

4-1-1971

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Recommended Citation

Bouman, Walter R. (1971) "History and Dogma in Christology," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 42, Article 23.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol42/iss1/23>

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History and Dogma in Christology

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CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF A RECENT CONVENTION RESOLUTION OF THE LUTHERAN Church—Missouri Synod (Resolution 2-16, "To Affirm Historicity of New Testament," Denver 1969) provides a basis for the author's discussion of the way in which church bodies can best prepare doctrinal statements and of the proper role of historical investigation and dogmatic formulations in the process of framing the church's Christological confession.

Nearly 20 years ago Prof. Jaroslav Pelikan suggested to his seminary students that Christology would be one of the central theological concerns of the coming decades. His suggestion was all but unintelligible to students whose preoccupations focused on ecclesiological questions (church fellowship and church worship) and the validity of historical analysis of Biblical literature. Yet time has demonstrated that Pelikan's instincts and insights were more correct than the horizons within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod revealed at that time. Ernst Käsemann's essay on the necessity of paying attention to the historical Jesus because He is the Messianic Christ appeared in print in 1954.¹ Günther Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth* followed shortly thereafter. Werner Elert's *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie*, posthumously published in

1957, provided the first major reappraisal of classical Christology since the work of Adolf von Harnack and his contemporaries.

Today the centrality of Christological discussion is everywhere evident. The "death of God" theologians responded to the absence of a meaningful experience of God by attempting to retain and reappropriate the figure of the historical Jesus.² The "theology of futurity" proposes a central place for the historical Jesus, particularly the historicity of His resurrection, as the proleptic presence of the future of history.³ Even the rock culture gets a piece of the action with the "rock opera," or "passion," *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. Each example involves an implicit or explicit Christology, an understanding of the being

¹ The English translation is entitled "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1964), pp. 15—47.

² An excellent description and critique of the "death of God" theology is available in Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), pp. 107—45.

³ Carl Braaten, *The Future of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 82—108, is representative.

of Jesus, with varying degrees of relationship to the Christology of Chalcedon. That fact reveals the contemporary problem. The Chalcedonian confession of two natures in one person is frequently regarded as questionable because to the growing historical consciousness of the past several centuries history and dogma seem to be mutually exclusive. To formulate the dilemma as bluntly as possible, Christology seems to be confronted with the alternatives: either abandon dogmatic formulations in the name of history or reject history in the name of dogma.

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, too, has become involved in Christological discussion, but the route to its involvement has been unique. The concern with Christology has come about because of questions regarding the authorship and interpretation of Old Testament documents. The Synod has both adopted resolutions and authorized studies with Christological implications.⁴ The internal discussion of this matter has focused on the constitutional status of convention resolutions. The major question has been whether or not convention resolutions can be regarded as doctrinal law, binding on the clergy and congregations of the Synod. This constitutional approach has produced a twofold response. On the one hand, members of the Synod have been repeatedly urged to honor and uphold the doctrinal content of

⁴ Examples are "The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship," *Convention Workbook*, 1967, pp. 397—402; "A Response to Questions on 'The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship,'" *Convention Workbook*, 1969, pp. 499—500; Detroit Resolution 2-12 (1965); New York Resolution 2-03 (1967); Denver Resolution 2-05 (1969). All resolutions of the Synod are published in the appropriate *Convention Proceedings*.

synodical resolutions. On the other hand, the Synod has made some individual decisions consciously refusing to state that its theological resolutions are doctrinal law.⁵

The constitutional approach to resolutions on authorship and Biblical interpretation eventually turned attention to the substance of those resolutions. At its Denver convention in 1969 the Synod not only renewed its appeal to honor and uphold the doctrinal content of its resolutions. It also declared that "guided by the Word of God and the Confessions," it "has not found it necessary to disavow any of its doctrinal statements and does not today."⁶ Such a statement seemed to invite what should have been done all along, namely, examination of the content of theological

⁵ See Cleveland Resolution 6-01 (1962); Detroit Resolution 2-01 (1965) and the convention minutes regarding its adoption (*Proceedings*, p. 62), where the phrase "are required" was rejected as a substitute for "have been urged"; Detroit Resolution 2-08 (1965), which placed synodical resolutions "under the norms of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions"; Detroit Resolution 2-27 (1965), adopted with the floor committee's provision "that this resolution is not to be regarded as a doctrinal statement" (*Proceedings*, p. 72); and New York Resolution 2-31 (1967), which the convention refused to require of professors at "synodically governed schools." (*Proceedings*, p. 34)

⁶ Denver Resolution 2-27 (1969). It is interesting to note that in the very next resolution, Denver Resolution 2-28, the Synod repudiated a resolution on selective conscientious objection to war which it had adopted at the previous convention (New York Resolution 2-35 [1967]). Both resolutions involved specific theological issues. The Synod had clearly adopted a position at its New York convention that was at variance with its Lutheran confession. That it rectified this action at the same convention at which it passed Resolution 2-27 must have escaped the attention of the framers of this resolution, and indeed the attention of the entire convention.

resolutions in the light of the Synod's constitutional doctrinal basis.

At this point two closely related concerns intersect in a significant way. On the one hand, there is the concern with Christology both in the larger Christian community and in the Missouri Synod. On the other hand, there is the continuing internal problem about the status and validity of theological resolutions. The intersection occurs in Resolution 2-16 of the Denver convention: "To Affirm Historicity of New Testament." A comparison with the theological resolutions adopted by the Missouri Synod during the past decade will quickly reveal its significance. Other resolutions referred issues to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), commended documents and studies of the CTCR, or reaffirmed positions and documents from the synodical tradition. But this resolution stands out conspicuously as a convention attempt to formulate and adopt a creative theological statement. It is not a routine reaffirmation of the historicity of certain New Testament passages. It is rather an attempt to provide such a reaffirmation with a thoroughgoing rationale. Both the rationale and the resolution contain significant Christological statements.

