra, p. 90), regardless of whether or not the rite of Holy Confirmation which the Church has today continued in an unbroken succession. But Professor Craemer continued to argue that Confirmation is not a Sacrament, nor a sacramental character, nor a sacramental act. But Vilmar nowhere called Holy Confirmation anymore sacramental than was the laying on of hands in the New Testament. Professor Craemer also disagreed with Vilmar, whom he quoted as saying that one who is baptized receives the gifts of the Holy Ghost in Holy Baptism and that it is now the duty of the Church as an established organization to develop these gifts, to uncover the richness of baptismal grace and to keep away from the baptized all harmful influences--through the grace bestowed in Holy Confirmation. Whether one agrees or not with Craemer depends upon whether he considers the laying on of hands effectual and "exhibitive" or rhetorical. Prof. Craemer was obviously what Vilmar called a "rhetor." Craemer further asked: "Does it follow that since the apostles laid hands on the baptized in their time and performed a creative act (!), that now the Church should adapt this fact for herself and be sure that the laying on of hands by pastors is the same creative act?" Vilmar answered this question when he said that there is no Scriptural reason to believe that any of the charismata were taken away from the Church in post-Apostolic times. The reason that the Church has lost so many of these gifts, which are often given through the laying on of hands in the New Testament, is not that they were taken away but rather that the Church has become indifferent and has lost her faith in these gifts (Cf. supra, p. 24). Prof. Craemer further asserted that Vilmar should have read what Article XIII of the Apology has to say about Holy Confirmation. He did (Cf. supra, p. 30). And finally Prof. Craemer said that Vilmar's conception of Holy Confirmation shows that he was on the "road back to Rome." But Vilmar nowhere, to the author's knowledge, compared his concept of Holy Confirmation with that of the Sacrament of Holy Confirmation as understood in the Roman Catholic Church, nor did he appeal to any Roman Catholic sources as corroboration for his statements. Rather, he appealed to Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Symbols, and the Hessian Church Orders.

Holy Confirmation and Practical Theology

Holy Confirmation is, of course, to be preceded by a course of instruction. This is not a full scale instruction in religion, Vilmar emphasized; nor is it teaching a system of doctrine and practice, nor is it a course of introduction to Holy Scripture. Rather it is to be an instruction in the teaching on the Church, on the outpouring and reality of the Holy Ghost, on the three Sacraments, on the theology of prayer, and also instruction in the practice of prayer. Each course of instruction dare not be only teaching, but rather a fixing of the will to want to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The reality of the presence of the Holy Ghost and of Christ must be impressed upon the children--presented as a reality that cannot be doubted (especially the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist). In addition, the pastor should always prepare carefully for each lesson and begin and close each class with a prayer.¹²

First is to come instruction in the Liturgy, followed by instruction concerning the Sacraments (but not as though one were teaching mature pastors); then instruction in prayer. (The child must pray in the presence of the pastor so that he can see to how great an extent the child's thoughts have formed.) The Our Father and the Creed are to be prayed every morning and at fixed times for prayer. The Ten Commandments are to be prayed every Monday. And the children are to be instructed how to pray upon entering church (where most people today, said Vilmar, bow their heads without thinking) and upon leaving church, i. e., the Our Father. They are to be

¹²Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 127-28.

instructed in prayers at receiving Holy Communion, table prayers, evening prayers, collects for special prayer days, the common prayers of the Church, prayers at one's daily tasks, and in the confession used at Holy Absolution.¹³

In order for a child to receive confirmation instructions he must be able to fulfill the following requirements:

1. maturity in reading ability,
2. knowledge of the books of the Bible and ability to look up passages,
3. general knowledge of Bible history (Law and Gospel, life of Jesus),
4. ability to memorize the catechism,
5. ability to memorize Bible verses (minimum: 40-50),
6. ability to memorize original Lutheran hymns, at least the most important stanzas.¹⁴

Basically, said Vilmar, one's method of confirmation instruction depends upon whether one holds that Holy Confirmation is an act in which the confirmand receives something or whether he does something; or does the doing depend on the receiving or vice versa? i. e., can the child upon receiving the Holy Ghost be admitted to Holy Communion as a fruitful member of the Christian Church, or is he only taken into the fellowship of Christians on the basis of his vow? Without a doubt, in the Hessian Church, the former is the case.¹⁵

There has never been any universal agreement, noted Vilmar, on the

¹³Ibid., pp. 128-29.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 126.

