# HARNACK AND ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION

*by*

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In the following study I would like to examine one side of a suggestion made by Professor William A. Clebsch of Stanford University at a recent ecumenical colloquium on the campus of the University of Santa Clara. Clebsch contended that the fundamental question facing theology in this age of ecumenical sensitivity is whether John Henry Newman or Adolf Harnack should be followed as the interpreter of Christianity's dogmatic past. Quite obviously, the former possibility is being explored very conscientiously and thoroughly. Newman's understanding of doctrinal development seems implicit, for example, in Karl Rahner's thesis that "every formula in which the faith is expressed can in principle be surpassed while still retaining its truth."[1] Even Gregory Baum's recent call for "doctrinal renewal" appears to assume the Newmanian concept of progression which, at the same time, it seeks to augment or transcend.[2] But despite Jaroslav Pelikan's perceptive observation regarding Harnack's relevancy to some of today's ecumenical issues,[3] the other alternative in Clebsch's suggestion

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[1] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* I, translated by Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 44. Though the essential outline is the same, there are shades of difference between Newman and Rahner. The former stresses the necessity of time for the articulation of great truths, for instance, while the latter tends to refer the occasion for doctrinal development to the incompleteness of human language in which divine truth is expressed.

[2] Gregory Baum, "Doctrinal Renewal," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. II, No. 3 (1965), pp. 365-381. Similar treatments of "development" or "renewal" which manifest dependence upon the Newmanian pattern are not difficult to uncover. Frederick E. Crowe, for example, in his "Development of Doctrine and the Ecumenical Problem" (in *Theological Studies*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (1962), pp. 27-46), believes that questions concerning Scripture-alone vs. Scripture-and-tradition focus upon the problem of doctrinal development as it was "clearly seen by Newman." Ed. Dhanis, for example, seeks to adopt a more rigorous basis upon which to understand and negotiate the transitions inherent in "development" in his "Révélation explicite et implicite," in *Gregorianum*, Vol. XXXIV (1953), pp. 187-237. A very thorough discussion of this problem is presented by Henri de Lubac in his "Le Problème du développement du dogme," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, Vol. XXXV (1948), pp. 130-160.

[3] Jaroslav Pelikan, "Introduction" to Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961), q. v. Pelikan herein cites several recent developments which serve to strengthen the contemporary utility of Harnack's scholarship. The presence of the Nag-Hammadi and Dead Sea documents, for example, has re-opened many of those issues which Harnack introduced concerning early Christianity's dependence upon a Gentile environment. Further, "institutionalism" seems to require renewed study today from much the same perspective in which Harnack earlier undertook this topic. Yet, significantly, the ultimate basis of Pelikan's recommendation is the distinctiveness of the Harnackian method.

has not yet been sufficiently probed. The primary reason is not difficult to isolate: Harnack regards the transition from kerygma to dogma as a devolution. His almost "atomistic" reading of the history of Christian thought—an approach which allows him to discriminate the various components of dogma—seems to weaken his congeniality toward those discussions which demand some clear possibility for doctrinal continuity as a condition of entry and participation. Whereas Newman inspires a cultivation of development, Harnack exhibits a built-in resistance. For him continuity has been violated, and, for the most part, destroyed. The rupture occurred when the attempt was made to replace the primitive Christian vision with the results of the endeavor to adapt the kerygma to Greek forms of language and thought.[4] According to Harnack, this Hellenized form of Christian truth is composed out of an auxiliary rather than a primary concern. Its function is to establish a norm by which the Church might exclude those who refused obedience.[5] As a result of this interpretation, Harnack cannot regard time as a necessary component of the elucidation and comprehension of the primitive kerygma. Nor can he give status to such elements as growth, development, and gradual perfection. Thus, if the author of *Dogmengeschichte* is to be brought into today's discussion from this vantage point, he is forced to enter as Newman's antagonist.

However, to view Harnack simply as an opponent of Newman's developmentalism is to dismiss his work without trial. His claim on the attention of ecumenists rests elsewhere: *on his sensitivity to methodological questions.* It was his own understanding of the ecumenical question—the problem of theological unity and diversity—that produced his concern for separating out the components of the doctrinal traditions. Harnack recognized that the issue of theological unity and diversity, as viewed from the historical perspective, cannot be resolved

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[4] A representative statement appears in *History of Dogma* II, translated by Neil Buchanan (New York, 1961), pp. 13-14: "As Catholicism . . . is the result of the blending of Christianity with the ideas of antiquity, so the Catholic dogmatic, as it was developed after the second or third century on the basis of the Logos doctrine, is Christianity conceived and formulated from the standpoint of the Greek philosophy of religion." Harnack goes on to assess the way in which this resultant "secularization of religion" and "retardation of culture" should be evaluated.

