



## **P. Werner Löser, S.J., Frankfurt am Main** **Pluralism in Dogma?**

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"Pluralism" belongs to the signature of our time. It goes on increasing while the unified and graspable spheres of our life that are handed on by tradition seem to be diminishing. This process has also affected our Church and our order. That this is so becomes especially clear when we consider this process in its worldwide dimensions. Some welcome it, others look on it with worry. What significance does church dogma have in this pluralistic world? Is it a counterweight against a spreading pluralism? Or does church dogma itself share in this pluralizing which, tendentially, knows no limits? We will now test out this question by way of an example from that realm of church dogma which, historically and factually, is the incontestably central one: Christological dogma. Our reflections will be presented in three steps: 1) Pluralistic Church; 2) Pluralistic Christology; 3) Pluralistic Dogma? Please note that the headings for the first two sections have no question marks, and that the heading for the third section does have a question mark.

### **1) Pluralistic Church**

The 20th. century, that will come to an end in a few months, has introduced profound changes not only for the world but also for the Church. Christianity has had to learn, and has been able to learn, to correct the guiding image that it had long followed and that centered around the attributes "one" and "unique." This change opened up to Christianity new possibilities of being with one another: confessionally conditioned multiplicity has now just as extended a right to existence as culturally conditioned multiplicity. For the Catholic Church the decisions of Vatican II signaled the decisive breakthrough. In 1896, Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Satis cognitum* had laid out in impressive fashion the image of the one and only Catholic Church. There is a sentence in this encyclical which programmatically expresses this image: "He (Christ), who founded just one single Church, had also willed it to be 'united,' and indeed in such a way that all who are to belong to her, united with each other by the innermost bonds, should constitute just one people, one kingdom,

one body." When one examines, both in this encyclical and in subsequent official texts of the Church, what precisely is meant by the concepts *una* and *unica*, one sees that: *una* - "one" means "uniform," and *unica* - "unique" means "exclusive." According to the understanding of the time, the Church was guaranteed as a uniform and exclusive reality by its hierarchical, structured form, and by the pope as its visible center of unity. In the encyclical we read: "Since the divine Founder willed that the church be one in faith, in governance, and in community, he chose Peter and his successors as the foundation and central point of this unity." The foundation of such unity was, in addition, a church teaching built on the foundation of tightly interrelated dogmas. In fact, the Catholic Church from Trent up to the middle of our century was characterized by a broad uniformity in all essential dimensions of its form and its life. This marked the experience which Catholics of that time had with their Church, some in happy and others in painful ways. Our Catholic church of that time claimed to be - in exclusivity - the only Church that could rightly call upon Christ. This encyclical gave this a very sharp formulation: "There is only one Church of Christ, and that for all ages. They who live outside of it fail to fulfill the will and command of Christ; since they have abandoned the path of salvation they are on the way to damnation." The new vision that got expressed in Vatican II consists also in the fact that the concepts *una* and *unica* are given a more open meaning. Now "one" no longer means "uniform" but "pluriform": unity in multiplicity. One can read the history of the Church after Vatican II as the history of the effort to make more room for plurality in its inner spaces. And the concept "only" now no longer means "exclusive" but "including," "inclusive": uniqueness in openness.

That the church should be a living unity in plurality and a uniqueness in openness has a profound theological grounding. It has to do with the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ is the new People of God from Jews and pagans. Israel was in an emphatic way one people, the one people of God. Yahweh, the one God, chose it to belong to Himself. It lives in one land into which God Himself had led it. It lived under one Law that God Himself had given it to guide its life. Through Jesus and according to Him, the people of God is one people of Jews and gentiles. No longer does one have to be a member of a Jewish family so as also to be able to belong to the People of God. Through the giving of his life on the cross He tore down once and for all the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:1-11). Finally he, the one risen from the dead, sent out His disciples into all the world for them to proclaim the gospel to all nations (Matt 28:16-20). Now access to the People of God and to the salvation that God gives to those who belong to Him and follow His way is open to all human beings whether Jew or gentile. Through Jesus and after Him, membership in the new People of God is opened up through the baptism towards which through the men and women who have come to faith in Jesus. This new People of God of Jews and gentiles is no longer characterized only by unity but also by plurality. It is no longer at home in just one land, but is at home everywhere in the world - as the Letter of Diognetus in the early days of the Church already explained -: in Israel, in Asia Minor, in Greece, and finally all over the globe, and thus in India as well. At the same time the importance of the local community was growing. This is where the church concretely comes into being. Thus Paul can speak of the "Church of God that is in Corinth" (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:2). In corresponding fashion there is the Church that is in Ephesus, the Church that is in Rome, and later, too, the church that is in Buenos Aires, in New York, in Kinshasa, and in

