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PLURALITY OF THEOLOGIES:
A PARADIGMATIC SKETCH

There has been a great deal of talk recently among historians of Christian reflection about the problem and the possibility of a 'plurality of theologies'. Directives from such eminent spokesmen as Karl Rahner have underscored the need for a rationale by which to demonstrate that the presence of different orientations does not necessarily violate the unitary character of a Christian tradition.¹ Other Catholic thinkers have offered arguments for ascribing a relative status to the 'Thomistic style' of theology, and cases have been made for the inclusion of additional schematic frameworks.² Beyond all of this, there are elegant suggestions in the writings of Bernard

¹ Some of Karl Rahner's most instructive comments in this regard were given in response to questions by Fr John S. Dunne at the Notre Dame Conference on 'The Theological Issues of Vatican II', March 25, 1966 (see *Vatican II. An Interfaith Appraisal*, edited by John H. Miller. University of Notre Dame Press, 1966, p. 607), following Rahner's paper on 'The Task of Theology after Vatican II'. Rahner's attitude is also implicit in the following observation in his essay 'Exegesis and Dogmatic Theology', in Herbert Vorgrimler ed., *Dogmatic vs. Biblical Theology* (Baltimore. Helicon, 1964): 'The Church has always admitted that there are different schools of theology with different outlooks, indeed, that there should be. From the point of view of pure logic, the conflicting principles of these schools could under certain circumstances be dangerous to the faith, even objectively. Two assertions from conflicting schools cannot be true from the same stand-point at the same time. But this danger to the faith has never been felt subjectively. And rightly so. Everyone knows that, historically, each of the conflicting schools maintained whole-heartedly the basic principles which are to be maintained in such open questions, and wished to maintain them. The theologians could therefore be left to their debate without any misgivings. The Church did not intervene, but left room for freedom, to the benefit of theology' (p. 59).

² See the discussion of this point in Eugene Fontinell, 'Reflections on Faith and Metaphysics', in *Cross Currents*, vol. XVI, no. 1, 1966, pp. 15-40, and in the unsigned collective statement in *Wort und Wahrheit*, April 1965, reprinted as 'Priests for a New Era', in *Cross Currents*, vol. XV, no. 3, 1965, pp. 257-273, which reads in part as follows: 'The resulting intellectual crisis is further intensified by the fact that the traditional marriage of theology to one specific philosophy—Aristotelian scholasticism—is foundering. The cement between philosophical sub-structure and theological super-structure is crumbling. Philosophically engaged Catholics no longer allow themselves to be glued to Thomism or one of the related scholastic systems. . . . Theologians today are convinced, as before, that theology can only be worked out with the conceptual instrumentation offered by philosophy, and that a theological synthesis without a co-ordinated philosophy is inconceivable—but that many philosophies not inimical to revealed doctrine, nor, therefore to a Christian theology, are possible. The idea of a single, true Christian philosophy, justified by a similarly monolithic theology must be abandoned. It is not *philosophia* as a perfect closed system that is *perennis*; continuity can and should characterise the ever-continuing effort at philosophising which is compatible with faith. This means that there cannot be an "eternal" symbiosis of a single theology and a single philosophy' (pp. 259, 60). See also Gerald A. McCool, 'Philosophical Pluralism and an Evolving Thomism', in *Continuum*. Vol. II, No. 1, 1964, pp. 3-16, and Johannes B. Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik* (Munich: Kosel, 1962).