[5] A variant on the Harnackian interpretation has been presented more recently by Martin Werner (*The Formation of Christian Doctrine,* London, 1957) who traces the process of "Hellenization" to an early collapse of the eschatological perspective which, in the beginning, characterized the Christian community. What followed, according to Werner, was a gradual transformation of that vision toward the more apparent course of human history. Through this process of "secularization," Catholicism emerged by transitional procedures which Werner regards as being strictly indefensible.

simply by referring to doctrine or dogma in the technical or official sense. Rather, the problem has reference also to those systematic theological expressions which understand themselves to be dependent upon (and articulative of) the same Christian kerygma. As Harnack knew, and as Newman tended to overlook, it is with these comprehensive expositions of the kerygma—of which the syntheses of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Luther are outstanding examples—that any historical grounding of unity and diversity must deal. Located there, the problem can be clarified by means of a re-thinking of the Hellenization process and an analysis of the procedures by which it was achieved. To accomplish this, the analyst must cultivate critical techniques to make doctrinal synthesization the object of self-consciousness. Because he established a precedent in this regard, Adolf Harnack belongs at the table of present ecumenical discussion. His "atomistic" reading of Hellenization contains a sensitivity to the distinct kinds of mental operation implicit in that reflection whose purpose is synthesis. It is to the distinct styles of such reflection, at least in large part, that the problem of theological unity and diversity refers.

This subject seems amenable to examination and treatment in a twofold way. Thus the first section of this paper is given to a tracing of the method implicit in Harnack's approach to the history of doctrine in order to raise some questions concerning his fundamental distinctions. (The treatment of method also establishes a critical means by which to separate Harnack's principle of analysis from his value judgment concerning the place of dogma vis-a-vis kerygma.) In the second section some directives are proposed for the application of this critical sensitivity to the evident occurrences of difference within the theological tradition.[6] The purpose throughout is an assessment of the potential clarifying worth of the following thesis: *doctrinal stylings are susceptible to structural description.* This thesis is provocative, especially in this context, when it is tempered by Professor Pelikan's observation that

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[6] Such differences are also treated methodologically, and variously, in the following studies: Peter Fransen, "Three Ways of Dogmatic Thought," in *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (1963), pp. 3-24; Jean Danielou, "Unite et pluralité de la pensée chrétienne," in *Etudes*, Vol. 312 (January, 1962), pp. 3-16; C. Moeller and G. Philips, *Grace et Oecumenisme* (Paris, 1957); E. S. Abbott *et al., Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West* (London, 1957). The most significant and thorough work of which I am aware in this regard, a study wherein comparative methodology is fashioned within historical analysis, is Robert P. Scharlemann's *Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard* (New Haven, 1964.) (See my review in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. II, No. 1 (1965), pp. 100-111.)

each successive shift in theology and in church history during the three decades since his death in June 1930 has served to demonstrate the correctness of the questions with which Harnack dealt, if not always the completeness of the answers he provided.[7]

I

As he gives indication of it in the first chapter of the monumental *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte,* Harnack's historical method issues from his awareness of the dominant task:

> . . . the understanding of history is to find the rules according to which the phenomena should be grouped, and every advance in the knowledge of history is inseparable from an accurate observance of these rules.[8]

The emphasis upon the rules by which groupings of phenomena are discerned is not an incidental stress in Harnack. Rather, it results from his examination of previous efforts to compose a unitary account of doctrinal history. He criticizes prior histories, for example, for failing to distinguish the particular form of Christianity (which is conditioned by the thought and culture of an era) from that inherent power which is characteristic of the religion as it originally was. This overriding concern for rules of order, then, is placed within the framework of the two questions which the historian asks with respect to the material before him: 1) how, why, and from what source did dogma originate? and 2) how can one account for variations (or development) in dogma? Harnack's intent is to make the answers to the two questions dependent upon the discernible rules which characterize historical understanding.

Historical understanding utilizes rules, therefore, in order to designate, isolate, and arrange appropriate phenomena. The rules cannot simply be formulated in advance and then applied to the materials. Rather, the fittingness of phenomena to groupings is more complex and, thus, can never be established by means of an appeal to a logically-prior typological scheme. The categories which are necessary to the grouping of phenomena are created (at least in part) by the materials which are given to the historian. The materials themselves have a

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[7] Pelikan, q. v.