age at which a child should be confirmed. In ancient times it was the opinion that prayer (Gebet) should begin at the end of the twelfth year and that Holy Confirmation should follow in the thirteenth since the natural development of the child's understanding ripens at about this age. It was also remembered that the Israelite children began to take part in the festivals at this age. This was the rule in the Hessian Church, he said, until 1726 (and still was in the Roman Catholic Church at his time). But from 1726 to 1772, the age of confirmation was set at fourteen; from 1772 to 1800 it was set at thirteen years and two months. After that it was again established at the age of fourteen. In opposition to this practice, Vilmar said, it ought to be noted that just about at the age of fourteen, girls are at a different stage in their development from boys. Therefore, the differences in methods of instruction often must be great. It is possible, however, to divide the sexes to solve this problem.¹⁶

(The churches of Hesse had the practice of keeping a baptismal and confirmation record book. Each page was divided into two columns: on one side was recorded the time of Baptism, and the other side was left blank so that there could be recorded in which year, month, and day the baptized child made confession of his faith before the church and by the laying on of hands was admitted with the other believers to the Holy Eucharist.¹⁷)

As far as the date of Confirmation is concerned, the Church Order directed that it should take place at Easter, Pentecost, and where

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 126-27.

¹⁷ Amilius Ludwig Richter, editor, "Hessische Kirchenordnung--1566," Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts (Weimar: Verlag des Landes- Industrie-comptoirs, 1846), II, 294.

necessary, at Christmas. After the children have been instructed, they are to be examined in the church before the pastor and elders. On the day of Confirmation they are to appear with their parents and sponsors at the church, where, after an address by the pastor and after a prayer by one of the sponsors concerning their examination, the children are commended to the congregation and confess their faith by answering the pastor's questions. Then follows the pastor's prayer and the laying on of hands. The rite is closed with Psalm 23 and a prayer. A second shorter form goes as follows: address to the congregation, examination and confession of faith, laying on of hands, and prayer. At the communion, several of the elders or the sponsors precede the children.¹⁸

* * * * *

Probably in Vilmar's conception of Holy Confirmation more than any other teaching, he would be faulted by many who call themselves Lutherans. Since the Lutheran Symbols have so little to say about Holy Confirmation, it is a subject which has largely been ignored in the Lutheran Church. It ought to be pointed out, however, that Vilmar's chief argument for his concept of Holy Confirmation is the fact that the laying on of hands was performed in the New Testament in order that baptized Christians might receive gifts of the Holy Ghost and the validity of this action was never abrogated. It would be very interesting to make a very thorough liturgico-historical analysis of Vilmar's position to reveal what defects there are in his assumption.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 295.

CHAPTER XI

THE OTHER "SACRAMENTAL ACTIONS"

About the remainder of the acts which Vilmar categorized as "sacramental actions" he had comparatively little to say. These included the pastor's blessing of Holy Matrimony, Holy Unction, and various other blessings. Most of these acts he discussed almost exclusively from a practical point of view rather than from a systematic or exegetical point of view.

Holy Matrimony

According to the Hessian Church Order of 1566, Christian marriage is the divinely ordained, lawful joining together of a man and a woman; they are joined together by God according to His Word and command in good conscience, mutually consenting to live with each other to the end of their natural lives in godliness, modesty, and righteousness; through good and evil times they will resolve to beget children and raise them to honor God and His Church and the congregation; they will resolve to avoid unchastity and live lives that show that God has given each to the other to help the other not only for this life but for eternal life.¹

On the basis of this directive in the Church Order, Vilmar noted that marriage as such is an institution that was established long before the Christian Church existed (not only among the Jews but also among the heathen). Therefore it was instituted by God according to the plan of

¹Aemilius Ludwig Richter, editor, "Hessische Kirchenordnung--1566," Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts (Weimar: Verlag des Landes-Industrie-Comptoirs, 1846), II, 297.

creation, not according to the plan of salvation. But Christian marriage is, of course, included in God's plan of salvation. So marriage for Christians has to be sanctified. By the pastor's blessing of a marriage then the whole married life in all respects is put into the service of salvation, so that a man and his wife are together for the purpose of leading each other and their family to the Lord and keeping them with Him. That is the general meaning of the marriage blessing. By this blessing marriage is made an institution for the propagation of salvation. A Christian family is thus founded on what the whole history of salvation is founded. Then too, by the blessing a marriage is declared forever binding. As far as that goes, he said, the ancient Church was correct when it called every unblessed marriage concubinage, and refusal to receive the blessing of the marriage was looked upon as falling away from the Church. Through this blessing, marriage receives a spiritual character, and only in this way does marriage become a type of the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22ff.) Without the blessing it is unthinkable that Christian marriage alone is a type of this relationship between Christ and the Church.²

This blessing, necessary for a truly Christian marriage Vilmar included in the "sacramental actions."³ But Holy Matrimony itself is not a Sacrament whereby communion with God and with Christ is made without means.⁴ Although Holy Matrimony receives sanction in the New Testament,

²A. F. C. Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1872), pp. 135-36.