Loneragan (and others who have come under his influence) that there is sufficient theoretical, even metaphysical, basis to justify plurality in theology.¹ The claim would seem to be that different theological orientations (e.g. those of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and maybe even Teilhard de Chardin, etc.) are expressive of distinct fields of vision which are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The aspect of this multifarious issue that I would like to treat in the following pages is the way in which plurality was created by theology's dependence upon a number of philosophical schemes. I shall contend that the possibility of plurality was implicit in the theological use of philosophical patterns for expressing Christian affirmations. If theology is a kind of hybrid (or, as Henry Duméry suggests, the choosing of a philosophy in view of faith's reflection)² a number of its components become potential sources of the differences between orientations. For this reason differences between theological approaches may not imply differences in matters of faith or religious affirmation at all. Instead they may refer to movements inherent in distinct forms, or patterns, of reflection. The source of difference (and, perhaps, also of plurality) might be rooted in the schematic patterns into which faith's affirmations have been incorporated. In addition, I shall contend that plurality in theology is not merely a possibility. It is not simply the result of the fact that a number of philosophical patterns do, indeed, qualify as frames by means of which religious affirmations can be ordered and articulated. Beyond that, plurality is a necessity—a necessity by virtue of the impossibility of capturing the fundamental *disposition* of Christian affirmation within the *form* of any one of the suitable philosophical schematic frameworks.

I shall approach this subject by referring to a methodological interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* which appears to provide an unusually provocative parallel case-study. To be sure, Robert S. Brumbaugh, the author of *Plato on the One*,³ has not designed his work with 'theological overtones'. His efforts are carefully exegetical and analytical. Yet, perhaps because this is the *Parmenides*, the analysis he sets forth possesses striking significance with respect to our subject. He argues, for example, that the *Parmenides* can be

¹ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan's suggestions regarding a 'universal viewpoint' in his *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York. Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), pp. 564 ff.; Lonergan's note on 'Metaphysics as Horizon', in *Gregorianum*, vol. XLIV, 1963, pp. 307–318; and Michael Novak, 'The Philosophical Roots of Religious Unity', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. III, no. 1, 1966, pp. 113–129.

² Henry Duméry's definition, in *Critique et Religion* (Paris. Sedes, 1957), p. 271, is placed in the following context: 'Ainsi, les responsabilités sont mieux définies: la foi transcende tous les systèmes; mais, sans recours à un système, elle ne saurait recevoir une expression cohérente au plan intellectuel. Dans ce sens, une théologie, c'est d'abord le choix d'une philosophie en vue de "refléchir" la foi.' The relation between philosophy and religion is the subject of the discussion with Duméry recorded in the *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, vol. LXIX, no. 2, 1965.

³ Robert S. Brumbaugh, *Plato on the One: The Hypotheses in the 'Parmenides'* (New Haven. Yale University Press, 1961).

taken, at least in part, as a formal index to the systems which, perhaps incidentally, have appeared in western philosophy. The hypotheses (denoting relations between the one and the many) which serve as the basis for the exercise in Part Two of the dialogue, Brumbaugh suggests, can be taken as a paradigm representing typical notions of schematic order. He further sees Plato contending that *dianoia* presupposes that each hypothesis, though incomplete if taken in isolation from the others, is necessary to a fuller explication of *participation*. For our purposes the inference might be, and in ways that I shall further illustrate, that theological patterns must be understood in a similar way, that is, as forms of order which imply distinct relations of a 'one' and a 'many'. If this be valid, it appears that the formative elements of theological reflection can be identified (i.e. in terms of the determinants of constituted reflection). And, if the formative elements are identifiable, access may also be available to the sources of difference between various theological styles. Since it appears that it is as necessary to theology to articulate *participation* as it is to philosophy, one may here be in the presence of a situation in which distinct patterns of theological reflection are not mutually exclusive, but, rather, depend upon each other. In following up these suggestions I do not propose to argue that theology too is a kind of footnote to Plato. Yet, it would not be surprising should it turn out that way, provided, that is, that the footnote denotes methodological rather than historical influence.

I

The context in which it is conceivable to transpose insights from western philosophy into ingredients for Christian theology is the functional relationship of 'Being and Becoming' to 'God and the World'.¹ In the classical age the former was of dominant concern and formative capacity to philosophy just as the latter was the determinative centre to which theology refers. The compatibility between the two relationships made theology possible. From Greek philosophy Christian theology received its determinant structure(s); in Christian theology Greek philosophy was shaped, sometimes altered, by specific kerygmatic affirmations. Throughout the history of the association of the formative relationships the influence has been reciprocal. The Christian kerygma possessed a constructive effect upon the shape of those philosophical patterns with which it was associated. And, in like manner, the schematic patterns, in various ways, had influence upon the content of Christian theology. The fittingness between scheme and kerygma refers fundamentally to the suitability and propriety of conceiving the Being-Becoming relationship to be the framework for the articulation of Christian affirmations.