[8] Harnack, *History of Dogma* I, p. 12. On this general topic see Wilhelm Pauck, "The Significance of Adolf von Harnack's Interpretation of Church History," in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review,* Vol. XIII, No. 3 (1958), pp. 31-43; and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "Das Problem der Dogmengeschichte. Zum 100. Geburtstag Adolf von Harnacks," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,* Vol. XLVIII, No. 1 (1951), pp. 63-89.

formative—perhaps even a constructive—function. Because they do, Harnack is enabled to "clearly distinguish three styles of building in the history of dogma"[9] without basing those distinctions upon an imposition of some extraneous scheme. It is also by virtue of the amenability of the theological literature to division into such recognizable groupings that Harnack is able to set forth his fundamental distinction between *dogma* and what can be understood as the *essence* of Christianity. Because the essence is able to join itself to a variety of styles of dogma, the historian's penetration and description of the forms of synthesis which have occurred within the history of Christian theological reflection assume the manifoldness of the following task:

> . . . the question as to the origin of theology can only be answered by surveying all the relations into which the Christian religion has entered in naturalizing itself in the world and subduing it.[10]

The three volumes of *Dogmengeschichte* attest to the comprehensiveness of the consequent task and to the precision which it requires. Despite its inexhaustibilities and complexities, its executor is able to maintain a singleness of purpose by means of the questions which he proposes to resolve. That is, the groupings which occur within Christian dogmatic history can be used to clarify the initial twofold issue, i.e. the question concerning origin and development. The resolution of the issue requires the distinguishing of various styles of doctrine. It also demands a differentiation of dogma from the pre-dogmatic kerygma which dogma presupposes. Thus, the groupings involve distinctions between kinds within a class (as, for example, between the positions of Origen, Augustine, and Luther) and also distinctions between classes (i.e. between the doctrinal synthesis as such and that which is pre-systematic). It is not enough that one differentiate various styles of dogma; beyond that one must also discriminate dogmatic expression (as a unitary, circumscribable phenomenon) from that which appears prior to it. The two sets of distinction cannot be negotiated in the same way. Yet the criteria are interrelated methods of classification. The discernment of these fundamental distinctions—both in kind and in class—is the key to the success for which one hopes when rules of historical understanding are applied to given theological materials.

9 Harnack, p. 8.
10 *Ibid.,* pp. 10, 11.

The close association of the two aspects of the fundamental tasks enables Harnack to rephrase his understanding of the source from which clarification is possible. Earlier he had stated that the question concerning the origin of theology points one to a survey of all the relations into which the kerygma has entered. Now he states something of the reverse: the question concerning the development of dogma refers one back to

> a true perception of what the Christian religion originally was, for this perception alone enables us to distinguish that which sprang out of the inherent power of Christianity from that which it has assimilated in the course of its history.[11]

Again, the potential loci of clarification are not identical. They are, however, intimately bound up with each other. One approaches the question of the origin of dogma by examining the various doctrinal styles with which the kerygmatic core has been associated. In this way, the distinction between classes is treated by means of a differentiation between kinds within a class. In the same way, one approaches the question of the development of dogma by seizing upon that which is the original normative characteristic of Christianity's pre-dogmatic form. Origin is examined by means of charting development; development is investigated by means of an isolation of that which is fundamental to origin. Both kinds of discernment, therefore, depend upon a reductionist technique which attempts to establish the fundamental core to which all else refers. Hence, because of the method which he uses, Harnack cannot trace the characteristic lines of any *Dogmengeschichte* without also opening the many issues implicit in *das Wesen des Christentums*.

It is at this point, however, that the reader must raise a question: can a treatment of structure, or of style, ever be used to clarify a question about "core"? Will access to the Augustinian style of dogma, for example, serve also to illumine kerygmatic origin? Or, will a differentiation between Augustinian and Thomistic styles, for example, aid one in abstracting the original sacred treasure from its presence in synthesized form? These are cautions which must be honored. Indeed, any potential use of this method for purposes of clarifying ecumenical issues must pause to examine whether the assumption is correct: *is essence ever accessible by means of an inquiry which is fundamentally descriptive?* To be sure, Harnack is not seeking essence when he

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

should be describing doctrinal patterns. Nor does he describe patterns when he understands himself to be penetrating essence. But he does seem to think that a description of stylings can also be utilized to clarify the question of essence. And this is a contention which requires methodological steps which are not explicit in Harnack's approach.

To put it in another way, there is perfect consistency in distinguishing between kinds within a class, and, at the same time, between kinds of classes. There is a basis, that is, upon which one can distinguish between styles of dogmatic presentation; and there is also a basis upon which one can distinguish between dogma and the pre-dogmatic. There is also a certain logic in making use of a form of structural analysis to discern and describe the dominant characteristics of those distinct kinds of stylings which have appeared in dogmatic history. But the correctness of the approach with respect to the distinction of styles within a class does not necessarily transfer to the attempt to relate class to class. The discernment of the structural features of dogmatic stylings helps one distinguish the synthetic form of theological expression. To recognize that fundamental class distinction, an accurate description of the structures of dogma against which the primitive core is to be contrasted is necessary. But none of these related tasks need entail that a discovery of that which regulates the development of dogma is equivalent to a discernment of the subject (i.e. the kerygma) of the prior proclamation.

