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GOD-OF-THE-GAPS ARGUMENTS IN LIGHT OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

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Abstract

Barbour suggests several possible relations between science and religion. I explain why these relations are inadequate and propose a different way of relating the two. Drawn from the cross theology of Martin Luther, it dictates that we frame science within an encompassing fideist system centered around the cross of Christ. I further describe why such a “Crucicentric Science” approach would solve the God-of-the-Gaps problem concerning quantum indeterminacies.

Keywords: Theology of the Cross; Quantum Indeterminacy; God-of-the-Gaps;

1. INTRODUCTION

In his 2007 book, Ian Barbour suggests several possible relations between science and religion: conflict, independence, dialog, and integration (Barbour, 2007).¹ His four views assume no epistemological hierarchy between science and theology and present a fundamental symmetry among scientific and religious claims about reality. Barbour presents no overarching framework in which one system encompasses the other. He describes science and religion as self-sufficient worlds capable of existing alongside each other or integrated as equals.

In this paper, I contend that the theology of the cross finds Barbour’s approach erroneous and propose a different way of relating science and religion, one which draws its inspiration from the theology of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther would not have accepted the assumption of symmetry and lack of epistemological hierarchy between science and religion. Along with others, Luther is a “theologian of the

¹ Barbour’s four views are: conflict (suggesting science and religion contradict each other), independence (suggesting science and religion coexist without any relation), dialog (science and religion having a dialog about contentious issues) and integration (where science and religion are combined in a way which complements both)- Barbour, I. G. (2007), *When science meets religion*, New York: Harper San Francisco.



cross” who places the cross of Christ at the center of what man can know about God and declares all other means of gaining knowledge about creation as subservient to the superiority of the cross. This approach is a “crucicentric” one. Yet Luther does not dismiss scientific discoveries as irrelevant to the study of God’s creation. Building upon his theology, it is possible for us to construct a worldview establishing a strict hierarchy between theology and science which corresponds to his distinction between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory.

My approach places science as a corollary to theology. I intend to support this claim using a crucicentric analysis of quantum indeterminacy, its relation to theology as presented by William Pollard, and the assertion that God intervening in quantum potentialities constitutes a God-of-the-Gaps explanation. Barbour's analysis of this issue (Barbour, 1972) will serve as a case study through which I will describe what I hold to be the theology of the cross position on the correct hierarchical relation between science and religion.

Our discussion will start with a very brief introduction to the epistemological strands of Luther’s theology of the cross, after which I will present a brief introduction to quantum indeterminacy. These two sections will form the background necessary for an analysis of quantum indeterminacy, its theological explanation, and the God-of-the-Gaps rebuttal thereof which I will present in the third section.

2. LUTHER’S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

“Cross theology” is the name given to a succession of ideas conveyed by various theologians since the days of Paul the Apostle. Their unifying theme emphasizes the centrality of the cross and crucifixion of Christ for human redemption and knowledge of the Divine. Its leading proponents were Paul, Athanasius and especially Luther, who consolidated its structure into a coherent theological system in his Heidelberg disputation.

Luther’s theology of the cross distinguishes between two types of theologians: those of the cross and those of glory. The theologian of the cross is someone who sees “what is visible of God through suffering and the cross” (Luther, 1518; McGrath, 2011). According to Luther, the theologian of “glory” does the exact opposite by deducing knowledge of God from the creature itself. Luther presents the theologian of glory as someone who “sees and speaks of God’s glorious manifestation among the heathen, how His invisible nature can be known from the things which are visible and how He is present and powerful in all things everywhere.” This contradicts the theologian of the cross who “teaches that punishments, crosses [that of Christ and that of the creature], and death are the most precious treasury of all.” (Pelikan, 1955)

The theologian of glory looks at God with the eyes of intellect; he learns through fundamental methodologies that we can gain knowledge of God speculatively. The theologian of the cross, however, looks at God through faith and learns from the cross that God reveals knowledge of himself solely through the crucified Christ (McGrath, 2011). Luther concludes that it is the theologian of the cross who is ultimately wise and that the methodology employed by the theologian of glory produces the image of a blind creator (McGrath, 2011; Bradbury, 2011).

For the theologian of the cross, understanding the meaning of the cross is always predicated upon faith. McGrath notes that for Luther *Crux Sola* is *Sola Fide*: “through faith alone can the significance of the cross be perceived.” Faith is the ability to see beyond what is visible to the eyes and perceive that which lies further, in the realm of *Invisibilia* (Mcgrath, 2011). McGrath adds that that is precisely the reason why empirical verification is useless in the case of faith - fideistic conclusions will always negate those reached by relying solely on reality as perceived by the senses.