In this essay, therefore, I propose to undertake three tasks. The first task is to analyze and evaluate the Christological perspective of Resolution 2-16. The second task is to place the Christological discussion within the Missouri Synod into the context of the Christological discussion occurring in the larger Christian community. The third task is to offer some concluding observations regarding the use and adop-

tion of theological resolutions by synodical conventions.

I. RESOLUTION 2-16 OF THE DENVER CONVENTION (1969)

Resolution 2-16 was formulated because of a request that the Synod declare statements attributed to Jesus in the gospels to have been made by Him and to declare "that all the miracles and events recorded in the New Testament actually happened in ordinary calendar history."⁷ Most of the resolution is devoted to the rationale. It is here that analysis and critique are particularly important. Werner Elert's distinction between church dogma and its basis has helped to underscore the importance of the rationale. According to Elert, church dogma is the *Sollgehalt des kirchlichen Kerygmas*, the mandatory content of the church's proclamation. In this sense dogma always serves the Gospel, for the church is church only and insofar as its proclamation is the Gospel. The task of dogmatics, then, is to ask and to answer the question about the adequacy of the basis or rationale of that mandatory content, that is, to ask whether it is adequately grounded in the Gospel.⁸ The distinction between basis and dogma is thus very significant. The problems in Christian theology rarely lie in the relatively brief dogmatic formulations. The problems more frequently reveal that a particular theological tradition does not provide a dogmatic formulation with an adequate basis in the Gospel. The rejections of dogma in Christian history have

⁷ Overture 2-19, *Convention Workbook*, 1969, p. 77.

⁸ Werner Elert, *Der christliche Glaube*, 3d ed. (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1956), pp. 30 to 49.

been helpful in revealing the inadequacy of the basis of the dogma. Continued controversy after an apparent conciliar agreement has served the same function. Robert Wilken has pointed out, for example, that both Cyril and Nestorius "agreed on the orthodox dogma proclaimed at Nicaea and Constantinople; what they did not know, however, was that each had received a different tradition of *how to get to it*."⁹

This same distinction between dogma and approach, between dogma and its basis in the Gospel, was also recognized by C. F. W. Walther. Commenting on the requirement of unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, Walther stated that "the Church necessarily cannot require a subscription to those matters which do not belong to doctrine," such as "the line of argumentation in favor of a doctrine."¹⁰ Walther suggested that it is possible to improve on the "line of argumentation" just as Elert urged upon dogmatics the quest for an "adequate basis" (*zureichender Grund*) for its dogma. The problems we have in teaching and apologetic, in edification and witness, are most often related to the "line of argumentation," not to the dogma itself.

We turn, then, to the rationale, the *Grund*, of Resolution 2-16 in order to in-

⁹ Robert L. Wilken, "Tradition, Exegesis, and the Christological Controversies," *Church History*, XXXIV (June 1965), 123 ff., esp. p. 127.

¹⁰ Walther is quoted in a lengthy footnote in Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 357-58. See also C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church?" *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XVIII (April 1947), 241-42.

quire about its adequacy. The resolution takes up the question of the historicity of the New Testament because:

- a. The heart of the New Testament message is the Good News of an event which took place in history, "under Pontius Pilate" in Palestine; this Good News concerns a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth; the validity of the apostolic proclamation and the faith of the church stand or fall with the historical reality of the event (1 Cor. 15:1-19; John 15:22-24). The Gospels therefore invite historical investigation and are to be taken seriously as historical documents.¹¹

There can hardly be any question about the validity of a "line of argumentation" which seeks to move directly out of the nature of the Gospel itself. Here the nature of the Good News is rightly affirmed as historical, and on this basis the gospels are said to "invite historical investigation." So far so good. The canonical gospels also invite *more* than historical investigation. They invite faith in the Jesus there proclaimed. We should note that a stated concern for such faith was completely absent from the original overture. The rationale could have been helpfully critical of the overture at this point if it had called attention to the relationship between the historical event and the act of entrusting oneself to the Jesus who is the subject of the history. There are numerous condemnations of mere "historical faith" in the Book of Concord¹² and with good reason. The primary concern of Christian faith is not that these events happened (although that is by no means being denied), but rather that in

¹¹ Resolution 2-16, *Convention Proceedings* (1969), p. 88.

¹² For example, Augsburg Confession XX, 23; Apology IV, 48.

what happened the forgiveness of sins is taking place. The person confronted by the event is being invited to entrust himself to Jesus, the forgiver. I will return to the relationship between history and faith later in the analysis.

The rationale continues:

b. The event recorded in the Gospels is unique, without analogy in human history. It is nothing less than *God's* entering into human history for us men and for our salvation in the Person of Him in whom "the Godhead dwells bodily." It is the crisis point and turning point of human history, the coming in of the new world of God, the dawn of the new creation. Historical investigation here moves in the presence of the Creator, present in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth; historical investigation must reckon with the unlimited power of Him who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not. Here the miracle is not only a possibility or probability; it is *essential* to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer. Christian historical investigation must therefore beware of measuring probabilities by standards taken from a secularized conception of history; the warning uttered by the document "A Lutheran Stance Toward Biblical Studies" (Part Two, Chapter 3) is very much in place.

This paragraph in the rationale raises the most significant questions. The first sentence introduces — again validly — the uniqueness of the event with which the gospels deal. But now we must proceed very carefully. The elaboration that this event is "without analogy" is coupled with a later warning against "measuring probabilities by standards taken from a secularized conception of history." This is, no doubt, directed against those late 19th-century German philosophies of history

(proposed by, for example, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert, Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Troeltsch) which identified the historically significant with the typical and the recurring and which were thus interested in the principle of historical analogy as a criterion for probability.¹³ As such the elaboration and warning, too, are valid. But are not more distinctions in order? The Gospel as "good news" is surely not without analogy in and of itself. There are many "gospels" in the marketplace, competing for the trust of men, as St. Paul indicates in Gal. 1:8. In order to speak of the event of the Gospel as that which is unique and without analogy, we must express as exactly as possible what differentiates the good news in the gospels from other "gospels." The rationale describes this uniqueness as "*God's* entering into human history for us men and for our salvation in the Person of Him in whom 'the Godhead dwells bodily.'" (The italics here and above are part of the original resolution.) The reference to the person Jesus of Nazareth helps to distinguish this historical event from God's general activity in all of history. If there is to be an emphasis, however, it might better be on the *Person* than on *God's* entering into history. God is always present in history. The point of the Christian Gospel is that in the history of Jesus God is doing something qualitatively different from what He is doing in the rest of history. The uniqueness must lie in that qualitative difference.