Harnack has thus undertaken three projects in his account of the origin and development of Christian dogma. In the first place—and perceptively so—he has distinguished between sorts of expression. He has noted that the theological synthesis requires a different "style" of reflection from that which is implicit in kerygmatic affirmation. Secondly, he has found it fitting to use a descriptive approach as a means of discerning the patterns of the various syntheses. (This creates the possibility for a schematic account of the distinctions between the theological orientations of Origen, for example, Augustine, and the Protestant Reformers.) Finally, he has utilized the distinction between sorts of expression to clarify the problem concerning the essence of Christianity. The thesis is that essence is to be located in Christianity's pre-synthetic or original form.

It is the final step which places an obstacle in front of any attempt to give ecumenical currency to Harnack's approach. It is that extension of the method which provides the basis for judging the conceptual translation of the original faith as illegitimate. It is this application of

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selectivity to one of the differentiated sorts of expression which tends to qualify the suitability of Harnack's formulation of questions for contemporary use. One can accept the application of a method of discrimination to the components of the theological syntheses. But one must find a certain bias responsible for subjecting the products of discrimination to this thoroughgoing reductionism.

Nevertheless, this Harnackian peculiarity need not qualify the fact that the distinction between sorts of expression is itself an extremely important one. It is of profound ecumenical significance that theological syntheses should be recognized as having involved different reflective procedures from those implicit in kerygmatic affirmation. It is of vital importance that these distinctions be noticed, and not simply for purposes of specifying the dependence of Christian doctrine upon Greek thought forms. Beyond that, if Christian affirmations have been incorporated in Greek philosophical structures, then the variations between stylings of dogma may be the product (at least in part) of the structures, and not, first of all, of the affirmations. And, as Harnack has indicated, the very possibility of treating the problem in this way depends upon a method of distinguishing the *formal* and *contentual* elements in theological conceptualization.

Ultimately, therefore, the presence of this historian of dogma in ecumenical conversation is based upon his suggestion that *reflexivity* (the discipline of making reflection the object of reflection) makes the problem of theological unity and diversity accessible. Harnack insists that critical analysis can be applied to the theological form of systematic reflection. Because he does so he assumes a kind of "Kantian position" with respect to the history of dogma. That is, he treats the theological form of systematic reflection by making it methodologically self-conscious. He examines the styles of dogma in the light of the distinct mental procedures which they imply. And it is the disciplining of a technique of reflexivity to which he calls all subsequent historians of Christian theology. Historical theology, that is, must be keenly analytical because of the form of that reflection with which it has to do. And in an age of doctrinal renewal, the analytical character of historical theology must be sensitized to the various styles of that form of reflection which have appeared—and are normative in some sense—within the Christian tradition. Again, and unhappily, Harnack seems to have assumed that the mere appearance of distinct stylings is indicative of illegitimate transposition: the original treasure is not rightly amenable to conceptual and systematic translation. It would

be more accurate, we have contended, not to expect to be able to locate "essence" amidst stylings, and, thus, not to judge stylings invalid simply because they do not manifest such characteristics. But Harnack did take the first step. His conclusions are indeed the product of the application of analytical techniques to theological materials. And each successive step depends upon a cultivation of this critical sensitivity with respect to those same materials. To advocate a more careful exercising of this form of critical reflexivity is to agree with the qualification Professor Pelikan places upon Harnack's contemporary significance. Finally it is the completeness of correct questions which creates the possibility of correct and pertinent answers. Thus, in the next portion of this study, I shall propose some ways in which Harnack's distinctions can be refined and applied with greater rigor to those theological stylings to which problems of ecumenical concern refer.

II

We suggested at the outset that Adolf Harnack belongs in contemporary ecumenical discussion by virtue of his disciplined sensitivity to the fact of unity and diversity within one and the same theological history. We argued that unity and diversity refer not solely to the problem of disparity between primitive Christian affirmations and subsequent ones but also to the presence of different stylings within the same tradition. We suggested that both Thomas and Luther, for example, exhibit a dependency upon kerygma, and yet diverge in their efforts to set basic affirmations in some integral order. (Luther, on the one hand, resists the Aristotelian structure which appears dominant in Thomas. Thomas, on the other hand, regards that same structure not simply as a convenient tool of communication but also as that form which adequately represents truth about external reality.) Harnack is important, therefore, for two special reasons: 1) he refers the problem of theological unity and diversity to the conflict between such variant theological stylings; and 2) he exhibits a type of method which gives one the ability to subject such syntheses to stylistic description.

