

Vilmar on the Pastoral Office

Logia 26/3 (2016): 54-55

Extracts from pages 275, 276-78 and 280-81 in A. F. C. Vilmar, *Dogmatik*, 5, (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsman, 1874)

The basic article in the Augsburg Confession, article 5, states, rather generally, that a divinely instituted office is required to gain faith. In addition, the faith and salvation of the congregation, and the survival of the church, depend on the presence of this office, so that the congregation is *shaped* and *maintained* through ministry of the church. Thus the congregation has nothing, possesses nothing, contributes nothing from itself to the blessings of salvation, but keeps on receiving them...

In article 14 ...the office of public teaching and administration of the sacraments is connected with being rightly called in the rite of ordination. This has to do with the order by which *only pastors can be called into the office by pastors*, the order by which the pastoral office is transplanted from a person to a person. The Variata of the Augsburg Confession unnecessarily adds: "just as Paul commanded Timothy to appoint presbyters in the cities." It is regrettable that that this addition, which excludes each and every misunderstanding, was not included in the original version, so as to cut off any possibility of promoting and justifying theories about the pastoral office, such as have been produced in recent times, without recourse to the Scriptures and the Confessions...

In article 13 the Apology permits calling ordination a sacrament because it is commanded by God and based of God's great promises. It adds the proviso that the order of ministry should not regarded as a Levitical, sacrificial priesthood. In our way of thinking the order of ministry must, of course, be separated from the Lord's Supper and Baptism, because the forgiveness of sins is given in both these sacraments. Nevertheless it is a *sacramental* act in which God, rather than a man, does something for the redemption of the world in such a way that its enactment is necessary for its redemption (which does not depend on whether human beings do it or fail to do it). It is a first class sacramental act as measured by apostolic practice and the institution of the office by Christ himself. It carries out a direct command of Christ, and the laying on of hands (which is still now rightly done in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) really gives the Holy Spirit; it gives the ability to forgive and retain sins and to perform Christ's acts as His own acts through the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the government of the church. This power to act, like every power, can only be granted by the person who already possesses it. So it also follows that *full responsibility* for teaching, the sacrament and the congregation, for preserving doctrine and the sacraments, and for the salvation of souls in the congregation is conferred on the person who is ordained....

In recent times new theories about the pastoral office have arisen which sharply contradict the Scriptures and the teaching of the church. In general they can be reduced to the idea that the pastoral office emerges from the congregation... These theories have seldom attempted to provide *a scriptural basis* for their claims, nor have they ever been justified from the *Confessions*. Instead word and sacrament are regarded as things which qualify and equip a person to gather the church. Those who maintain this position do not consider that, since word and sacrament are, by their nature, enactments, they are bound to persons. Without people to administer them, word and sacrament gather a church as little as the Sacred Scriptures, as a book, will gather or have gathered a church...

In contrast with this view we maintain that there is an office of word and sacraments that has been instituted by Christ. It is responsible to the Lord Jesus for the church and its provision with God's Word and the Sacrament of the Altar as well as for leading each soul and the church as a whole. No member of the congregation is *responsible* for another member, let alone many members or all of them. The pastor is accountable for all those who have been entrusted to him, yet not to them but to Christ the Lord. They lie on *his heart* as well as on the heart of Christ. Thus he has the authority to rule and judge them with the Word, the power to pronounce effectual threats in God's name and the right to supervise doctrine and to exercise discipline.

Like the doctrine of the sacraments and the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of the pastoral office comes down to this main issue: is the Holy Spirit *personally present* among us, and is Christ the Lord *personally, bodily* present among us? Or are only the effects of the Holy Spirit available to us, the powers of the Holy Spirit and Christ, yet separated from him so that he is far away from us? Have we human beings been left to our own devices so that we must cope by ourselves as best we can with our own strength? If we can affirm the first question, then we will, without any doubt, immediately recognize that the acts of the pastoral office are *the acts of Christ* himself and also admit that the absolution and retention of sins are *performative acts* that do what they say.

Yet, if, on the one hand, the personal presence of the Holy Spirit and Christ himself give the office-bearer the power that is necessary for him and the certainty and stability that is just as necessary for him, then, on the other hand, their presence also demands the unconditional self-surrender of the office-bearer with his whole earthly self to the Holy Spirit who is personally present with him and who comes from him, his self-surrender to Christ who is bodily present with him and with the congregation too through him, the office-bearer. This self-surrender is not required of any other member of the church. Above all else this includes the arduous duty of personal self-effacement, the suppression of his own personality, and the renunciation of his own *opinions*. Here it is not just enough to believe in Christ and to love Christ. Rather in administering the sacraments, pronouncing the absolution, and proclaiming God's Word, he is to *immerse* his whole self *in Christ*. That cannot and will not be required of any other congregational member. Anyone who enters the pastoral office in our time and does not intend

to do this should disqualify himself from the office of the New Testament and thereby protect himself from certain condemnation.

Dr. John W. Kleinig