God’s hidden revelation in the cross defies reason, and we should regard it as a mystery (Mcgrath, 2011, Quoting from Luthers Werke). Any authentic epistemological knowledge about God is, for Luther, only asserted and verified based on faith in Christ and the crucifixion, and is not a system of rationally verifiable axioms (Dalferth, 1982).

3. ANTHROPOCENTRIC METHODOLOGIES

A significant point of crucicentric theology is its rejection of all anthropocentric methods of gaining knowledge of God. The ability to gain knowledge of God solely through the cross excludes all other means of attempting to arrive at such knowledge. The creature is without an innate capacity to understand what God alone can fathom. When humanity attempts to arrive at knowledge of God using methods which do not heed the centrality of the cross, it establishes itself as the starting point for such knowledge and renders it flawed and anthropocentric.

What follows is a presentation of the relevant methodologies which the crucicentric theologians (including Luther) have refused to accept as legitimate for gaining knowledge of God:

Crucicentric point 1: Science ("Natural Theologies") is referred to by Luther as methods "seeking God from around the cross" rather than "through the cross of Christ." Knowledge of this kind imprisons its subject within the confines of human speculative capacity and limits it to the restricted scope of human reason.

Luther does not dismiss science entirely. He agrees that the natural world can point to the nature of God, but insists that relying on it for the full knowledge of God rather than the suffering and the cross of Christ would be foolish and constitute being blinded by pride (Luther, 1518). Creation cannot reveal the Creator - only He can reveal Himself. Von Loewenich notes that "There is no direct knowledge of God for man." (Loewenich Von, 1982) The knowledge conveyed by the cross is not just additional knowledge alongside that from other sources. Instead, it is the only real source of knowledge about the Divine. Any other method of acquiring such knowledge has to conform to and accept the cross's epistemic superiority.

Crucicentric point 2: Luther also rejects the authority of human reason itself. Reason cannot comprehend that which alone knows itself. Reason predicts its self-finitude by trying to achieve that which can only be known by the infinite mind of God. If humans were able to perceive that which only the mind of God can fathom, an inner contradiction would occur: The creaturely perception is not equipped to fathom that which only God can know. The idea that reason is an efficient tool for understanding divine reality leads Luther to a *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

Despite that, we should not reject human reason. Luther did believe it to be a useful tool in apprehending God's creation, as long as we do not regard it as the primary tool for understanding the Divine. Science and logic can be useful tools for developing new technologies and *ad hoc* theories about the universe, as long as these do not take the place of the cross of Christ in understanding the world's ultimate function and purpose. Furthermore, science and philosophy cannot dictate the theological method. The opposite is, however, legitimate for Luther: Theology is the queen of philosophy (science) as it can use the latter's methods and axioms at its discretion.

God's Revelation at the Cross

"For God, who said 'Let light shine out of darkness' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6.)

Inspired by this verse, the crucicentric theologians believed God created man in order to know his creator intimately. They believed the cross and suffering of Christ reveal God and that this revelation has certain specific characteristics:

Crucicentric point 3: Wisdom versus foolishness. The crucicentric theologians described the dichotomous differentiation between wisdom and foolishness in order for it to function as a tool emphasizing elements which are coherent within the crucicentric worldview and dismissing those elements which are inconsistent with it. Luther believed the cross of Christ manifests divine wisdom and also functions as a revelatory mechanism inappropriable by humankind. He also believed knowledge held by humankind about reality is inferior to the one emanating from and originating in the cross of Christ, essentially making divine wisdom antithetical to the "foolish" wisdom held by humanity.

Crucicentric point 4: God is both hidden and revealed at the cross. The cross is where suffering and humiliation abound, and it is also the site where God is most revealed. Luther emphasizes that the

degradation and suffering on the cross reveal God Himself and not a symbol or metaphor for God as humanity would prefer to believe. For in its vanity and adoration of materialism, humanity imagines a god like itself (Bradbury 2011). The revealed God manifests at the cross along with the hidden God: He is a being whose will and plans will always be unbeknownst to man. These revealed and hidden dichotomous natures co-exist at the cross.

Crucicentric point 5: The epistemological priority of the cross. God chooses to convey information of Himself primarily through the cross of Christ. The reasons for that are (McGrath, 2011):

A. The creature could not survive a full disclosure of the nature of God. Recalling the biblical story of Moses, the cross functions as “God’s back” which God revealed to Moses (Exodus 34:6.). God alone can know who and what God is. This knowledge cannot be comprehended naturally by the creature, but only as God bestows it upon him.