Kottayam. It is the one Church that is present in the local churches. Each of these churches has its own history and its own tasks. Each thus unfolds its own profile. There arises a with-one-another of unity and plurality. In the first chapters of the Johannine Book of Revelation there is mention of seven communities. Each has its own angel; to each community the Son of Man sends a letter. He enters into their particular situation and exhorts and encourages them. In these seven communities lives the one Church; for the communities all come together in the fact that they are related in unity with the one Jesus, the Son of Man, who, for His part, is their judge and their savior.

## 2) Pluralistic Christology

Is this interconnection of unity and plurality in the Church also reflected in the realm of doctrine? The answer can only be a yes. We will now check this out in its central sphere, i.e., in the realm of Christology. Even the New Testament presents differently accentuated Christologies side by side: the Christology of Paul, the Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Christology of the Johannine writings, the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels. Today, two thousand years later, now that the Church in Africa has taken significant steps to become more and more an African Church, and that the Church in Asia is also at work to become more and more an Asian Church, we acknowledge with interest and respect that specifically African Christologies and specifically Asian Christologies have been worked out and continue to be worked out. Michel Fédou in his *Regards asiatiques sur le Christ* (Paris: Desclée, 1998) has recently made possible a look into the Asian forms of Christology. He takes the reader along on a journey through all the Asiatic countries in which the Christian Churches have already gotten established and in which Christian theologians have already begun to formulate anew their understanding of Jesus of Nazareth. The first country whose christological fruits Michel Fe'dou describes is India. He devotes to it three of his six chapters and thus indicates that the Indian efforts are of special importance. In the first of these chapters - "Christologies indiennes: le contexte des religions" - he deals with the Christologies that have come from dialogue with the Indian religions. It is no wonder that, in the process, the question of not just the relative, but also of the absolute, uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth gets very frequently raised. In the second of the chapters belonging to India-"Christologies indiennes: le context de l'injustice" - Fédou describes the Christologies that are something like an Indian variant of liberation theology and are above all interested in the relevance of the Christian message for the liberation of the poor in India. With the leitperspectives of these two first Indian chapters one has already named the two basic orientations of all Asiatic Christologies. One is dealing either with Christologies whose peculiarity arises out of dialogue with one's respective religious partners, or one is dealing with Christologies that want to give an answer to the often difficult social situations of the people. The third India chapter outlines the Christ-understanding of Aloysius Pieris. What is special in his efforts is that he interrelates the two ways of Indian (and Asian) Christology that we have just sketched. The other chapters of the book are devoted to the new Christologies that have arisen in the other religions of Asia, in Korea and in the Philippines, in Japan and in China.

More than ten years ago Yvette Aklé edited a volume of essays that presented the new ways of

the African theologians in their attempts to sketch out an African Christology: *Chemins de la christologie africaine* (Paris: Desclée, 1986). In the different articles it becomes clear that there are specifically African ways of understanding the message of Jesus. An especially central category is that of "life." In view of this, the cosmic and mythic dimensions of the image of Jesus rise to a new level. Some authors reach back to African concepts of experience in order to make them fruitful for Christological reflection. Jesus then appears as "Chieftain," as "Ancestor and Fider," as "Master of Initiation," as "Healer." The authors are concerned to mediate between the biblical and ecclesiastical Jesus tradition on the one hand, and the new African attempts at rapprochement. Everything breathes freshness and reflects the joy of the new. Not everything is already mature. This needs time. The book shows that many men and women in Africa have discovered for themselves and continue to discover the gospel of Jesus Christ and that they are taking it up in impressive originality and independence as a decisive power in their lives.

So this is what is seen in this glance at the Asian and African proposals for Christology: the churches which, in the context of their cultures, have begun to go their own way, have also already produced new theological concepts. To the Church, that is characterized not just by unity but also by plurality, corresponds also its theology: in all times and in all places, theology too has context-conditioned accents; it too has a pluriform face.