The problems have only begun. The emphasis on "*God's* entering into history"

¹³ See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 165 ff., esp. pp. 177 ff. for the critique of this view of history by Eduard Meyer.

seems to be a deliberate one in the rationale. His entry was "for us men and for our salvation." Does this mean that the incarnation itself is redemptive? The rationale does not say. Later in the "resolved" the affirmation of the historicity of the New Testament is made as "an act of faith *in the incarnation* of our Lord." (The italics in this instance are my own.) If the incarnation, rather than Jesus as incarnate Lord, is the object of faith, the question must be repeated with greater urgency. Does this mean that the incarnation itself is the Gospel? Such a view was by no means absent from the ancient Christologies,¹⁴ and it recurs again as central to the theological perspective of Karl Barth.¹⁵ But the uniqueness of the good news in Jesus does not lie in the fact that God is present, not even that God is present in Jesus; or to formulate it most explicitly, the good news is not that Jesus is God. The statement is true, and yet it is not the Gospel. If we want to ground the dogmatic confession of the incarnation in the Gospel, then we must not ask whether the incarnation happened. Rather, we must ask what Jesus, the incarnate Lord, is doing.

Here Luther serves us better. Comment-

¹⁴ Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Gregory of Nyssa come to mind. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus — God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 39—40. But J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 170—74, adds a needed warning against too facile an interpretation of these ancient Christologies.

¹⁵ Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 23—44, esp. pp. 29 ff. See also Edward H. Schroeder, "The Relationship between Dogmatics and Ethics in the Thought of Elert, Barth, and Troeltsch," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXVI (December 1965), 756—63.

ing on Philippians 2, the *kenosis* passage, he writes:

[Jesus] was not like the Pharisee who said, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men," for that man was delighted that others were wretched; at any rate he was unwilling that they should be like him. This is the type of robbery by which a man usurps things for himself — rather he keeps what he has and does not clearly ascribe to God the things that are God's, nor does he serve others with them that he may become like other men. Men of this kind wish to be like God, sufficient in themselves, pleasing themselves, glorying in themselves, under obligation to no one, and so on. Not thus, however, did Christ think; not of this stamp was his wisdom. He relinquished that form to God the Father and emptied himself, unwilling to use his rank against us, unwilling to be different from us. Moreover, for our sakes he became as one of us and took the form of a servant, that is, he subjected himself to all evils. And although he was free, as the Apostle says of himself also, he made himself servant of all, living as if all the evils which were ours were actually his own.¹⁶

Notice what Luther is saying here. That God is against us is how we encounter the power of God in history generally. Death is the end of all historical life. But Jesus does not "use his rank against us." Rather, Jesus — incarnate God — is God for us. As such "he subjected himself to all evils." The uniqueness of what is taking place in Jesus is that in total and absolute antithesis to God acting as judge in the death of everything else, Jesus is God taking

¹⁶ From Luther's 1519 essay, "The Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 301.

death into Himself. That is what He is doing for us men and for our salvation. But of that, again, there is significant silence in the rationale. There are attempts to speak in terms which have a Biblical ring: "It is the crisis point and turning point of human history, the coming in of the new world of God, the dawn of the new creation." But what does this mean? Have death and hell ceased? Has the judgment of God been banished from history? The rationale invites these questions because it fails to state what is really "without analogy" and utterly unique, what is in fact the Gospel itself: that here *God died* on our behalf.¹⁷

There seems to be a reason for this silence. The interest of the resolution lies elsewhere. The interest lies in drawing conclusions about what *must* necessarily be taking place since God has arrived on the scene in person. The interest lies in what historical investigation must expect to find taking place since the Creator is "present in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth." The real interest of the rationale is formulated as follows:

Historical investigation must reckon with the *unlimited power* [emphasis added] of Him who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not. Here the miracle is not only a possibility or probability; it is *essential* to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer.

This is a strange line of argumentation indeed. Is "unlimited power" what the Gospel is about? Is "unlimited power" so

¹⁷ Building on Luther and on Theodosius Harnack's 19th-century interpretation of Luther's theology, Kazoh Kitamori's *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965) develops this theme with great power and insight. See esp. pp. 32 ff.

surprising to human experience, so foreign to normal historical investigation? If historical investigation, in its most elementary sense, simply seeks to find out what happened, how can it be told what must have happened, indeed what is *essential* "to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer"? Who decides in advance of the event what God's redemptive action must be? What miracles are essential to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer? What if a healing like those recorded in the gospels has never happened in my experience? Does that mean that "the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer" has not happened to me? It is important to emphasize at this point that these concerns do not call into question the reporting of a single incident in the gospels. Rather, they raise the most serious questions about a line of argumentation which assumes what kinds of events must be taking place in the history of Jesus, the Redeemer, because certain activities are essential characteristics of the presence of God.

It is clear how this line of argumentation develops. God is proclaimed to be incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. So far so good. But at this point some hidden assumptions begin to insinuate themselves. Certain attributes and activities are assumed to belong to the nature of God. Now the argument can proceed *fortissimo*. If Jesus is God, then we can expect these attributes and activities to be present and happening. But the fatal flaw in this line of argumentation lies in a set of hidden assumptions which do not distinguish between the wrathful judgment of God and the redeeming love of God. If God's judgment is carried out in history and nature,

then the last thing that we can do is to anticipate God's redemption on the basis of attributes and activities observed in nature and history. The hidden assumptions about the undifferentiated "nature of God" are responsible for both the fact and the nature of the Christological controversies from Arianism to monotheletism. These same hidden assumptions are responsible for the rejection of the Christological dogma itself from Socinianism through the Enlightenment to modern secularity. Now these hidden assumptions appear once more in the rationale of Resolution 2-16.