B. The true theologian needs to depend upon God for the location of divine disclosure. The cross is “the final, decisive and normative locus of the revelation of God.”(McGrath, 1987) Who Christ is and how the cross is to be understood constitute the message from the cross which is to receive precedence over all other Christian events, including Christ's resurrection and incarnation.

To conclude this summary of the theology of the cross, Luther asserts that the theologian who does not wish to look at God through the cross, but instead circles the cross and tries to look at the glory of God directly, draws an analogy of God upon himself and falsely self-appropriates divine attributes. Such a theologian tries to reduce God to the level of the creature (Bradbury, 2011). He states that the true theologian looks at God through the cross of Christ and that that is the only way to do so - through the cruciform lens. The cross tells us of God, of His creature and the relation between them through the crucified Christ. The theology of the cross stands at the center of all theologies wishing to describe God’s revelation honestly, and if Christian thought ignores the demands of the cross, it becomes a theology of glory (Bradbury, 2011).

Lastly, our discussion of Luther’s theology of the cross emphasizes two motifs which are abundantly present: The glory of God as contrasted with the ingloriousness of the creature and the epistemological principle according to which only God can know Himself in such a way as to be able to disclose His nature to the fullest. These two principles intertwine to accentuate the cross being the only place able to disclose real knowledge of God and that its reception is contingent upon the recipient’s faith.

I now turn to a brief introduction to the topic of quantum indeterminacy. By explaining this phenomenon using God’s providence, theologians have integrated theology into the scientific rhetoric in a way which, I contend, is incongruent with the theology of the cross.

4. QUANTUM INDETERMINACY

Classical Newtonian physics has always described a mundanely deterministic world: scientists thought that they could calculate and describe any future state of a system based on its present condition. Quantum physics, however, describes a much different reality. It was Erwin Schroedinger who described the wave function during the 1920s. Schroedinger’s function did not describe the exact location and trajectory of an electron with any precision but allowed for probabilities thereof. Physicists could calculate the chances of finding any specific location and momentum of an electron at any point in time.

Schroedinger’s equation describes probability waves corresponding to a large number of observations and presents the movement and nature of elementary particles as hazy and uncertain. We cannot observe the atomic and subatomic particles the same way we observe macroscopic entities, and we cannot describe their properties the way we describe everyday properties. When using concepts drawn from Newtonian physics such as space, time, and causality - those particles cannot even be coherently described.

In 1927 the uncertainty principle was articulated by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg. The principle states a fundamental limit to the accuracy with which the scientist can know specific pairs of physical properties of elementary particles, for example, their position and momentum. The more

accurately we measure a particle's position, the less accurately we can know its momentum, and vice versa (Barbour, 2007).

Several assumptions exist about the source of this indeterminacy. Einstein, Planck, and Bohm claimed this uncertainty is but a construct of our human mind and is caused by temporary human ignorance, which will be resolved in the future when we discover more precise laws (Barbour, 1972). Bohr and others believed the nature of our experiments causes these perceived indeterminacies and considered this to be an inherent flaw forever forbidding us from attaining full knowledge of our subatomic research subjects (Barbour, 1972).

The third option and the one I will work with in this paper assumes quantum indeterminacy to be a part of nature; It claims nature itself is indeterminate, and we are observing this indeterminacy in our experiments. This approach tells us that subatomic particles are very different creatures from what we know in our daily life (Barbour, 1972). It is not just a matter of the observer disturbing the natural system, but the natural system itself is indeterminate and functions without a strict causal relationship between events. When a human observer measures the system, he brings into actuality values of position and trajectory, which up until that point were in a state of uncertainty. The observer does not find out values which were theretofore precise but unknown. Instead, the observer's measurement becomes a part of the event's history by forcing one of the many potentialities into being (Barbour, 1972).

According to this view, classical causation does not exist. The future is not unknown, but undecided. It consists of a large number of possible outcomes, determined by the possibilities awarded to it by the past and chance alone. The potentiality of states is ontological, objective, and exists at every single moment. It is not just a construct of the human mind.

God and Indeterminacy

Where does God fit into this scheme of reality? How does God influence physical events? Does His influence violate any physical laws? The priest and physicist William Pollard (1911–1989) tried to combine quantum indeterminacy with God's providence.

Pollard utilizes the biblical notion of providence: The bible describes events which are believed to have occurred in a manner responsive to God's will. This assertion does not contradict science's claim that repeatable events have a certain probability of occurring. Any such event occurs according to a certain probability as well as according to God's will. A world functioning this way can be studied by science and described by it (Pollard, 1959).