¹ A fuller expression of the correlation of these relationships in early Christian theology is presented in my article ' "Being and Becoming" and "God and the World": Whitehead's Account of Their Early Association', in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, vol. 63, November 1965, pp. 572-590.

By virtue of its insight into the basis upon which the disciplines of Greek philosophy and Christian theology were later correlated, Plato's *Parmenides* is particularly instructive. As Brumbaugh interprets it, its classification of relations between 'one' and 'many' contains in rudimentary form the formative elements by which philosophical patterns are fashioned, and to which, we add, religious affirmations have been attached. This is not to say that the *Parmenides* contains some latent capacity to sketch theological systems out in advance, as it were, as in some aprioristic manner. That kind of hint must be tempered by the constructive, and non-formally creative, influences of kerygma upon scheme. But it is to suggest that the rudiments of systematic reflection can be isolated, and that types of formal order can be prefigured as long as certain commitments are made. The fundamental commitment has to do with the way in which the determinative pole is conceived to order *relata* (or that which it determines). What one discovers in the *Parmenides*—again, at least in part—is an outline of typical patterns of formal determination. Because of the way in which he conceives the relation between Being and Becoming, Plato contends that the dominant relationship must be an asymmetrical one. Because it is asymmetrical, its expression requires a number of formulations of the relation of 'one' to 'many'. Finally, an art of normative measure is able to sense the necessity of each of the hypotheses and the manner according to which they are interconnected.

Christian theology is also committed to an asymmetry. That is to say, its formative relation between God and world is conceived in an asymmetrical way.¹ To affirm that God is alone good, and that the world's goodness is derivative, and, at the same time, to affirm that the world is in some sense good in itself is to contend that the dependence of world upon God is not identical with the dependence of God upon world. But the dependencies do indeed run in 'both directions'. It is this asymmetry between God and world which is implicit in the Christian doctrine of creation. The same regulative form is expressive of Christian affirmation concerning incarnation: in the classical terminology the relation between *natures* in the person of the Christ is conceived according to an asymmetrical pattern. Because that pattern cannot be articulated fully except by means of the conjoining of a number of affirmations (which, when taken separately, appear to be mutually exclusive), asymmetry provokes an inclusion of a variety of distinct starting points. Committed to asymmetry in order to conceive participation between

¹ For evaluations of the influence of asymmetry upon Christian theological formulation, see T. Andre Audet, 'Orientations théologiques chez Saint Irénée', in *Traditio* vol. I, no. 1, 1943, pp. 25-54; Claude Tresmontant, *La Métaphysique du Christianisme et la Naissance de la Philosophie Chrétienne* (Paris. Seuil, 1961); William A. Christian, 'God and the World', in *Journal of Religion*, vol. XXVIII, no. 4, 1948, pp. 255-262; and William A. Christian, 'The Creation of the World', in Roy Battenhouse ed., *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (New York. Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 315-342.

God and world, theological patterns also appear to be regulated by the *dianoia* which the *Parmenides*' theses exhibit.

More precisely, the selective relationships between one and many in the eight hypotheses (four dominant, and four their respective contraries) can also function as 'theological axioms'. In each instance a pattern of determination is specified as the one orders *relata* in distinctive ways.