Within the context which we have prescribed, the Harnackian thesis which deserves particular scrutiny is the following: *a search for distinct patterns of doctrine is dependent upon a method which is able to discern structural characteristics.* Implicit in this thesis is a recognition of the necessity of disciplined criteria by which to conduct comparative theological analyses. For ecumenical purposes, the fitness of descriptive analyses with respect to theological systematisation

may yet become an avenue of clarification when alternative syntheses are placed side by side. Upon what does one focus, for example, in Catholic-Protestant discussion when the attempt is made to negotiate theological issues by reference to Thomas and Luther? How does one select a topic there which can assure a fruitful exchange? Does the mere occurrence of "grace," for example, in the two bodies of literature imply that an analysis of respective attitudes toward "grace" will lead to a discernment of primary differences? Further, can one be sure that "grace" in the Thomistic disposition of the word is even comparable with "grace" in the Lutheran context? That comparison has been attempted in this manner is clear indication of an expectation that Catholic-Protestant conflict is penetrable at the point of essence or distinctive theological cores. But, if Harnack's directives are taken seriously, the oversimplification implicit in such an approach should become apparent. Methodologically, the mistake is to ask that synthetic patterns exhibit irreducible essences. Harnack, on the contrary, has suggested that the analyst focus upon the describable (perhaps even "positive") features of the respective synthetic styles. It is highly probable—as we have contended—that the theological stylings of both Thomas and Luther presuppose the kerygma as an irreducible core. One can expect "grace" to possess a dominant place, for example, as one can expect the same of the necessity that redemption be through the significant acts of God in Jesus Christ. Such primary elements are presupposed. The difference between the two theological outlooks issues from their dispositions toward understanding, interpreting, and integrating the kerygma within that form of reflection by which they are characterized. As is evident, this occurs in strikingly different ways. But that difference—and this is Harnack's point—cannot be uncovered by any attempt to resolve the question of essence. Such syntheses presuppose dependence upon the primitive "core," but they are shaped according to various reflective patterns. And reflective patterns, as it were, have their own rhythms, grammar, and formal characteristics, which, as Harnack contends, are open to description. If Hellenization is a fact—regardless of the way in which one attempts to establish its religious worth—the influence of conceptualization upon the kerygma will and must be reflected in the variations between doctrinal stylings. Hence, the historian of dogma, by virtue of the fact that he is dealing with synthetic theological construction, should seek those structural features which distinguish particular reflective patterns.

Yet, we will be disappointed should we look to Harnack for the techniques by which not only to discern the distinct styles but also to compare and contrast their characteristic features. It is one achievement—and a large one—to recognize that such stylings are amenable to description. Something else is required to fit that description with techniques of comparative analysis. However, precisely this is necessary if the Harnackian precedent is to be extended to deal with the unity-diversity problem in this form. The *Dogmengeschichte* does not go this far. Nor does it appear that the comparison-contrast issue was primary for its author. Nevertheless, though Harnack's first intent was not to resolve the problem of theological unity and diversity by means of such comparative analyses, he did in fact supply directives by which his project could be extended for that purpose. The crucial insight in that regard is the following: unity and diversity can be associated with the process of theological synthesization, which process is such that its formal and contentual elements can be distinguished by means of abstraction.

However, even when assessed only methodologically, there is an oversimplification here which must be disclosed and corrected. Harnack has made two basic distinctions: a) between "original treasure" and conceptual adaptation; and b) between the contentual and the formal. He goes on to identify the primary characteristics of the two distinctions with each other. In this sense, kerygma stands to dogma as content stands to form. But the problem is more complicated than he appears to have supposed by virtue of the fact that Hellenization is of diverse kinds. The original core does not stand solely in relation to Hellenization as such (as some integral reflective phenomenon). Rather, the core is related to a variety of synthetic doctrinal accounts and, hence, to a number of instances of Hellenization. Because of this, the advancement beyond Harnack must regard the process of Hellenization not only as the source, but also as the locus of the problem of theological unity and diversity. In that context, the formal and contentual stand in the relationship of reciprocal influence. Because of that, the relation between affirmation and scheme (or style) is manifestly more complex than Harnack seems to have thought. Certainly the systematic pattern functions as the means by which affirmations are joined and made to cohere. In specific ways the pattern contains the limits and circumscribes the possibility for the kinds of affirmations which can be given formal status. But, beyond that, conceptualization actually contributes content of its own. It tends to suggest additional