A common mistake is to think of providence as an extra-natural "spiritual" force acting on reality by changing the probability rate of events to make some more probable than others. This influence is akin to a natural force exerting causal physical pressure upon reality. Pollard claims that such a notion of divine intervention would be unbiblical (Pollard, 1959). He suggests that it is God who actualizes one among a set of alternative potentialities (Barbour, 1972), thus determining for a given event what its following event will be. Through this mechanism, God manifests His providence in the world in a manner which is not visible to scientific measurement and does not violate any natural laws. Scientists who study this phenomenon cannot find an explanation of why any specific outcome among the natural possibilities is actualized. They call it "chance." (Barbour, 1972) By actualizing numerous outcomes, God can influence the unfolding of events on the macroscopic scale as well. According to Pollard, we know those events as miracles of God's doing, for example creation, incarnation, and resurrection (Pollard, 1959).

The God-of-the-Gaps Argument

Scientists sometimes refer to this description of God's intervention in quantum potentialities as a God-of-the-Gaps explanation. Such explanations are said to invoke God as a cause of phenomena we do not yet understand. We assume these phenomena will, in time, be explainable as our scientific understanding improves (Russel, 2009). The underlying claim is that by explaining unexplained processes in the world as God's work, we rid ourselves of the responsibility of finding a scientific, causal explanation of a given phenomenon and are mistakenly content with filling gaps in the theory by the belief that God wills events into being as observed.

I will claim that it is not the causal relation we need to explain by bringing God into the figurative equation. What we should do is explain God's maintaining work in the world using the observed phenomena; we should incorporate reality as we find it into God's work as we believe He exercises it. In effect, it is not theology which we should use in order to fill gaps in scientific understanding, but science should be used to fill gaps in theological understanding. I will elaborate upon this principle using Luther's cross theology and its unique outlook, as well as the "God-of-the-Gaps" argument which has been used to refer to the unsolved question of why any specific quantum potentiality is actualized.

5. CONCLUSION - A CRUCICENTRIC APPROACH TO SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Having described the matters at hand, namely Luther's theology of the cross and the theological explanation of observed quantum indeterminacy, I now turn to an analysis of the relation between science and religion as deemed proper by Luther's crucicentric theology. I will do this by implementing the boundaries of human thought, as described by Luther in points 1 and 2, upon assertions made by contemporary science. I will also describe the place science should take within crucicentric thought according to points 3, 4 and 5 in order for it to be a meaningful contributor to an encompassing theological worldview. Crucicentric theology, as an overarching system, will be demonstrated using a refutation of the God-of-the-Gaps argument described in the last section. I will show that the God-of-the-Gaps argument is void, for its emphasis upon God filling gaps in scientific knowledge is a misunderstanding of the proper relationship between religion and science.

As mentioned earlier, Ian Barbour's four views relating science to religion are conflict, independence, dialog, and integration. These views assume no system is more central than the other and offers several ways of relating the claims made by one system with those made by the other. No hierarchical epistemic authority is suggested, meaning no system is considered to be "more true" than the other. Whenever we encounter claims about creation or reality, we are to turn to one of the suggested ways offered by Barbour in order to reconcile different claims about the world.

Such a reconciliatory method would be foolish when viewed through a worldview based upon the theology of the cross, for it assumes man to be a worthy arbitrator able to distinguish between truthfulness of systems at least one of which does not speak of the cross of Christ. Barbour's supposed epistemic equivalency constitutes an anthropocentric viewpoint which claims a revelatory mechanism to be found in a human-made system, negating the crucicentric principle stating no such system is appropriable by man (crucicentric points 3 and 5).

The crucicentric worldview suggests that religion is an encompassing system whereby it becomes the prime system revealing God and His creation through faith in Christ. Science should be secondary to it and, while having much merit, only used to point to God and not to unravel knowledge of The Divine or His handiwork. Luther claims philosophy (science) seeks God from around the cross, meaning science does not heed the revelatory power of the crucified Christ and instead relies on human-centered methods of gaining supposed knowledge. Science thus imprisoning man's thought within the confines of his limited reasoning capacity (crucicentric point 1).

Human reason cannot comprehend that which only God can (crucicentric point 2). Science is based on human reasoning and is therefore ill-equipped to fathom the mysteries of creation. Its

explanatory power is limited to the confines of human perception. Can one perceive that which is beyond perception? All one can have is an awareness of the fact that some matters lie beyond one's perceptive abilities. Relying on human perception for the understanding of the world around us is deemed foolish by Luther for precisely this reason.