### **3) Pluralistic Dogma?**

Here now we have the decisive question: Does this pluriformity also include everything that is found in the realm of dogma? Does pluriformity of Christology mean also a pluriformity of Christological dogma? This question cannot be answered with a quick Yes or No. The answer depends on the presupposed concept of dogma. This must be unfolded step by step. In doing so it must be taken into account that the reality dogma is best understood when one understands it as an element in the process of the interpretation of the Bible.

#### **a) Dogma and Interpretation of the Bible**

The Bible itself provides the dimensions of its appropriate interpretation. As we describe these dimensions-in three steps-the realm of dogma stands out in a particular place.

The Bible is to be interpreted as a book that was composed in a particular historical situation, and that gives witness to historical situations in which God has revealed Godself to the world.

God, in historical events, has revealed Himself and graciously turned towards his people and the world. In texts and in books that were composed in different times and under different conditions, these events are remembered. The decisive event, of which the New Testament speaks, is Jesus of Nazareth in the history of His life. This life ended on the cross and in the grave, but was rescued-at Easter-by God's powerful act. The New Testament gives witness to the history of Jesus of Nazareth and to the events flowing from it. It is not about "what always was, but never happened," that is, about myths, but about "that which has taken place among us," as is written in

the first verse of Luke's Gospel. It is implicated in the concreteness and also the limitation of everything that is historical. It all takes place in specific places and in specific times. Those involved speak specific languages, they operate within a specific world of ideas. The Bible shares in the historicity and, with that, in the limitation of the events to which it gives witness in the most varied of ways. It contains reports and accounts, but also speaks in parables; it records letters, but also offers prayer texts. Especially noteworthy is the text form of the gospels. Whoever wishes to grasp the meaning of the biblical text in the most precise way possible will do well to apply those methods which have been developed in the historical and intellectual sciences for the interpretation of old texts. In the application of these historical-philological methods, account will be taken of the fact that the biblical texts testify to events of the past, and are themselves texts that arose under earlier, limited conditions. At work in all this is a respect for the fact that God has revealed Himself into history, that God communicated Himself in events that, as historical, exhibit the same space-time limitations.

This self-revealing God is also, as triune, the one God. The one God shares Himself with the world in a revelation. The Bible that testifies to this one revelation, can, with all the multiplicity of its texts and indeed even with its division into the Old and the New Testament, ultimately be only one book with one inner unity. The assertion that the Bible is characterized by an inner unity is thus theologically unavoidable. Can this unity also be discovered by looking at the text? It cannot be denied that the books and texts of the New Testament are of quite diverse character. And yet, by applying the same method that allows one to see the diversity of the New Testament texts, one can also make out an inner unity of the New Testament. From critical and text historical analyses have shown that there is a type of short texts that can be described as the original confessional formulas. They can be described as the original texts of credal praise, or even the original dogmas. These texts are found scattered throughout most of the New Testament writings. And they are numerous. Many of these formulas of confession are acclamations, e.g., "Jesus is the Lord" (Phil 2:11). Others are very brief summaries of the message of Jesus Christ, e.g., "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the twelve" (1 Cor 15:5). Still others are hymns which were apparently sung in the earliest liturgies of the Church, e.g., "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men ..." (Phil 2:11). These brief texts of credal praise are the oldest text elements of the Christian tradition. They already existed before being woven into the later, longer texts in which they have come down to us. There are good reasons to assume that they reach back into the first years of the primitive Christian community. In these texts, Christian faith in Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, speaks out in its most original form. Whoever agrees with the confession they contain belongs to the Christian community. Notice now that these original texts of credal praise have an exclusively Christological orientation. They speak only of Jesus of Nazareth. He is in person the decisive event in which God reveals Himself and enters into history. The original texts of credal praise or, if you will, original dogmas, are the first texts handed on in the

Christian Church. All of the more comprehensive and then also thematically other-oriented texts of

the New Testament-called forth by concrete historical and cultural situations-are unfoldings of these primitive Christian confessional statements. It is from these that the greater and later writings come. They go back to these more primitive texts. In this sense one can say: the Christologically oriented original texts of credal praise hold together the pluriform writings of the New Testament. It is by means of these text elements that the New Testament is characterized by an inner unity.

The Bible is to be interpreted as a book whose truth, that calls for our existential and faithful response, draws us into its demands to be searched for and found.