affirmations which are structurally appropriate or necessary to the achievement of systematic closure. This creative function is not restricted, however, to the syntheses or to the exigencies of conceptual order. On the other hand, the religious affirmations of the primitive faith also retain various degrees of ability to shape, even to alter the pattern into which they are incorporated. (For example, Aristotle's tendency to eternalize matter, though schematically appropriate, must be overruled by Thomas in deference to a conviction which has its source in the kerygma itself. The Platonic leaning toward immortality of the soul, though stylistically fitting, must be resisted by Augustine by virtue of another formative disposition which comes from the heart of the faith.) Furthermore, the candidacy of certain patterns as potential means by which primitive affirmations can be ordered is indeed destroyed by the conceptual demands of specific affirmations. If theology (even in Harnack's sense) can be understood as "the choosing of a philosophy in view of faith's reflection,"[11a] then the kerygma itself must contain implicit criteria to guide the selection of systematic structures. Not all of the available "logics" from the classical age are acceptable. Indeed, as history shows, the early theologians adopted only those patterns for which there was a fitting disposition in the original faith. (One could argue, for example, as St. Irenaeus appears to have done in his *Adversus Haereses,* that the formal structure implicit in Gnostic thought disallows an expression of many of those original affirmations which Christian faith finds it necessary to make.) And, as an additional example of the reciprocal influence of scheme and affirmation, in some instances the presence of an affirmation might almost be coincidental with the articulation of some portion of that structural framework with which it has been associated.

In short, when theological system-constructing is regarded as the context to which unity-and-diversity refers (rather than simply being identical with diversity), then the approach to the problem must be prepared to do more than de-Hellenize the kerygma. Instead, it must be equipped to undertake a critical exercise in comparative theological reflexivity. And this, it seems, is almost equivalent to a cultivation of a particular consciousness: a critical attitude which is sensitized to the difficult task of re-thinking the process of synthesizing from the

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[11a] Henry Duméry, *Critique et Religion* (Paris, 1957) p. 271. The context in which this definition occurs is the following: "Ainsi, les réponsabilités sont mieux définies: la foi transcende tous les systemès; mais, sans recours à un système, elle ne saurait recevoir une expression cohérente au plan intellectual. Dans ce sens, une théologie, c'est d'abord le choix d'une philosophie en vue de 'refléchir' la foi."

perspective of its methodological ingredients. As perhaps a still novel reflective discipline, comparative reflexivity can neither compose nor explain but criticize and analyze. Its patron cannot be constructive theology in any of its form. And its precedent, it appears, is the approach of Adolf Harnack, since that stance marks the entrance of reflexivity into the history of dogma. Its peculiar responsibility is the adaptation and cultivation of techniques of conceptual analysis toward the theological instances of synthesized reflection. And its prospect is the ability to demonstrate that clashes between theologies within the Christian tradition—regardless of the convictions which foster them —are also conflicts between conceptual patterns which are variantly ordered.

Indeed, this discipline need not start from scratch. Techniques of critical reflexivity have been formulated since reflection became its own object, surely since the studies of Immanuel Kant. In that regard, Harnack's own distinction between form and content, when applied to the synthesizing of thought, is not unrelated to Kant's contention that formalization requires *logical principles* as well as *interests of reason*.[12] Though Kant did not fashion critical reflexivity for comparative purposes, others have done and are doing so. We refer especially to the recent work of the philosopher Richard P. McKeon who has argued that systematization of thought, regardless of its subject matter, requires *principles of orientation* and *distinct methods*.[13] On the basis of this starting point McKeon is able to formulate a rationale by which differences between philosophical positions can be charted. Though precision would require a detailed examination of McKeon's and other proposals (especially were one to proceed with an actual exercise in adopting and applying them to given theological materials) it becomes apparent that the discussion of the operation of *referents*

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[12] Kant's fuller treatment of this subject occurs in his "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, particularly under the heading "The Regulative Employment of the Ideas of Pure Reason," A 642-668.

[13] Richard P. McKeon, "Philosophy and Method," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 22 (1951), pp. 653-682. This article has been reprinted in part in Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., *What is Philosophy?* (New York, 1965), pp. 93-97. McKeon further develops these proposals in "Dialogue and Controversy in Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1956), pp. 143-163; see also his "Principles and Consequences," in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LVI, No. 9 (1959), pp. 385-401. On this general topic, see Everett W. Hall, *Philosophical Systems: A Categorical Analysis* (Chicago, 1960); George K. Plochmann, "A Theory of Systems: A Rough Sketch," in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (1957), pp. 45-59; Richard Rorty, "Recent Metaphilosophy," in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XV, No. 2 (1961), pp. 299-318; Newton P. Stallknecht and Robert S. Brumbaugh, *The Compass of Philosophy* (New York, 1954).

and *relata* in structuring thought can illumine the Harnackian concern. That is—so it has been discovered—the synthesizing of reflection requires a principle, or a point of orientation to which ideas are referred as well as an interest which designates the auspices or the relationship under which reference occurs. The principle is necessary to fix the vantage point. The method is necessary to establish the kind of relationship which is to exist between the principle and that which it orders.