"The "one" first appears as a transcendent, wholly self-sufficient ontological principle, in Hypothesis 1, and as such disconnected from every appearance of plurality; in Hypothesis 3, it appears as the others than the one, which we can recognize as "just the other forms"—that is, as closed formal structures related in part-whole patterns, but transcended by some unifying principle; in Hypothesis 5 the "nonexistent one" which still stands in relations is projected into relation with a world of physical process as a structural abstract, nonexistent "possibility"; in Hypothesis 7 the hard particularity of a single minimum particle or symbol is postulated as a surrogate for any higher type of unity."¹

It is conceivable that the 'one' in Hypothesis 1 can be identified with that 'transcendent, wholly self-sufficient' God whose relation with the world is characteristic of a Neoplatonist outlook. It is also possible to construe Hypothesis 5 in terms of a 'process theology' in which the 'non-existent one' is identified as the God whose relation to world is understood as a 'possibility' upon which all else depends. These and similar applications of other hypotheses can be seen as illustrative extensions of Brumbaugh's suggestion:

'It is illuminating to think of these options as offering philosophies in which a transcendent entity, a specific form, a process, and an element, respectively, are the units of existence with which philosophy is concerned.'²

Though a speculative exercise in correlating options with actual instances may be both intriguing and fruitful, even at this stage of our examination, a number of transitional steps are required before an analysis of 'possible metaphysical axioms' can be transposed with clarity into the theological domain. As suggested earlier, the basis upon which the transposition can occur is the compatibility between two formative relations, that is, 'Being and Becoming' and 'God and the World'. Classical philosophy and the earliest examples of systematic Christian theology were not identical in content even though they were ordered by common schematic patterns. The relationship formative of philosophy provided a basis of order by means of which religious affirmations could be integrated. The 'synthesis' was effected by a coincidence of structures: an asymmetrical fashioning of the formative theological relationship was also implicit in kerygmatic affirmations concerning the way in which God has referred himself to the world. There was a disposition toward asymmetry in the early Christian pronouncements regarding the Creator's ordering of creation as well as in the participational understanding of the relationship of Being to Becoming in

¹ Brumbaugh, *op. cit.* p. 209.

² *Ibid.* p. 207.

Platonic philosophy. But despite this compatibility, and the means by which it was effected, theology was never identical with philosophy—and never could be. Nor was it ever absolutely free simply to choose from available schematic options. Its commitment to those same kerygmatic affirmations influenced its selections of ‘axioms’ as well as its understanding of the way in which the axioms’ respective ‘definitive elements’ should be construed. To qualify as a suitable pattern for theological use, for example, a philosophical option had to give the theologian an opportunity to articulate the relationship between God and world in a way compatible with the faith.

On the basis of frequency of usage alone, it appears that Hypotheses 1 and 3 allow a translation of the content of the Christian kerygma into schematic form. A number of theological systems have been attempted, for example, from the starting points which are also implicit in Neoplatonic philosophy. Hypotheses 1 (‘If one is, it certainly will not be many’) construes the dominant element as a transcendent entity: the one is related to the many by functioning as all that the many is not. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, which Thomas Aquinas frequently quotes with approval, appear to be lucid examples of the exercising of this schematism for theological purposes. It is against some such structure that Augustine reacted in his refurbishing of the Neoplatonic outlook. Whenever this option appears in theological construction it identifies the transcendent One with the God who is known primarily by contrast with that with which it stands in relation. Consequently asymmetry cannot be effected under these auspices without difficulty. The tendency of the scheme is to ascribe such wholly-otherness to the one that it eventually comes to stand in no relation to the many. When this occurred historically—as it did, for example, in certain forms of Gnostic thought—the Christian theologians (Irenaeus is an excellent example) found it necessary to reject the implicit nonsymmetry in favour of a pattern which allowed an ascription of real status to a world which, at the same time, was subordinate to God.¹

Hypothesis 3 has also enjoyed extensive and frequent use in the history of Christian reflection. The Thomistic venture, for example, has sought to effect a form of asymmetry in terms of a unity which can be found in those others than the one. It is here that one discovers a focus upon the ‘part-whole structure’ as a product of the two dominant parts of the Hypothesis, that is, that there is a principle of unity in the others than the one, and that the principle of unity is not distinct from its parts. The emphasis falls upon issues of differences and likenesses. And a fundamental concern is the distinction between the various ‘part-whole structures’ which comprise