The interpretation of the Bible is by no means finished when it has laid simply laid out times, places and courses of events from the past. For what was taking place in those events is precisely that which people of all times and places- including us here and now-would like to have happen to themselves, so that they too could make it their own and find in it their salvation. Modern hermeneutical philosophy has taught us to distinguish between the factual and the true. The true is what makes a claim on people here and now. When the true encounters human beings and they open themselves to it, they are changed. But no one of us comes to a believing understanding or to an understanding belief of the truth presented by the Bible unless, when we are addressed by the word of the Bible, we are both open and ready to have claims made on us and to be moved. Such readiness begins with the condition of an existential being-moved, which is likewise what the Bible is all about. The interpretation of the Bible reaches its fulfillment in the faith that corresponds to the claim-from within the Bible itself~f the self-revealing God.

These ideas have been taken by and large from modern hermeneutical philosophy, now taken up into the field of theology, and especially into the realm of questions that arise in biblical exegesis. Does the Bible itself contain indications that it indeed wants to be interpreted in a contemporary way, and to speak to today's men and women, and to inspire to faith?

An especially important indication lies in the fact that the Bible is a written document. In the first years of its history the young Church possessed in written form only the Scriptures of Israel. The Christological first texts of credal praise and their first unfolding, and the Jesus-tradition too, were first handed on and spread about orally. But then came their writing down in fixed form. This written fixing of what, at first, was handed on only orally prevent it, first of all, from losing its precision and from getting mixed with the arbitrary and the fantastic, as actually did happen in the circle of those texts that were taken up into the Bible and as echoed in the apocryphal writings. But even more importantly, in the transition from at first orally witnessed revelation into Scripture, this very process takes up and unfolds an important dimension of the revelation of God: namely, that it is really intended for all peoples of all times and places. The historical revelation event comes home to the whole world by way of the Scripture which gives witness to it and which stands universally ready and willing to be faithfully interpreted. Hans Georg Gadamer once wrote: "In the form of writing (Scripture) everything is handed on for every present" (*Wahrheit und Methode*, [Tübingen 1970, 367]). But even more, in the process by which tradition becomes Scripture, even the contents or, more precisely the theological profile-of the individual writings are matured and

solidified. Thus the reader and interpreter of the New Testament now comes up against, for example, a theology of Paul, or of John, or of Mark. And connected with this comes also the unfolding of the different text forms we find in the Bible: the gospel as especially striking form, the letters, the hymns, the apocalypses. An unarbitrary contemporary reading of the Bible is primarily possible because the Bible exists in its particular special form: in its form and in its forms, but also in its specific message and in the specific components of its individual texts.

The Bible is to be interpreted as a book that creates the Church as its sphere of understanding, and that opens up its meaning only to those who live within the Church and in dialogue with its history.

The appropriate interpretation of the Bible also has an ecclesial dimension. It takes place not only in word and text. It also happens in the liturgy of the Church; in the personal prayer of Christians; in church customs; in doctrine, whose ever new unfolding is entrusted to the theologians; in canon law; in art; and above all in catechesis and preaching. In all that it does, the Church is interpreting the Bible. Everything in this also has an historical component. One can even say: the history of the Church is the history of the interpretation of the Bible.

As a rule, all this seems to be quite unproblematic. It is a point of controversy, to be sure, whether and how the interpretation of the Bible taking place today is tied to the dogmas of the Church. Do not dogmas, that were formulated in earlier times and under conditions now foreign to us, now lay chains on the present-day readers and interpreters of Scripture that make it impossible for them to be true to their task? In answering this question I take my lead from Heinrich Schlier who, in his essay "Was heißt Auslegung der Schrift-What Does Interpretation of Scripture Mean," in: *Besinnung auf das Neue Testament* (Freiburg: Herder 1964, 562) offers some most helpful insights. He proceeds in three steps.

In his initial reflection he points out the fact that it belongs to the peculiarity of historical events, and of the texts that open up and preserve them, to open up a space for themselves in which they find an echo, that is, in which they are observed, attended to, pondered, and judged. This holds also for the events of the salvation- and revelation-history of the Old and New Testaments and their texts. They call forth the Church as the space of their being attended to and reflected on. The Church, for its part, preserves through the ages the events and texts on which it is based and in whose acceptance it guarantees its identity. That is why it places them together in the canon of the Holy Scripture. This can be formulated as: the Church is the place of resonance that the word of God witnessed in the Bible makes for itself and that it needs to become audible in history.