Where does this take the resolution? This line of argumentation with its questionable hidden assumptions about what sort of attributes and activities must be associated with the presence of God leads to the following convention action:

Resolved, That the 1969 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod affirm the historicity of the New Testament, making this affirmation as an act of faith in the incarnation of our Lord as attested and presented in living reality by the Spirit of Truth in words which He Himself has taught.

Why is the incarnation the object of faith? The church confesses the incarnation, to be sure. But the object of faith is always the Lord who is incarnate. We do not make "an act of faith in," that is, entrust ourselves to, a doctrine about an historical incident. We make "an act of faith in," that is, entrust ourselves to, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Doctrine is necessary, but it is not the law of believing; it is the law of preaching and teaching so that faith in Christ can take place. The subject of the Second Article of the Creed and there-

fore the object of my believing is Jesus Christ, our Lord.¹⁸

To speak of an act of faith in the incarnation seems to be a capitulation to the very secularity which is being warned against in the second part of the rationale. To use the term "faith" in this sense requires accepting the assumptions and perspective at work in one important understanding of contemporary secularity, namely, that our world can function quite well without God as a "working hypothesis."¹⁹ In such a context any action of God becomes a "postulate of faith." This means that "faith" no longer refers to the act of entrusting one's self to Jesus as God the forgiver. Rather, "faith" comes to mean the assertion that supernatural beings and

¹⁸ Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 226. See also the references to faith as trust in Christ, Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, III, 11, 13, 25, and 30. Luther's confession that Jesus is Lord in the Small Catechism, II, 4, and in the Large Catechism, Second Part, esp. 31, is most closely related to the Gospel. Luther's concept of Christ's lordship is that it is focused in His redemptive servanthood and death. Wolfgang Trillhaas contrasts this concept of lordship with that developed in Martin Bucer's *De Regno Christi* of 1550 in "Regnum Christi: On the History of the Concept in Protestantism," *Lutheran World*, XIV (1967), 40—51. See also Ernst Kinder, "Soteriological Motifs in the Early Creeds," *Lutheran World*, VII (1961), 16—23. Kinder attempts to show that the same understanding of *kyrios* was involved in the formulation of the ancient creeds. Werner Elert, *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1957), pp. 26—32 and pp. 165—84, explores the "political" use of the concept of Christ's lordship with some telling contemporary applications.

¹⁹ Larry Shiner, "The Concept of Secularization in Empirical Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, VI (Fall 1967), 207—20.

actions exist in a context which denies that supernatural beings and actions exist. This usage of the term "faith" seems to be taking place in the reference to "an act of faith in the incarnation of our Lord." What is being said, in effect, is that some people do not think that incarnations take place, and that healings and feedings and resurrections don't take place either. The members of the Missouri Synod, on the other hand, think that the incarnation did take place and that these other events happened, too. Up to this point we would all have to agree with these statements *as descriptions* of a state of affairs. The problem is that this resolution designates our thinking the incarnation and other events took place as "an act of faith." This is nothing less than the *fides historica* which the Book of Concord condemns. Because the rationale is not adequately grounded in the Gospel, the Missouri Synod seems to have adopted a resolution the wording of which (if not the intention behind it) would have to be called into question in terms of the Synod's constitutional standard for doctrine.

II. CHRISTOLOGY AND THE GOSPEL

The line of argumentation employed by Resolution 2-16 operated with some questionable theological assumptions. This led to unfortunate wording of the resolution in which "faith" seemed to become *fides historica*. The adoption of an inadequate theological resolution by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod would be a local problem of the most parochial kind were it not for the fact that the failure to ground its Christological confession in the Gospel is not unique to Resolution 2-16. Careful awareness of our own difficulties

and problems can become, therefore, a window opening out into the problems and difficulties besetting Christological confession in the larger Christian community. Resolution 2-16 correctly perceives that there is a close and necessary relationship between the Christological dogma (that Jesus is God and man) and the historicity of the words and actions attributed to Jesus by the canonical gospels. It is the contention of this essay that if the Christological dogma is not adequately grounded in the Gospel, the dogma will be either misused or rejected. Similarly if the history of Jesus of Nazareth is not adequately grounded in the Gospel, it will also be either misused or ignored. The analysis of Resolution 2-16 has indicated that without an adequate grounding in the Gospel the relationship between history and dogma can be obscured or misrepresented. All of these concerns find expression in the most significant volume on Christology to appear during the past decade: Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Jesus—God and Man*.

Pannenberg formulates his Christological position in opposition to both Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth. In Bultmann's Christology there is almost radical discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the exalted Christ. What little we can know of the earthly Jesus is not significant for Christian faith and proclamation. The gospels are the product of the exalted Christ speaking through the Christian community.²⁰ Bultmann's proposed "demythologizing" of the New Testament follows consistently from this Christology. The contemporary church is to be the continuing voice of the

²⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 3—4 and 33 ff.

exalted Christ by translating the proclamation about Him from the cultural forms of the New Testament era into cultural forms appropriate to our own time. Only in this way will the proclamation of the Gospel accomplish the same function today that it did in the New Testament era.²¹

Karl Barth's Christological perspective has the incarnation of the Word, the Son of God, as its point of departure (thus making it seem more orthodox than that of Bultmann). The Son of God enters into human existence in the man Jesus of Nazareth to bridge the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man, for God is, by definition, "Wholly Other" than man. The great paradox which Christianity proclaims and which men are summoned to believe is that Jesus is the revelation by which the distinction is bridged. The self-disclosure of God has taken place. The incarnation is at one and the same time the "humiliation" of the Son of God and the "exaltation" of the Son of Man.²² It is significant that a revelation-oriented theology such as Barth's leads to a Christology which focuses on the incarnation. The parallels between Barth and a revelation-oriented preoccupation in the Missouri Synod are obvious.

In contrast to Bultmann, Pannenberg

²¹ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 9—15 and 33 ff.

²² Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 33, refers to all 12 volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*! More realistic references might be Otto Weber's excellent *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 41 ff. and 73 ff. (although this work reports only on the volumes up to and including III/4), and Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), pp. 33—64.

wants to reaffirm both the significance and the accessibility of the historical Jesus. The events in the gospels, including the resurrection, are capable of being known through historical investigation and without "demythologization." In contrast to Barth, Pannenberg urges a different point of departure for Christology: the historical events of the earthly Jesus. Pannenberg wants to do Christology "from below," beginning with "the historical man Jesus" and leading up "to the recognition of his divinity." Such a Christological approach "is concerned first of all with Jesus' message and fate and arrives only at the end at the concept of the incarnation."²³ Pannenberg's reasons for urging a Christology "from below" instead of "from above" are instructive. First, "Christology from above presupposes the divinity of Jesus" instead of inquiring "about how Jesus' appearance in history led to the *recognition* of his divinity." Second, if the divinity of the Logos is the point of departure, then Christology becomes concerned primarily with the problem of the union of God and man in Jesus and thus does not take seriously enough "the determinative significance inherent in the distinctive features of the real, historical man, Jesus of Nazareth." Third, since we are not in the position of God, we must know Jesus from within the limitations of our "historically determined human situation."²⁴

I think Pannenberg is fundamentally correct in this approach, and the clarity and cogency with which he makes his case can only be affirmed. The resurrection of Jesus has priority in the route to recogni-

²³ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 34—35.

tion of who Jesus is and what He is doing. Nothing in the earthly career of Jesus can replace the resurrection in this sense. Pannenberg is also correct in insisting that the earthly Jesus, historically placed into the Judaism of His time with regard to His message, His activities and His fate, is the source of both Christian understanding of divine presence and activity and Christian confession of Jesus' identity with the eternal Logos.

Nevertheless, I am not fully comfortable with Pannenberg's continued concern with the concept of "revelation." Insofar as Christian theology has a concern with revelation it must, to be sure, agree with Pannenberg's thesis that revelation occurs in history and is open to the same kind of historical observation as every other historical event.²⁵ Pannenberg's critique of Barth at this point does not lead him to distinguish what is being revealed. He opposes an undifferentiated suprahistorical and supernatural revelation with an undifferentiated historical and natural revelation. What he seems to neglect is the valid and necessary contrast, even antithesis, *within* the historical revelation between that which takes place in the history of Jesus of Nazareth and that which takes place in history generally. It is the contrast between judgment and redemption, both of which take place within history. The redemption in Jesus is a *qualitatively* different revelation than the judgment of God, even though it takes place within the same kind of circumstances and under the same conditions as any historical occurrence. Here Gerald

²⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," *Revelation as History* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 125 ff., esp. pp. 135 ff.

Downing's little noted but very significant study, *Has Christianity a Revelation?* provides a much needed corrective. Downing opposes continental neoorthodoxy with the thesis that "salvation" or "redemption" rather than "revelation" is the key to Holy Scripture and the Christian proclamation.²⁶ Lutheran theology could and should be working with that same kind of corrective emphasis.

Pannenberg's concern with revelation in history, coupled with his critique of Barth, leads him to place the incarnation at the *conclusion* of Christology. For this reason he also criticizes Luther's Christology,²⁷ but he fails to distinguish carefully enough between Luther and Barth in their *use* of the incarnation. Since for Barth revelation itself is already redemptive, the incarnation is the focal beginning for the confession of Christ, the Revealer. From that point on Barth wrestles continuously with the relationship between the divine and the human—in Christ, in Holy Scripture, in preaching.²⁸ For Luther, on the other hand, the incarnation identifies the person but not the nature of the redemption. Hence Friedrich Brunstäd observes that in the Lutheran confessional tradition the "two-natures Christology" has been subordinated to an "assumption Christology."²⁹ Because of the importance of Brunstäd's insight and dis-

²⁶ F. Gerald Downing, *Has Christianity a Revelation?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 24 ff.

²⁷ Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, pp. 221, 301, etc.

²⁸ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 183—217.

²⁹ Friedrich Brunstäd, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951), pp. 36 ff.

inction, Pannenberg's description and critique of the problems involved in the two-natures approach to Christology are most helpful.

The basic problem of the two-natures approach is that it comes with preconceived attributes and characteristics about both God and man already built into the concept of "nature." Such an approach thus becomes burdened primarily with the logical task of confessing a union of two ontologically antithetical natures. This is the reason for the Christological controversies which took place both after Nicaea and after Chalcedon.³⁰ The major participants in the Apollinarian and Nestorian controversies fully affirmed that the eternal Logos was divine in the same sense that the Father was divine. It was their use of the Greek antinomy "finite-infinite" as the essential characteristics of human and divine nature respectively that made the relationship of the divine Logos and the human Jesus a problem. In the Apollinarian "Word-flesh" Christology the Logos was said to have replaced the human soul (mind) in such a way that death could not affect the eternal Logos. The Nestorian "Word-man" Christology, by way of contrast, regarded Jesus as having a human soul (mind). But only the union of the two "natures" experienced birth and death. Nestorius, too, believed that he was guarding the divinity of the Logos by refusing to assert that God suffered or that God died.³¹

Chalcedon was not a solution to the

³⁰ Elert's analysis of the post-Nicene and post-Chalcedonian controversies is unsurpassed. See *Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie*, pp. 7 ff. and pp. 33—70.

³¹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 289 ff.

problem revealed by the clash of these Christologies. Its affirmation of the two natures was more in the nature of a formulation of the problem, or better, a confession in the face of the problem. It did not challenge the assumptions on which the opposing positions were based: namely, that divinity and humanity were antithetical in terms of the finite-infinite antinomy. That Chalcedon was not able to do away with the problem becomes clear when we note that its dogmatic formula was subsequently enforced either by civil or ecclesiastical authority. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that in the Christological dogmas we have the unfortunate triumph of Hellenistic culture over Biblical concepts. The rejection of Arianism, for example, was actually the rejection of the Greek Logos doctrine in the name of a specifically Christian concept of the Logos.³² Leslie Dewart is correct in regarding the process of dogmatic formulation as a necessary cultural step if the Christian church was to break out of its Jewish cultural origins and become a universal faith and community.³³ The call to return to Biblical categories fails to perceive the problem, because the Bible, too, can be read with the assumption that the human as human is the antithesis of the divine.