Despite science being anthropocentric, it can still point to the glory of God. In order for science to look at God through the cross, it needs to be an integral part of a religious mode of thought. It should be a part of a more extensive, encompassing system predicated upon faith. According to Luther's crucicentric theology, God induces faith; Faith is not inherent to the believer and is, therefore, a reliable foundation for thought. Such science would still be a tool for gaining knowledge of creation, but now it would hold its findings in the perspective of the cross of Christ. It would frame its findings by an overarching fideist system. Such a frame of thought would allow it to refer to reality as God's creation, to look at God "through the cross" and not "from around the cross." Science would then constitute a wise system, rather than a foolish one as described by Luther (crucicentric point 3). I shall call such science by the name "Crucicentric Science."

By holding both science and religion to be epistemologically equivalent, Barbour negates the centrality of the cross for human knowledge of the Divine and His creation. This equivalency lies in contradiction to Luther's views about the centrality of the cross as an instrument of God's revealedness (crucicentric point 4). Science, as Barbour describes it, does not acknowledge the limits of anthropocentric understanding and ignores the fact that solely God can disclose knowledge of God and His Creation. Crucicentric science, on the other hand, heeds the message from the cross and redirects its efforts without changing its methodology. It acknowledges the primacy of the cross and sees all of its findings, achieved using the scientific method, as provisional results to be incorporated into God's revelation at the cross.

I now turn to the claim that God intervening with quantum potentialities is a God-of-the-Gaps argument. This argument claims that bringing God into quantum physics fills an area where knowledge is still missing - a gap. It subordinates God to a scientific explanation and raises the latter to the position of the primary encompassing system of thought where God needs to fit in. This claim ignores the centrality of the cross as dictated by Luther (crucicentric point 5).

According to crucicentric science, the God-of-the-Gaps argument used in this case is a foolish claim. A wiser claim would be that scientists discovered a natural mechanism of uncertainty and need to incorporate it into religious dogma with the cross at its center. God's control of quantum potentialities is therefore no longer an attempt at delegating unexplained phenomena to an unknown source, but assigning scientific findings to what we believe to be God's work.

The findings of crucicentric science fill a gap in our understanding of the work of God. Such an understanding can never be completed by science alone because, according to the theology of the cross, only faith can bring us closer to knowledge of God and faith's prime locus of revelation can only be the cross of Christ.

Such a view constitutes a type of religious counter-apologetics. It denies the need for Christian self-justification in the face of science by claiming science to be a subordinate of religion. Science needs to be incorporated into religion and not vice versa, thus nullifying the need for an apologetic religion striving to "elevate" itself to scientific epistemological acceptance. Its usefulness lies in drawing a guiding line for those scientists who struggle with their religious beliefs by presenting their scientific work as highly supportive of their religious views. We cannot even pose the problem of contradiction between scientific and religious worldviews since no such contradiction is possible: everything found by science is a part of God's created universe, and any apparent contradiction has to originate in the most fallible elements in the system, namely human logic and anthropocentric misunderstanding.

Applying the notion of crucicentric science to Pollard's ideas about God intervening in quantum potentialities leads to a reassessment of the findings of quantum physics. Given the indeterminacy physicists have found in nature, we can conclude that God has created the world we see around us, along with its indeterminacy. The question we need to ask is, why did He create those indeterminacies in the

first place? The soteriological implications of such a question are beyond the scope of this paper. We can only assume that God created quantum indeterminacy as a mechanism facilitating God's intervention in historical events. By favoring specific quantum potentialities, which lead to certain macroscopic outcomes, God could have brought into being events described by the bible. Such is Pollard's position when he speaks of biblical time (Pollard, 1959).

I present this view as an example of utilizing scientific findings for a better understanding of God's work in the world. Of course, we can extrapolate different views for any given scientific detail, and this can prove a ripe breeding ground for further discussion about God's providence. As science advances, it can analyze newly found phenomena in such a way as to try and build a coherent worldview describing God's revelation per crucicentric theology.

To conclude, what we should do is to offer a possible answer based upon scientific understanding to the question of how God intervened in reality throughout human history. We do this instead of offering an answer based upon Christian understanding to the question of how individual potentialities are actualized. The difference between these two approaches is that the first incorporates scientific knowledge into a religious worldview, while the latter incorporates a religious worldview into the answer to a scientific question. Opponents accuse adherents of the second approach of using the God-of-the-Gaps argument. Those opponents cannot similarly accuse adherents of the first question which spawns from the emphases put forward by Luther in his theology of the cross.

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