This is followed by a second reflection. The dogmatic way of thinking is not foreign even to the New Testament. Fixed statements of the gospel message surface not only in its late writings; they also, as we pointed out above, precede even historically and factually, the rest of the texts of the New Testament in the form of original texts of credal affirmation. The confessional formulas of the primitive Church already have the marks that characterize the later dogmas of the Church: we are talking about credal statements in which the Church expresses in a binding way the very ground given to itself. Both the New Testament writings in their unfolded form as well as the later dogmas

of the Church make explicit, make precise, and present what was already said in the grounding formulas of confession. That means that the dogmatic way of thinking is not fundamentally foreign to the thinking about the faith that is already found in the New Testament. Whoever is interpreting the New Testament is, in so doing, already dealing with dogma in its earliest form.

Now a third reflection. It has to do with the meaning that a church dogma proclaimed after the New Testament has for the interpretation of the Bible. Faith reflection in the Church has the task of thinking through, in an integrating way and in the context of contemporary questions, the facts and circumstances that come to expression in exegesis and biblical theology. It has to do this in conversation with all the partners who could bring light to the matter. In the history of the Church, as we know, reflection based on the truth of exegetical uncovered facts and circumstances has again and again led to the setting down of the results in dogma. Future interpretation of Scripture—that was and is the meaning of this process—should no longer be able to prescind from what has been so fixed. The decisive question now is: what is the meaning of such a dogmatization of the results. Can it be justified in view of the nature and claim of the Bible? In a brilliant text that has now become famous Heinrich Schlier once answered the question this way:

"Through its methods and its 'listening understanding' exegesis discovers what Scripture says. This is then handed over to the Church's faith-thinking for deeper reflection and to be thought through even further. And perhaps, on this or that point, it thereby thinks something through to its end. Such thinking-through-to-the-end which is manifest in the faith consensus of the Church can, if the hour requires and allows, lead to being fixed in dogma. But this does not mean the end of thought but the elevation of the thought, the thought about, the thought through, and the here and now thought- through-to-its-end into the incontestably and unforgettably memorable. For exegesis this does not mean the suspension of its work in the context of this or that text, but a notification of the decisive thinking at the starting point of its new reflection" (60 f.).

Thus, for the Scripture-interpreting Church, dogma is something that is incontestably and unforgettably memorable. That is why, in its Scripture interpretation in the here and now, the Church is dependent on dogma and tied to it. Dogma understood in this way lies within the line of what the Bible itself intends to affirm and is thus not foreign to it. Dogma, understood as the "abidingly memorable" is characterized in form by its conceptual clarity and firmness. That is the only way it can unfold its power. But this still does not exclude a development of dogma—as the investigation of the history of dogma has shown in many ways. An especially eloquent example of this is found in the history of Christology of the ancient Church. The Council of Nicea (325) stated the *homoiosios to patri*, or, the *vere Deus* about Jesus. In recognition of the validity of this statement the council of Chalcedon (451) saw itself not only in the position but also obliged to enlarge this with it *homoousios hemin*, or, *vere homo*. This is a further development of a dogmatic statement. This process is repeated in a similar way in the history of theology. The validity of a dogmatic statement and its further development do not exclude each other. In a certain respect this is a possible indicator of what could be meant by "pluralism in dogma."