In the 16th century the Bible was, in fact, read in the light of just that antinomy — with a consequent continuation of controversy about Christology. Calvin and

³² Elert, *Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie*, p. 21.

³³ Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp. 130 ff. For a helpful analysis and critique of Dewart see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 25—33.

Zwingli operated with the axiom that the finite was incapable of the infinite. The resultant emphasis on the transcendence of God had reverberations in every area of doctrine and ethics. In Socinianism and other anti-Trinitarian movements Jesus was denied the divinity ascribed to Him in the classic dogmas—on the basis of the same axiom! Wherever one begins with the two-natures formulation freighted with the finite-infinite antinomy the result is either that the paradox of the incarnation becomes the object of faith and the problem for theological reflection (as, for example, in Resolution 2-16) or the "balance" of the Chalcedonian formulation ceases to be maintained.³⁴

This is the reason why Brunstäd attaches such importance to the assumption Christology of the Lutheran confessional tradition. The Chalcedonian formulation is clearly reaffirmed in Article III of the Augsburg Confession, but not with the presupposition of the finite-infinite antinomy. The assumption Christology (German: *dass Gott der Sohn sei Mensch worden*; Latin: *quod verbum . . . assumpserit humanam naturam*) helps to preclude that. The Logos as the subject of Jesus of Nazareth was of

³⁴ This, it seems to me, is the fundamental weakness of the study guide on Christology, *Who Can This Be?* produced in 1968 by the Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U. S. A. The 1967 conferences on Christology out of which this document grew were based on the assumption that Lutherans had tended to emphasize the divinity of Christ. The conferences were to redress this imbalance by an emphasis on the humanity. The approach to the human in the study guide was to ask how our contemporary knowledge of man might "enrich our understanding" of Christ's humanity (p. 21). I have little difficulty restraining my enthusiasm for such an approach to Christology.

the utmost importance to the Lutheran confessional tradition because of its understanding of the Gospel. That the assumption Christology did not involve a subtle or implicit diminution of the full humanity of Jesus was possible only because the finite-infinite antinomy was replaced by (or at least very much subordinated to) the sinner-Holy God antinomy. That the Logos became man did not mean that God was entering a mode of being foreign or hostile or antithetical to His mode of being. For it is not man as man or man as creature who is the antithesis of God, but rather man as sinner, man as *fallen* creature, man under judgment.³⁵

Here the doctrine of the incarnation has both its validity and its limitation. The purpose of confessing the incarnation is to name the *subject* of what is taking place in Jesus. It can fulfill this role only if we do not burden the doctrine of the incarnation with presuppositions and assumptions that do not derive from the historical Jesus. (On this point Pannenberg is again fundamentally correct.) Christian dogma is not a world view, a philosophy of history, a metaphysic—even though it must work with such cultural constructs and concepts. Christian dogma is what the church confesses about the historical Jesus in order that the mandatory content of the Christian proclamation of the Gospel be preserved.

The antinomy which Luther perceived so well and to which the Gospel speaks is sinner-Holy God, not divine-human or finite-infinite. Christianity is good news for

³⁵ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, pp. 211—22. See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 179 ff., esp. pp. 181—83.

sinner under the power-full judgment of the Holy God. The miracle and paradox of the *kenosis* (according to Luther's previously quoted comment) is not that the Logos emptied Himself of metaphysical attributes (whatever they are). Indeed, it is of importance that whatever God *is* (if we can speak this way at all) not be laid aside in Jesus. Rather, the miracle and paradox of the *kenosis* is that something God is *doing* is laid aside; Jesus is emptied of the wrathful judgment of God.

That there is still judgment in Jesus' message is obvious. But it is a judgment encompassed by the Gospel; it serves the call to repentance. It is the necessary verdict (in which the repentant sinner joins by virtue of being repentant) upon that which deceives and enslaves the sinner: his despair of God's mercy or his attempted self-vindication. It is the necessary verdict upon that which destroys both ourselves and our fellows: our vindications at the expense of or in exploitation of our fellowmen. Such judgment can be and must be in the call to repentance only because it is a judgment encompassed by forgiveness, because the wrath of God is opposed by the death of God. The repentant sinner entrusts himself to the God who died and thus shares in that redemptive death.

Hence that which is new in the Christian good news is that the death of God rather than the wrath of God becomes the basis for the death of the sinner. The death of the sinner under wrath is literally a dead end for the sinner. But the death of the sinner through the burial with Christ of baptismal repentance is death to sin and resurrection to newness of life.

This line of argumentation, which has the Gospel in Jesus as the basis for ac-

ceptance and use of the Chalcedonian confession, was not maintained in its fullness and power within the Lutheran theological tradition. We can see a tension already in the line of argumentation employed by the Formula of Concord, Article VIII. The defining of the attributes of the divine nature "to be almighty, to be eternal, to be infinite, to be everywhere at the same time naturally, to be intrinsically present, and to know everything" and of the human nature "to be a corporeal being or creature, to be flesh and blood, to be finite and circumscribed, to suffer and die" (FC, SD, VIII, 9-10) simply reintroduces a line of argumentation based on the Greek antinomies. Werner Elert notes that what is lacking in the divine attributes are just those on which Luther's whole Christology depends: "His mercy, His love, His will to pardon." The attributes ascribed to the divine nature "are equally applicable to the *Deus absconditus*." How much better it would have been, says Elert, had the authors of the Formula of Concord affirmed the *finitum infiniti capax* with a line of argumentation based on the Gospel: that the gracious will of God is not only the cause but also the *content* of the *assumptio naturae humanae*.³⁶

The Christological dogma and the historical Jesus remain linked for Christian proclamation and for the evocation of re-