Again, were one to engage in an examination of fundamental differences between the thought patterns of Thomas and Luther, for example, he should pay particular attention to the task which reflection gives to the respective principles of orientation. A methodologically sensitive analyst will note, for instance, that Thomas is intent upon maintaining a comprehensive outlook which gives proper place to each variety of things of which nature consists. Luther, on the other hand, attempts to secure that which is alone the final and necessary authority. His writings reflect the disposition of a man whose primary interest is not in the unitary nor in the all-comprehensive but rather in the particular, the peculiar, the individual. His thought manifests a concern to locate the indiminishable core: that irreducible substratum whose authority is beyond challenge. He begins by surveying the various possibilities, then discriminates, isolates, and establishes that one principle which the world, the devil, and one's own flesh can never ultimately threaten. His question may be put as follows: where amidst the conflict between rival authorities can one find an unchallengable basis of authority? And the interest which follows upon that question is an interest in isolating that one thing, or that one principle, i.e. the Word, which is both "alone necessary" and "necessary alone."[14] Thomas

14 Able discussions of Luther's theological method include the following: Bernhard Löhse, *Ratio und Fides. Eine Untersuchung über die Ratio in der Theologie Luthers* (Gottingen, 1958); B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason* (Oxford, 1962); Gerhard Ebeling, "Die Anfünge von Luthers Hermeneutik," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. XLVIII (1951), pp. 172-230; Lennart Pinomaa, "Die Heiligen in Luthers Frühtheologie," in *Studia Theologica*, Vol. XIII (1959), pp. 1-50; Ernst Bizer, *Fides ex Auditu, Eine Untersuchung über die Entdeckung der Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch Martin Luther*. (Kaiserswerth, 1958); *Bengt Hägglund, Theologie und Philosophie bei Luther und in der Occamistischen Tradition: Luthers Stellung zur Theorie von der doppelten Wahrheiten* (Lund, 1956); Hägglund, "Was Luther a Nominalist?" in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 6 (1957), pp. 441-452; Wilhelm Link, *Das Ringen Luthers um die Freiheit der Theologie von der Philosophie* (Munich, 1955); Heiko A. Oberman, " 'Facientibus Quod in Se Est Deus non Denegat Gratiam,' Robert Holcot, O.P. and the Beginnings of Luther's Theologie," in *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. LV, No. 4 (1962), pp. 317-342; Hauns Rückert, "The Reformation—Medieval or Modern" translated by Charles E. Carlston, in *Translating Theology into the Modern Age*, ed. Robert W. Funk (New York, 1965), pp. 1-19.

Aquinas, on the other hand, reflects a different kind of concern, with an accompanying differently-ordered schematic frame. His is a kind of summary outlook. Its concern is for the interrelationships between the totality of things. Whereas Luther proceeds according to an exercise in elimination until an indubitable foundation is established, Thomas does not seek discovery of that "one thing" since, for him, the particular is made intelligent within the totality. His approach is to gather the whole range of possible or existent things into one, and then to differentiate their kinds on the basis of that which is characteristic of each. The question implied is the Aristotelian one: what sorts of things does reality contain and exhibit? or, what sorts of things are there?[15] He thereupon distinguishes the kinds of beings within the totality of beings which depend upon motion for the achievement of actuality. Everything that is has a rightful place within a network of interacting organisms. By noting the kinds of things there are, and then that which is necessary to the fulfillment of each kind, one is able to speak of the appropriate functions, operations, faculties, and powers by which each thing is characterized.[16] It is therefore methodologically fitting that Luther will be reductionistic in his attempt to secure the particular, while Thomas will always see the particular within the context of some more comprehensive whole. As Gabriel Widmer has suggested, the Thomistic pattern can be described as a "synthèse par hierarchisation."[17] It is apparent, therefore, that the

[15] I am indebted for this latter phrasing of the Aristotelian question to William A. Christian and his essay "Some Uses of Reason," in *The Relevance of Whitehead,* ed. Ivor Leclerc (London, 1961), pp. 45-89.