## **b) Dogma and the Unity of the Church**

Dogma holds Christians to a common reading and interpretation of the Bible and thus contributes to the preservation of the unity of the Church. Those who know themselves as bound to dogma enter by that very fact into the circle of the many who in common become aware of and accept the revelation of God encountered in the Scripture. Those who break away from dogma fall into the danger of a merely individual and even arbitrary interpretation of the Bible. History offers an example of this. In the Council of Nicea in the year 325, in the context of its struggle with contemporary Arianism and Hellenism, the Church decided on a binding commitment to the trinitarian image of God as the summit of biblical speech about God. This was the meaning of the statement that Jesus Christ is "of the same nature as the Father." But this dogmatic decision was in the following period - at least at first - not generally accepted -, so that the church of the fourth century was dominated by lack of peace and disunity. A double synod, one in Rimini and the other in Seleucia - in the year 361 - thought to get control of the situation by taking back the dogma of Nicea and making the recommendation that one should replace the concept of "identity of nature" with the concept of "similarity" and, in the search for the more precise meaning of what was meant by this, to look in the Bible. But this obviously well-intended answer to the Church's situation then led not to peace but made the problems much, much worse. Rarely has the Church lived through an epoch with so much controversy and disunity as that of this double synod. Only when the Council of Constantinople in the year 381 unmistakably confirmed the lasting validity of the dogmatic decision of Nicea did peace and unity gradually return again to the Church. The events in the fourth century are an indicator of something fundamental: Without a recognition of the common commitment to dogma in the process of biblical interpretation it will hardly be possible to preserve the unity of the Church through the ages; for agreement in the interpretation of the Bible is among the most effective factors that assure the unity of the Church. There is a widespread fear that being bound to dogma would, from the outset and inappropriately, limit the open space into which the Spirit of God could and would like to lead the Bible-reading and -interpreting Christian. But this fear would ultimately only be a grounded one if it were based on some other concept of dogma than the one just described, according to which Dogma is the "abidingly to-be-remembered" that has come from the very process of the interpretation of the Bible. So understood, dogma protects in its breadth the space opened up by God's revelation, and wards off every limiting and selecting - meaning, ultimately, heretical - interpretation of the Bible. In addition, this also enunciates a criterion for the correct and life-nourishing activity of the ecclesiastical magisterium. One can recall at this point that, a few years ago, The Commission for Faith and Order of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, after extensive consultation, decided to confirm once again the dogma of Constantinople that is, its creed - as the decisive text that holds the churches together beyond all confessional and cultural borders. This was to highlight once again its inter-Christian ecumenical significance. (See "Confessing the One Faith. An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)," Faith and Order Paper 153 (Geneva, 1991).

## **c) Dogma as Critical Criterion for the Doctrine and Life of the Church**

In the course of time the Church has learned that it can, indeed must, be inculturated. But lest Christian identity become obscured and thus unrecognizable in the process of inculturation, there need to be solid criteria to assist in discerning the possible from the not possible and the meaningful from the non meaningful. Among these criteria dogma also has its place. It is not a roadblock to new and serious inculturation. But it does call for caution when these paths lead to dead-ends or detours. Thus it develops an important critical potency. We experienced this at the beginning of the Third Reich in Germany. At that time, under the influence of Adolf Hitler and his party and government, the Deutsche Evangelische Kirche (German Evangelical Church) was formed. It lived totally for the purpose of being the Evangelical Church in that Germany that now followed the National-Socialistic (Nazi) ideology. This German Evangelical Church took its impulse from the "German Christians" who greeted Hitler as the long-awaited savior and who read the Bible in the light of the National Socialistic racial ideology. The majority of the German Evangelical Christians of the time went along with this. The historian of theology Emmanuel Hirsch was recognized as the strongest and most gifted representative of the "German theology" represented by the German Christians. It could be easily shown that this theology in its way and in its time supported a program of the inculturation of theology. Today we know that in its time it misused the otherwise welcome concerns of inculturation. They supported the Third Reich theologically and ecclesiastically. But a small group of Christians at that time recognized that the way of the German Evangelical Church was a wrong way. They came together in the "Confessing Church" and expressed their understanding of the faith and of the Church in the 1934 "Theological Barmen Declaration." They took the path of resistance which, for some of them ended in martyrdom (e.g. for Dietrich Bonhoeffer). When one once again reads the "Theological Barmen Declaration," one recognizes that it has been formulated from an unerring bond to the gospel and to dogma. This example from the heavy history of the Church in German can help us to practice restraint when church dogma in its form and content is called into question. This by no means argues against the Church's efforts at inculturation. It only points out that dogma can unfold its own both critical and productive power when such efforts lead off in the wrong direction.

In conclusion, can we speak of a pluralism in (Christological) dogma? If we are not talking about relatively minor differences in language, nor about the possibility of a further development of dogma, we should preferably avoid this.

Not only the New Testament original texts of credal praise, but also the early Christian *regula fidei*, and also the great Christological dogmas of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon, are characterized by singleness and firmness of meaning. That is precisely how they can exercise an indispensable function: to make possible the indeed quite possible and desired pluriformity of the Church and of its confession and understanding of Christ, and also to protect the Church from breaking down into arbitrariness and confusion.