³⁶ Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, pp. 222 ff., esp. pp. 229—30. Elert is by no means criticizing the *dogmatic* content of Article VIII of the Formula of Concord. He refers to the entire Christological structure as "the most splendid memorial to the architectonics of the generation" that wrote the Formula of Concord. This is a concrete example, however, of C. F. W. Walther's suggestion that unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions does not preclude the possibility of improving on the "line of argumentation" or basis for a dogmatic formulation.

pentant faith only when the Gospel is the basis. It is no accident, therefore, that in *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* Albert Schweitzer expected the historical Jesus to become an ally in the struggle *against* the Christological dogma.³⁷ Schweitzer felt that with the introduction of the dogma of Jesus as a supernatural being all need for and interest in "the investigation of his life and historical personality were done away with." Chalcedon "prevented the leading spirits of the Reformation from grasping the idea of a return to the historical Jesus."³⁸ Schweitzer can say all of this only because he does not grasp the Gospel of the Reformation. But without that Gospel as its basis the late 19th-century liberal quest was no more successful in finding the historical Jesus and no more capable of evoking fiduciary faith than is the preservation of a dogma which understands the link of the Logos and Jesus only as an ontological paradox.

It is the great merit of Rudolf Bultmann, and in the midst of all valid criticism this dare never be forgotten, that he pointed both Biblical and theological scholarship to the quest for the Gospel in the gospels.³⁹ In that, whatever his intention,

³⁷ Reinhard Slenczka, *Geschichtlichkeit und Personsein Jesu Christi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), is a very perceptive reevaluation of the historical material covered by Schweitzer's volume. In spite of the fact that Slenczka questions Schweitzer's interpretations at numerous points, he fully recognizes that Schweitzer himself placed the historical Jesus in strict opposition to the Christological dogma.

³⁸ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 1—6, esp. p. 3.

³⁹ I refer here to Bultmann's references to "the event of Jesus Christ" as "the revelation of the love of God" (*Kerygma and Myth*, p. 32),

he aided in the rehabilitation of both dogma and history. That Bultmann's students were able to link once again the historical Jesus and Christological dogma comes as no great surprise to those who can penetrate beyond a superficial reading of Bultmann's concerns. Günther Bornkamm's *Jesus of Nazareth* offers us an excellent example of a theological rationale which is able to read the gospels both as history and as Christological confession.

In his rationale Bornkamm points out that Schweitzer's chronicle of the abortive quest for the historical Jesus aided Biblical scholarship to recognize the unique character of the gospels. They are not biographies of Jesus because the church did not feel obliged to preserve what Jesus *was* and what he *had said*. The living and risen Lord was regarded as still speaking and acting in the Christian community. The gospels thus proclaim who Jesus is, not who He was. According to Bornkamm, "the tradition does not repeat and hand on a word once spoken, rather the tradition *is* His Word today."⁴⁰ Up to this point Bornkamm represents no advance beyond the position of Bultmann; and there would still be no reason to try to write an account of what happened before the resurrection. Yet

the "redemptive aspect of the cross of Christ" (p. 37), the "saving efficacy of the cross" (p. 41), and so on. If we can bracket for a moment the more problematic elements in his "program of demythologizing," we will be able to hear the emphasis on the Gospel in his reconstruction of "the event of Redemption" (pp. 22 to 44), in his conversation with Julius Schniewind (pp. 102—3), and in his concluding reply with its Luther references, especially on the justification of the sinner by grace through faith (pp. 191 ff. and 202—11).

⁴⁰ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 16 to 17.

the New Testament itself places considerable weight on that which took place before Easter. Bornkamm recognizes that fact and offers two reasons for it. First, Christianity did not lose itself in a timeless myth, not even a myth which could have been attached to Jesus. Rather, Christianity rejected myth and proclaimed that "the *history* of Jesus" is the once-for-all "history of God with the world." In this way the gospels unite the earthly Jesus with the Christ of Christian proclamation. Christian faith does not generate itself and it does not create its own redemptive myths. It is summoned into existence by events which precede it. Second, the Christian community attached importance to pre-Easter history because it did not abandon itself to what Bornkamm calls eschatological enthusiasm, to living in "glory" as if the Parousia had already come. The summons of the Gospel is the summons to die with and in Christ. This is possible only if the redemptive death of Jesus is an event in which the repentant sinner can participate.⁴¹

Bornkamm knows the great difficulty the historian faces in working with material in which history and Christological confession are so intertwined; but we do not sense as much of that difficulty as we otherwise might because of the more popular nature of his presentation. In Norman Perrin's *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* we are spared none of the arduous work which the historian undertakes in working with gospels in their present form. It may be that Resolution 2-16 did not have this much work in mind when it stated: "The Gospels . . . invite historical

investigation and are to be taken seriously as historical documents." But no matter; Perrin has attempted to do for the teaching of Jesus exactly what the resolution invited.

Initially I was uncomfortable with the stringent criteria on the basis of which Perrin proposes to determine whether a saying *originated* with Jesus. There seemed to be much argument in a circle, with one criterion dependent on rather than reinforcing another. It seemed that the concern for originality could not be fairly applied to determine what someone actually said or taught. It also seemed as if this enormous effort really did not make much difference for contemporary proclamation of the Gospel. But Perrin's criteria produced a work of strict historical investigation; and the results seem to be a pleasant and rewarding surprise. The three criteria which Perrin uses for determining with "reasonable certainty" that a teaching originated with Jesus are as follows:

1. The criterion of dissimilarity: "We must be able to show that the saying comes neither from the Church nor from ancient Judaism."⁴² Perrin is fully aware that with this criterion he may indeed be excluding from consideration many actual sayings of Jesus. But he is persuaded that he has no other choice if he wishes to deal historically with the gospels in their present form. This, it seems to me, is taking inspiration as seriously as history. The Holy Spirit did not give us biographies of Jesus. If we want to deal with the gospels in their own terms (and those, I take it, are the Holy Spirit's terms), then we cannot deal with

⁴² Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 39 ff.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13—27, esp. pp. 23—24.

them as biographies. Nevertheless, there is biography in the gospels, and the criterion of dissimilarity is a necessary, if stringent, way of getting at a limited part of that biography.