[16] For discussions of St. Thomas' theological method see James F. O'Brien, "Structural and Operational Approaches to the Physical World," in *The Thomist,* Vol. XXII, No. 3 (1959), pp. 389-400; Daniel C. O'Grady, "Thomism as a Frame of Reference," in *The Thomist,* Vol. I, No. 2 (1931), pp. 213-236; Tad W. Guzie, "Evolution of Philosophical Method in the Writings of St. Thomas," in *The Modern Schoolman,* Vol. XXXVII, No. 2 (1960), pp. 95-120; Robert E. Brennan, "The Mansions of Thomistic Philosophy," in *The Thomist,* Vol. I, No. 1 (1939), pp. 62-79; C. Dumont, "La réflexion sur la methode théologique," in *Nouvelle Revue Theologique,* Vol. LXXXIV, No. 1 (1962), pp. 17-35; M. D. Chenu, "Position de la théologique," in *Révue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques,* Vol. XXIV (1935), pp. 232-257; Philip Merlan, "Abstraction and Metaphysics in St. Thomas' Summa," in *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol. XIV (1953), pp. 284-291; Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy Between God and the World* (Uppsala, 1953); George A. Lindbeck, "Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Franciscan Studies,* Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1957), pp. 1-22; and No. 3 (1957), pp. 107-125; Lindbeck, "The *A Priori* in St. Thomas' Theory of Knowledge," in *The Heritage of Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun,* eds. Robert E. Cushman, and Egil Grislis (New York, 1965), pp. 41-63; Anton C. Pegis, "The Dilemma of Being and Unity; A Platonic Incident in Christian Thought," in *Essays in Thomism,* ed. Robert Brennan (New York, 1942), pp. 151-183; W. Norris Clark, "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism," in *The New Scholasticism,* Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (1952), pp. 167-194.

[17] Gabriel Widmer suggests this description in his review of the thought of

form of thought in which Luther's question is treated will differ in structure from one whose commitment is to the virtual incorporation of the entirety of things. To put it schematically, Luther utilizes the Word as his principle of orientation, and places that principle within the context in which relations are restricted to identity and opposition. Thomas, on the other hand, sees the matter-form composites as principles of orientation, and seeks to specify their interrelationships according to that reciprocity between beings which confirms uniqueness within the totality.

Because of these formal differences, the comparative analyst can give good case for demonstrating that singular objects of contention between the two stances are all under the influence of the characteristic form. On the Christological issue, for example, Thomas and Luther can be understood to follow the characteristic relations between referent and relata as outlined above. When the peculiar is sought within the totality, and when causal explanation depends upon teleological determination, then it is appropriate that the Christ be schematically located at that point which denotes the reciprocity between human realization and the divine nature. Redemption in Christ, for Thomas, is effected through the realization of the human *telos.* Jesus Christ, the *Imago dei,* is the divine likeness to which man is created. As true man he is in fact the *telos,* the manifestation of perfected humanity. Yet in revealing himself also as true God he affirms the insufficiency of all things human. In him humanity is made one with the *Imago dei* as nature is exalted to participate in the divine life. But the basis of the relation between Christ and the human being is the *telos* which reflects the reciprocity between Image and its likeness. On the same subject, Luther, on the other hand, places Jesus Christ within the context which reflects his fundamental concern to establish the one final authority. Indeed, Jesus Christ is identified with that Word: that insolable, normative locus of life and authority. Thomas places "grace" within that formative relation which has been shaped by an interest in continuity; hence, "grace" can be understood as an example of the way in which continuity between God and world is both exercised and certified. For Luther, "grace" is ruled by the formative relation which demands an either-or, and within which continuity is precluded; hence "grace" can be understood as an example of the way in which the

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Pierre Thevenaz in "Un essai de philosophie protestante," in *Révue de Théologie et de Philosophie,* Vol. XII, No. 2 (1962), pp. 93-106. Widmer's work appears in English translation by Rosemary Z. Lauer, in *Philosophy Today,* Vol. VI, No. 2 (1962), pp. 112-124.

relationship between God and world is effected without destroying the fundamental form in which it is conceived.

But to cite alternative theological dispositions which seem accessible to the critical analyst of systematic reflection—and to illustrate some areas of conflict which may possibly be clarified by such analyses —is merely to point to a large range of issues which can be illumined when reflexivity is employed at the table of ecumenical conversation. This is not to settle the question which Professor Clebsch singled out and to which we owe the inspiration of this paper. Perhaps it is only to insert a caution before that question is answered prematurely. Beyond that it is to contend that today's theological concerns demand that Christianity's dogmatic past be interpreted reflexively. Reflexivity is required since the faith of the fathers has in fact been transposed into a mode of expression which has specific formal regulations. To be sure, Harnack's procedures are not themselves capable of engaging in highly technical, comparative, reflexive exercises. Yet, his introduction of the critical technique into historical theology establishes a precedent upon which others of methodological sensitivity can build. As Professor Pelikan has rightly pointed out, the timeliness of Harnack refers to the correctness of the questions which he posed. And it appears from our vantage point that the correctness of questions is to be found also in the additional questions which are thereby made possible.

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