¹ It is conceivable to view the conflict between Irenaeus and the variety of Gnostic-oriented spokesmen referred to in the *Adversus Haereses* in terms of a clash between methods and principles. Irenaeus declares, for example, that the emanationist scale to which Gnostic thought refers does not provide opportunity to fix either of the two necessary poles of theological reflection.

whatever is. It becomes convenient to fashion explanation and description in terms of distinctions between kinds of organisms (vegetative, sensitive, locomotive, intellective, etc.), which distinctions are based upon principles of differences and likenesses.¹ It then becomes appropriate to understand specific organisms in the light of that from which their uniquenesses issue, that is, the respective ends to which they tend. With its focus upon the unity among the others than the one, this Hypothesis gives a stability to 'world' which is hardly ever possible under auspices of Hypothesis 1. By means of this approach the weaknesses of Hypothesis 1 have been overcome, and it becomes appropriate to speak of 'grace perfecting nature without overcoming it'. God is looked to schematically to support the interrelationships between kinds of things. This regulative capacity is implicit in the demand for wholeness and integration: the totality of things requires a reciprocity of interaction between distinct kinds of things. The regulative God is all but inherent in that things imply a locus of unity for the reciprocity between things upon which their existence depends. It is often at this point that theology *per se* begins: an occasion is present to utilise revealed data to qualify that Being upon whom all else schematically depends, but who, at the same time, is known only operationally within the system itself.

Questions immediately arise as to whether options other than those of Hypotheses 1 and 3 are available for theological use. The reason questions arise in this regard is that Hypotheses 5 through 8 'investigate what the consequences are if the one is not'. Hypothesis 7, for example, entertains the possibility of an indeterminate many whose 'unity' has no other status than that of a 'postulated elementary and indivisible particularity'. Hypothesis 5, though not as extreme as Hypothesis 7, treats a one which, though nonexistent, nevertheless maintains relations and properties with the many. It should be noted, however, that when philosophical schemes are utilised for theological expression the 'one' need not always be identified with 'God'. In Hypothesis 1, for example, the identification is in order. But other patterns can provide a place for God without demanding that he be the prime determinant. Thus God can function under auspices of Hypothesis 5 as the principle of regulation which makes possibilities actual: a position, as we suggested earlier, which becomes articulated in 'process theology'. Theologies built under Whiteheadian inspiration tend to exhibit this structure. In the classical era the position of St Irenaeus, by virtue of the dominant position which it assigned to tradition, bore some relation to the process orientation. In any of its instances, this orientation suffers the consequences of ascribing status to change. When change is regulative, the

¹ This sort of understanding of Thomas' theological method is in keeping with the suggestions of Brian Coffey, 'The Notion of Order According to St Thomas Aquinas', in *The Modern Schoolman*, vol. XXVII, no. 1, 1949, pp. 1-18; and James F. O'Brien, 'Structural and Operational Approaches to the Physical World', in *The Thomist*, vol. XXII, no. 3, 1959, pp. 389-400.

possibility of 'omnipotence' seems prohibited. (That prohibition, it appears, would not be troublesome necessarily within this frame; but it might be reprehensible to those who apprehend that outcome from the perspectives of Hypotheses 1 or 3.) In the same way, Hypothesis 7 can be, and has been, employed by constructive theologians. The implicit 'atomism' of a Luther might be a good case in point.¹ In this instance the arbitrary unit is not God, but rather the point at which, and from which, what can be known of the inaccessible God determines its appropriate relata. Luther utilises the Word as a principle of coherence; but since it has no analogues it cannot be employed to unify all things in any all-comprehensive way. Tertullian might be another case in point. The arbitrariness implicit in his orientation might provide good reason for his failure (a failure in which he rejoiced) to conjoin the enterprises of Athens and Jerusalem. His division between the two might be consignable to a schematism which possesses no ability to establish or express the requisite coherence.