³Ibid., pp. 136-37.

⁴A. F. C. Vilmar, Theologische Moral (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1871), II, 128.

it cannot on that basis be equated with the gifts of grace that specifically belong to Christ's realm.⁵

Nevertheless, even though Holy Matrimony itself is not a Sacrament equal to Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Holy Eucharist, it must be performed within the Church and according to both Church and state laws. For example, the Church Order said that clandestine marriages, without the knowledge and will of others, especially parents, in whose jurisdiction the children still are, or of guardians, can neither be praised nor justified because it is not in accordance with God's Word and not recognized by the empire; and because such a marriage has been begun in an evil and disorderly manner, the couple is justly to be punished according to the circumstances of the crime by both the government and the Church, in the same way as those who have premarital relations (die so vor dem Kirchgangk (!) sich heimlich beschlafen).⁶

On the basis of the Church Order Vilmar was very much opposed to civil weddings. The so-called civil marriage, he said, is nothing more than a retrogression to heathenism, which is slowly and laboriously taking over. As far as the Church is concerned, this is concubinage. Those who have only a civil marriage performed are not a Christian married couple. In recent times, he said, civil marriage has been highly favored--a radical departure from Church Order. From a political point of view, Vilmar said, civil weddings may be permitted to the sects, to apostates, and to the excommunicated. But as far as the Church is concerned, it is absolutely

⁵A. F. C. Vilmar, Dogmatik, herausgegeben von Dr. K. W. Fiderit (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsman, 1874), II, 225-26.

⁶Richter, Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts, II, 297.

to be abolished--both the general civil marriage and the obligatory civil marriage. Such civil marriages must be opposed with all the disciplinary means that the Church has at her disposal.⁷

Before one is married, said Vilmar, he must have a marriage examination. This practice was almost universal in the Lutheran Church and her Church Orders. Its purpose is to see to it that no one enters into marriage who does not have a knowledge of Lutheran teaching, i. e., who does not know the catechism. And the catechism should also be used extensively in the Christian home. It must be the irreplaceable basis for Christian home life, and the pastor must see to this.⁸ This is in keeping with the demands of the Church Order.⁹

The only marriages, however, which Vilmar forbade were those forbidden in the Old Testament Law: relations of consanguinity and affinity.¹⁰

Other than this, Vilmar had very little to say about Holy Matrimony. The primary consideration was that it take place within the Church and with the Church's blessing.

Holy Unction

Holy Unction, too, is included by Vilmar under the "sacramental actions."¹¹ But he carefully distinguished between Holy Unction and

⁷Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 136-37.

⁸Ibid., p. 137.

⁹Richter, Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16ten. Jahrhunderts, II, 297.

¹⁰Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 139.

¹¹Vilmar, Dogmatik, II, 225.

Extreme Unction. Extreme Unction, which certainly goes back to very early times, Vilmar said, is not based on demonstrable apostolic institution, since James 5:14-15 prescribes unction but not Extreme Unction. Holy Unction is to bring about the recovery of the sick, whereas Extreme Unction is an operation which imparts powers for this life (Priest, Prophet, King) and that is the way St. James presented it. To use Holy Unction as preparation for death at least contradicts Old Testament tradition, and there would have to be very explicit instructions to the contrary before Lutherans would find it wise to reinstate Extreme Unction instead of Holy Unction proper.

Other Blessings

In general, Vilmar defined any blessing as more than a proclamation (this was something for the rhetors); rather it is the separation of a particular object to a holy use, to an unchangeable purpose, to the service of God. Everything unspiritual and ungodly is rejected. The material world is thus brought under the rule of God by blessing and is sanctified to the service of God. We pray that God will sanctify the blessed objects, protect them, and keep them in His service. Under objects to be blessed Vilmar included explicitly churches, burial plots, and corpses.¹²

In addition, Vilmar included the churching of women as an important "sacramental action."¹³ Even as late as the early nineteenth century, Vilmar said, it was considered very important that no mother of a newly

¹²Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, pp. 140-41. This concept seems to be very similar to what is commonly known as the "sacramental."