2. The criterion of coherence: "Material from the earliest strata of the tradition may be accepted as authentic if it can be shown to cohere with material established as authentic by means of the criterion of dissimilarity."⁴³ This is what I meant about argument in a circle!

3. The criterion of multiple attestation: "Material which is attested in all, or most, of the sources which can be discerned behind the synoptic gospels."⁴⁴ The usefulness of this criterion, says Perrin, is somewhat restricted. It tends "to be more useful in arriving at general characteristics of the ministry and teaching of Jesus than at specific elements in the teaching itself."⁴⁵

These criteria lead Perrin to establish the originality of and then to interpret the parables, the kingdom of God teaching, and the Lord's Prayer tradition. It is difficult to summarize Perrin's findings because they are cast in the framework of close exegesis of numerous texts. However, some features of the teaching of Jesus are evident and clear.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was redemptive, that it was present in His own teaching and activity, that this teaching and activity challenged men as individuals to receive wholeness by recognizing and accepting God's redemption through faith. There is a close relationship between forgiveness and healing in the ministry of

Jesus. Without the healing, the proclamation of the kingdom would have been regarded as "a vain and empty sham."⁴⁶ Both forgiveness and healing were the subject of controversy between Jesus and His contemporaries. In His ministry, therefore, Jesus makes a specific claim about Himself and His activity⁴⁷ and calls for faith.⁴⁸ Jesus understood His ministry to be "a new point of departure quite incompatible with the existing categories of Judaism."⁴⁹ The parable of the prodigal son stands at the center of Jesus' own interpretation of His ministry.⁵⁰ Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners was an enacted parable of forgiving love which called into question the deepest religious-patriotic principles of His contemporaries. It was this act, therefore, which presented the Jewish authorities with both the occasion and the justification for the crucifixion.⁵¹ To claim to be God's new way of dealing with sinners is at the center of Jesus' teaching, healing, and crucifixion. That is the result of Perrin's rigorous historical investigation.

I do not necessarily conclude from this that all historians are to be trusted or that historical investigation has now established the truth of the Gospel. The proper conclusion, it seems to me, is much more modest. The church's confession that the Logos became man in Jesus of Nazareth can derive its content as Gospel from a historical investigation of what Jesus said and did. That is the contribution of historical in-

⁴³ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 130 ff.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 102—3.

vestigation, even if the criteria for such investigation are as stringent as those employed by Perrin. What his investigation discloses is that Jesus spoke and acted as the embodiment of God's forgiveness, calling men to repentance and faith in Him as forgiver. Such historical investigation does not demonstrate that the church's dogma about Jesus is true. It only defines what the church is saying when it confesses that Jesus, the man, is God. Dogma declares that the history of Jesus is the Gospel. In preaching I urge this Gospel upon you as the truth. Only if you entrust yourself to Jesus as God the Forgiver will you know the truth and experience the freedom of the Gospel.

III. CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT ON CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS

This study on the relationship between history and dogma in Christology began with Resolution 2-16, tested its grounding in the Gospel, and disclosed some inadequacy. It seems appropriate, therefore, to conclude with some observations regarding the theological work of synodical conventions.

First, this study might suggest further investigation of other convention statements and theological resolutions. With or without such investigation, however, the Synod might well ask itself whether it should not be very cautious about the application of any theological resolutions to teaching in the Synod. After some recent conventions the ink has hardly been dry on the pages of the convention proceedings before groups and individuals have begun agitating for the application of recently adopted theological resolutions as doctrinal law. Quite apart from the dubious consti-

tutionality of such agitation, this study has raised serious questions about the confessional validity of one significant resolution. The Synod itself reversed a previous convention's action on selective conscientious objection to war. If the validity of these resolutions can be called into question, perhaps closer examination of other resolutions would produce similar results. The Synod has thus far refused to regard its theological statements and resolutions as binding doctrinal law for its member congregations and clergy. Members of Synod have been urged to honor and uphold them only insofar as (*quatenus!*) they agree with the constitutional norm for doctrine and practice. The wisdom of such caution should be even more evident as a result of this study.

Second, this study might prompt us to take renewed notice of the resources in the Lutheran confessional tradition for insightful participation in current theological discussion. The Christological approach of Article III of the Augsburg Confession and that of Luther's two catechisms provides an excellent perspective for dealing with the continuing Christological problems that arise when the two-natures Christology of Chalcedon is used as a Christological point of departure. The usefulness of the Lutheran Confessions should make us more hesitant about requesting new synodical statements. It may well be that the request for new statements on theological issues is really implicit support for those who proclaim the dated irrelevance of the 16th-century formulations. The problem is not so much that there are *lacunae* in the Lutheran Confessions. The problem seems to be that either we are ignorant of our confessional resources or

we are unwilling to accept our actual confessional position. For the time being we might all be better advised to appropriate again the resources of the Lutheran confessional tradition rather than press for synodical conventions to make doctrinal law out of our private and parochial theological opinions.

Third, we ought to reconsider the procedures by which conventions give consideration to theological concerns. If we are going to be attempting a type of conciliar theology, and the persistence of overtures on theological matters seems to make this almost inevitable, then mere reaffirmation of past synodical action seems no more satisfying than hastily adopted statements like Resolution 2-16. It is helpful to remember that the legislative conventions created for governing the Synod were never intended to be the forum for the hard and lengthy work demanded of theological formulation. The practice followed in dealing with position papers prepared by the Commission on Theology and Church

Relations suggests a better alternative. In a number of instances a CTCR document was commended to the Synod for study by one convention before being received and commended to the Synod for guidance by another convention. Such a procedure allows time for further study, analysis, critique, and reflection. The same procedure might be beneficially followed with regard to drafts of theological statements presented to a convention. Such drafts ought not to be adopted by the conventions which first receive them. Rather they ought to be commended to the Synod for comment and critique. They might be reworked and re-commended to the Synod through a series of conventions before finally demonstrating an adequate grounding in the Gospel. Then they will deserve to be taken seriously as contemporary expressions of the church's abiding confession. They could even contribute "to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people."

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