But a pursuit of a speculative exercise in identifying schematic options should not be regarded as the fundamental implication of the methodological insights gleaned from the analysis Brumbaugh proposes and illustrates. Of first importance is the clarity this form of exercise provides regarding the ingredients necessary for theological composition. When those components can be recognised and isolated then the moves responsible for differences between outlooks can also be charted. What Brumbaugh has presented is a paradigmatic account of the formative elements of rudimentary philosophical systems. If the same—or a similar—account is transferable to theology, access can be gained to the sources of variability, and, conceivably, to means by which plurality can be negotiated.

II

So far our analysis has consisted of two steps. In the first place, we have referred the problem and possibility of a 'plurality of theologies' to the dependence of theological expression upon various philosophical patterns. And, secondly, we have contended that the formative elements of those patterns are accessible by virtue of the paradigmatic aid of a particular interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*. An additional step must be taken, however, if the issue before us is to be clarified. This too is made possible by the *Parmenides*. According to Robert S. Brumbaugh, that dialogue should be taken not only as an index into types of schematic order. Beyond that it also illustrates the contention that the hypotheses are, in some sense, mutually dependent. Because of the asymmetry implicit in participation none of the hypotheses is capable in itself of representing the intended,

¹ I am suggesting that there is compatibility between the 'atomism' herein described and the nominalistic framework within which Luther worked and against which he reacted.

delicate relationship. Since participation requires both the preserving of forms and a safeguarding of phenomena, 'each hypothesis then shows by its strength some weakness of the others, though by its final internal inconsistency it reveals its own incompleteness'. Therefore, a philosophical position fashioned out of the rudiments of Hypothesis 1, for example, comes to depend upon possibilities available in other hypotheses. Participation cannot be formulated adequately under the auspices of any hypothesis which claims exclusiveness. If the relation between one and many is conceived in an asymmetrical way, as Plato believes it must, the Neoplatonic orientation, for example, requires the outlooks built upon successive options (and these, in turn, require each other). This would imply that the history of western philosophy can also be read in terms of the *dianoia* which regulates distinct systematic starting points:

'The . . . classification of seemingly exclusive options not only applies to philosophers before Plato but seems to apply very well to the entire history of Western philosophic systems. Yet if we follow the detailed development of Plato's argument, no one of these systematic approaches to philosophy can be adequate, because none is complete. Awkwardly enough, the logical relations of these systems are such that, if they are exclusive, we cannot accept any one without finally accepting all the others, nor deny any one without finally denying them all, if we are to retain any consistency in our logic.'¹

The implications with respect to theological methodology are not difficult to draw. If theological reflection uses the structures which the *Parmenides* paradigm denotes, the same dialectic which regulates their inter-relationships in philosophy should retain its function in theology. The reason for such identity in regulation has been mentioned: the dominant polar relationship between God and world cannot be construed in any but an asymmetrical way if the form of theological reflection is to be disposed by the content of the Christian kerygma. But asymmetry is itself of such character that it can only be articulated in terms of a number of theses. Just as one hypothesis within the paradigm is better able than another to preserve forms, while another hypothesis is more skilful in safeguarding phenomena, so might one theological orientation be better suited to establishing the priority of God while another lays stress on the particularity of the reality of the world. Again, just as the capturing of the asymmetry within participation requires a number of distinct starting points, so also does the expression of that relationship in, for example, a doctrine of creation demand an ability to make a variety of statements which are inconceivable within any one perspective. The manifoldness and intricacy of the relation between divine and human in Christian affirmation concerning those decisive events in the life of Jesus cannot be mediated by means of any one theological orientation, but require the vantage points created by the dialectic. One perspective might be better

¹ Brumbaugh, *op. cit.* p. 197.

able than another to preserve divinity; the other, in turn, might be more skilful in safeguarding humanity. Each orientation might show by its strength some weakness of the others, though by its final internal inconsistency reveal its own incompleteness.