¹³Supra, p. 32.

born child return to public society before being churched. Furthermore, it was the rule that the woman would go to the altar and offer a gift. The basis for this custom lies in the Old Testament purification of women (Leviticus 12:4). This bodily uncleanness was transferred in the New Testament to a spiritual uncleanness, an opinion held by the Nazarites (The Eastern (orientalisch) Church holds as did the Nazarites that a child should not be baptized before the eighth day, and the mother, even if she dies in the meantime, should not receive Holy Communion before being churched.) And for a long time it was the custom not to bury an unchurched woman in the churchyard but outside it or at least along the wall and then to surround the grave with a fence. Luther condemned this practice vehemently, but it continued, e. g., in Marburg, until the end of the seventeenth century. Churching, however, is not to be considered a supplement to Baptism, but a prayer of thanks and supplication by the congregation for the mother.¹⁴

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In spite of the fact that Vilmar had so little to say about the lesser "sacramental actions" one can see that the same principle is involved here as is basic to the other "sacramental actions," i. e., that whatever acts the pastor performs as a representative of his office and, therefore, of Christ are "exhibitive," concrete, creative acts, works of the Holy Ghost--and not mere declarations and wishes, here again, as in the preceding chapters, the basic difference between the factualists (Thatsaechliche) and the rhetoricians (Rhetorische) is the dividing factor.

¹⁴Vilmar, Lehrbuch der Pastoraltheologie, p. 115.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

There are many people who call themselves Lutheran who will loudly disagree with some of Vilmar's concepts in regard to the Sacrament of the Church. And there are many others who will applaud his firm convictions and hail him as a staunch defender of orthodox Lutheranism in the mides of theological chaos. But if one is to try to remain objective, he will probably come to a conclusion somewhere between these two positions. Vilmar was certainly not the "Romanizer" that some insisted he was.¹ Nor was he a perfectly confessional Lutheran.

It is difficult to determine exactly to which of the Symbols Vilmar subscribed. He, of course, bound himself to the three Catholic Creeds and the Augsburg Confession in keeping with the Church Order of 1566. He often used the Small Catechism of Martin Luther definitively and at least mentions the Smalcald Articles² and the Tractatus.³ The Church Orders which he followed mention no subscription to the Formula of Concord,⁴ and Vilmar does not seem to include it in his subscription either. Lack of formal subscription to the entire Book of Concord, however, does not exclude one from the pale of Lutheranism.

¹Emanuel Hirsch, Geschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie (Guetersloh: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1954), V, 195-96.

²Supra, p. 54.

³Supra, p. 94.

⁴Hans H. Weisgerber, Jahrbuch der Hessischen Kirchengeschichtlichen Vereinigung, herausgegeben von Hugo Gruen (Darmstadt: Hessische Kirchengeschichtliche Vereinigung, 1955) VI, 7-13, has written an interesting article concerning Aegidius Hunnius and his valiant but abortive attempt to introduce the Formula of Concord into the old Hessian Church in the sixteenth century.

It ought to be noted, too, that most of the theological works which Vilmar wrote were written and published either shortly before his death or published shortly thereafter. All but one of the theological works available to the writer (i. e., Geschichte des Konfessionsstandes der evangelischen Kirche in Hessen) were written within four years before his death. This means, first of all, that his theological position does not vary a great deal; and secondly, one might validly infer that the last thirteen years of his life were probably his most mature. One ought also remember, however, that the years during which Vilmar wrote his theological works were very bitter years. He had been sorely disappointed in being refused the position of Superintendent and he was bitterly opposed to the Reformed elements in the Church. This undoubtedly caused much of his vehement rejection of the non-Lutheran theology of the rhetors.

Nevertheless, for all of Vilmar's bitter polemics, he has made a valuable contribution to Lutheran theology in his firm insistence on the absolute reality of the means of grace and of the "sacramental actions." Vilmar in no way "spiritualizes" the acts of the Church, nor does he reduce the Sacraments to mere "declarations of grace." When a Sacrament is performed, Vilmar believes, actual, positive grace is bestowed and nothing less than this will satisfy him. For Vilmar God is not a static God that stopped working in 33 A. D. and who now has people telling about what He did 2000 years ago. God is a living, active God who pours out grace on men every day throughout the year. This, Vilmar felt, was to be stressed especially in his day when the Reformed theologians were in the ascendancy.

Today, too, it would be well if Lutheran theology again stressed the Sacraments in their concrete reality and in their centrality in the life

of the Church. When Protestantism is depreciating the sacramental life as it is today, Lutheranism in her sacramental theology has a very vital contribution to make to the Church. And Vilmar with his strong positive emphases on the sacramental life has much to say both to contemporary Lutheranism and to the whole Church of Christ.

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