To cite one example, as one trained in Neoplatonism St Augustine was not obliged to treat the relationship between one and many in an asymmetrical manner. But as a Christian—as one who carried certain convictions concerning the goodness of the created order, the status which must be ascribed to the natural and physical world—he could not formulate the dominant relationship between God and world consistently except in a manner which made participation formative.¹ But, according to the *Parmenides*, this structural demand also provokes the dialectic which makes it necessary to include other orientations. One can therefore expect to find a number of schematic patterns in Augustine's writings which—though worked out to greater and lesser degrees, particularly, for example, in conflict situations—are also available to subsequent thinkers. As Alfred North Whitehead observed:

When Augustine died at Hippo in the year 430, the religion of the European races was in its main outlines settled. All its capacities for variant forms were already inherent in it.²

For this reason, at least in part, Thomas Aquinas from time to time can argue for continuity between his thought and Augustine's, and can even include Pseudo-Dionysian references as supporting evidence (even though they imply starting points dialectically distinct from his own).

The centrality given to participation in the Christian tradition, therefore, implies a plurality of theological systems. The *Parmenides* can be taken to illustrate the methodological basis for such plurality. It can also be referred to as an index to participation's arrangement of plurality. By its exercise one is enabled to approach the history of Christian systematic reflection as an ordered succession of disciplined attempts to achieve asymmetry. But this does not imply that the movement in theological history corresponds exactly with the sequence of development in the dialogue. Nor must it entail that the internal dialectic is the sole or sufficient cause of the transition from hypothesis to hypothesis. In this regard the *Parmenides* paradigm provides a means of description which is different from exhaustive explanation. As the history of theology demonstrates, a multitude of external reasons has often prompted the selection of new starting points in reflection. And yet, at the same time, such new starts would not have been appropriate

¹ I am indebted to William A. Christian's article, 'The Creation of the World', *op. cit.*, for the force of this observation.

² Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 168. A similar line is taken by Ernst Hoffman, 'Platonism in Augustine's Philosophy of History', in Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton ed., *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1963), pp. 173–190.

had not existent 'working hypotheses' been unable to express all that ought to be articulated. As the analysis shows, the index can also be called upon to prefigure specific areas of vulnerability, which, when agitated, may occasion shifts to new hypotheses. Despite its disclosive methodological ability, however, the paradigm is not a chronicle.

The centrality given to participation in the Christian tradition also implies a basis upon which to argue that particular systematic theological outlooks are, as it were, of one piece. Not only is plurality made necessary by asymmetry: it is also fixed and made determinate. Asymmetry, that is to say, does not allow an infinite number of starting points, nor can it admit an approach except into the relationship of mutual dependency. This would imply that there are but a select number of ways of formulating concepts inherent in kerygmatic affirmation. The *transcendence* or *otherness* necessary to a delineation of Kingdom of God, for example, can only be expressed in limited, specifiable ways. Only certain possibilities exist with respect to a treatment of the concept of *time*, for example, when theologians seek a systematic articulation of the significance of the *eschaton*.¹ But this would also suggest that the relationship between theological orientations can be determined and described. In this regard the following principle applies (if not taken simplistically): one can refer unity between select systematic outlooks to *intent*, and diversity to *means*. In the theological intent to effect asymmetry there issues a common structure, pattern, or determinative form. In each theological orientation which properly belongs to the Christian tradition the formative relationship between God and world is conceived in an asymmetrical way. The difference between orientations has reference to the points from which asymmetry is attempted, and, correlatively, to the influence of those starting points upon the determination of asymmetry.

To cite an example: asymmetry can be effected under auspices of Hypothesis 1 only if the *transcendent entity* is brought into participational relationship with the others than the one. This frequent theological pattern finds it appropriate to relate 'one' to 'many' in terms of an Incarnation, for example, or in the form of interaction between the eternal and the temporal. But when determination of thought does not occur from the point of a transcendent entity—as it need not do even to qualify as theological—asymmetry must be effected by whatever means are appropriate. Under the rudiments of Hypothesis 3, for example, asymmetry is meaningful only in terms of the dominant part-whole structure. This implies that the *form* must exhibit a participational pattern, precisely in the relationship of part to whole. In the example of Thomism, this comes to demand that analogy regulate Aristotelian causal explanation. When the relation of one and many expresses

¹ A fuller (though partial) treatment of this thesis is presented in my article 'Two Contrasting Approaches to Christology', in *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. VI, no. 2, 1965, pp. 133–144.

itself in the form of a *process*, as it does under the auspices of Hypothesis 5, then, frequently, time is called upon to effect the requisite asymmetry. That is to say, time must exhibit the progression which is the product of the influence of possibilities upon things. But, again as the writings of Irenaeus illustrate, the form of progression (or, the 'shape' of time) must itself be asymmetrical: the union between God and world is not simply instantialised; it is also serialised or projected out along the formative process. And, when access to a transcendent one is lost (even when that 'one' is construed as a possibility), then asymmetry must be achieved by means of an arbitrary *unit*. The accompanying task is to discover that which the unit determines as over against everything which does not come under its force. Luther's concern to specify the proper range of the Word's determination *vis-à-vis* imperia with other schemes or order is a case in point. The next step demands an expression of asymmetry within the rightful context, or an explication of such typical remarks as 'The Christian is the free lord over all, subject to none; the Christian is the dutiful servant of all, subject to all'.¹

One is not required to confess that the theological orientations so ordered are incomplete. Nor need he admit that these orientations belong to a context within which they are mutually dependent. Yet the alternative is recourse to some kind of support for the thesis, that is, that the kerygma implies a determination of what the definitive element shall be. This is simply not the case. The presence of Christian affirmation within systematic reflection is not felt in the choice of a particular point of orientation over alternative ones. Indeed, as the history of theology testifies, significant positions have been formulated from a variety of starting points. The presence of Christian affirmation is to be felt rather in the form or structure which systematic reflection is thereupon obliged to assume. The task of the theologian, the articulation of normative religious affirmations, is carried out by means of the shaping of reflective patterns according to a disposition inherent in the kerygma. The kerygma demands of reflection that it conceive the relationship between God and world in a way of which participation is descriptive. The dominant interest concerns the form of the relationship: nothing other than asymmetry can capture its lineaments. And, as the *Parmenides* shows, asymmetry cannot be systematically articulated in any one-dimensional fashion. The possibility of a number of starting points is not only recommended methodologically. This formal requirement has its source in religious intention.

As suggested earlier, the negotiation of plurality in theology depends upon the cultivation of techniques by which to isolate the formative elements of particular orientations. The retention of plurality as being itself a living theological option is more difficult. If integral theological positions are at

¹ Martin Luther, 'The Freedom of a Christian, 1520', in *Luther's Works*, vol. XXXI (Philadelphia. Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 344.

the same time incomplete in themselves, then their relativities provoke a particular sort of appropriation. One must become sensitive to the ways in which such theologies develop, their respective ranges of concern, the manner according to which they proceed, the interests under which they operate, and the topics over which they exercise meaningful interpretation as opposed to those about which they are silent. Beyond that, as Brumbaugh suggests:

'What we can do is to be intuitively aware of (or in fact simply to *be*) the kind of vertical, dynamic 'entity' that connects several levels at once. . .'¹

The retention of plurality depends upon the cultivation of a *dianoia* which transposes select orientations into related fields of vision. It appears that such an art of normative measure is the occasion for an ecumenical theology which refers itself to the history of Christian reflection. Indeed, an ecumenical theology is already implicit in the dialectic which regulates the distinct starting points of those orientations which characterise the tradition. Since the asymmetry inherent there is also rooted in the participation conceived between God and the world, the precedent and goal for such a theology is the *fulness* of relationship. It is to a fulness asymmetrically conceived that such a theology testifies, while illustrating the discursive methodological point that:

'a melody may be the same though every note is different when played in a different key'.

¹ Brumbaugh, *op. cit.* p. 234.