

# *Dynamic and Theological Models for Religion and Science*

with Richard Olson, "A Dynamic Model for 'Science and Religion': Interacting Subcultures"; David J. Zehnder, "A Theologian's Typology for Religion and Science"

## A THEOLOGIAN'S TYPOLOGY FOR SCIENCE AND RELIGION

*by David J. Zehnder*

*Abstract:* A 1991 article by psychologist John D. Carter offers an underdeveloped insight that typologies for relating science and religion might be fruitfully formulated in discipline-specific perspectives. This essay thus covers a specifically theological perspective only briefly outlined in Carter, and it expands four models that theologians have used to relate religion and science. This essay renames these models and expands their implications, especially for addressing the behavioral sciences. (1) The contrarian model generally opposes science, (2) the apologetic makes theology congenial to science, (3) the correlational holds both disciplines in tension, and (4) the synthetic attempts a grand unification of them. Arguing from the theologian's perspective, this essay is intended to demonstrate that different models/methods for relating science and religion are really reflections of deeper religious attitudes and argues that the task for which a method is employed ultimately determines its adequacy within that attitude's constraints.

*Keywords:* apologetics; contrarian; correlation; methodology; model; religion; science; synthetic; typology

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If true understanding comes through examining the whole context of our objects of inquiry, and a great part of this context is our own subjective disposition, then it makes sense occasionally to examine our presuppositions and implicit structures for organizing what we consider to be knowledge. For scholars of religion concerned with their discipline's relationship to science, an essential way to reach this self-awareness is to reflect on the models of theological and scientific interaction that we

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employ, perhaps even unconsciously. Toward this end, this essay is an effort to construct a typology of models that not only describes the facts of how science and religion might relate in a given model but also to emphasize the religious attitudes (i.e., beliefs and feelings about how the divine is known) that drive the major models of this interaction. Certainly, many typologies for science and religion already exist, and my intention is not simply to increase their number. However, a perspectival void in the established literature might be filled by determining what a specifically theological approach might yield for questions concerning religious and scientific interpretations of human nature. Students of religious studies will have more specific guidance in joining science to their theologies and scientists and philosophers will see what their own theories might overlook in religion.

What does it mean to construct a theologian's typology? The enterprise presupposes that though scientists, philosophers, and religion scholars might have unlimited appreciation for each other's disciplines, there will always be a limited capacity for one professional to do another's work, an acknowledgment essential to a humble search for truth. The most important science/religion typologies so far have been constructed by scientists who have subsumed the agendas of theologians and scientists under labels intended to cover both disciplines. A quintessential example of this practice is Ian Barbour's work in which he develops categories of conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration between science and religion (1990, 3–30; 2000; 2002, 1–9). These categories have served Barbour's field well over time, making it foolish to deny their value; however, their angle of analysis might be complemented with a more subjective angle from the standpoint of the theologians he categorizes.

His scientific typology's descriptive method leaves room to explore the subjective religious attitudes present in theological agendas. A case in point is that Barbour includes all neo-orthodox theologians under an "independence" label (meaning that they hold science and religion apart), expressly because they accepted the results of biblical scholarship (Barbour 1990, 11). While this claim is historically true in general, it tends to miss the radically different attitudes that Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann grew to have regarding natural knowledge's usefulness (not to mention Paul Tillich), especially as Barth attempted to do away with (officially "sublate," *aufheben*) philosophy after struggling with its impact on the church and Bultmann appropriated Martin Heidegger's philosophy of existence into the core of his theology. More radically, religious studies might discover that an "independence" label, for example, is not fitting for many religious figures whose broad religious attitudes make them unlikely to compartmentalize their lives and the information that they process.

It will be hermeneutically helpful to recognize the disparate concerns of scientists and religion scholars to permit at least two separate and discipline-specific kinds of typologies that do not necessarily share the same language.

So doing will capture the contextual nature of all academic work and highlight more clearly the barriers that professionals of various disciplines have in understanding other specializations, hopefully to reach more clarity between them eventually. And though this approach offers an alternative interpretation of some of Barbour's examples, it actually helps to develop the spirit of his typology's most nuanced contributions in which a broad label (e.g., integration) is broken down into several subcategories (natural theology, theology of nature, systematic synthesis) to capture the variety of agendas even under one label. This essay is one attempt to portray this kind of variety more consistently within religious studies. To make a typology discipline-specific will let that discipline define its types in the way that best honors its sundry manifestations, and to make the language specific will limit the variety of interpretations that abstract category labels tend to allow.

This standard for understanding as self-consciousness, propounded so forcibly by G. W. F. Hegel (1949), might only be carried on by the admission that my thoughts do not automatically correspond to your thoughts, nor do the doctor's to the pastor's. But to recognize these different standpoints from the outset will foster an inquisitive attitude toward knowledge. To establish a theologian's typology for religion and science is one way to begin separating typologies into different kinds in order to see what kind of insights might have been overlooked in past meta-typologies (those that cover scientists' and theologians' agendas) and what dialogue might be elicited from other disciplines that have their own unique ways of understanding this interaction. Though sometimes offering alternate interpretations, discipline-specific typologies need not replace meta-typologies such as Barbour's but serve to detail their various sides with greater specificity.<sup>1</sup>

An excellent precedent for this insight is an article by Rosemead psychologist John D. Carter, called "Secular and Sacred Models of Psychology and Religion" (1991; cf. Carter and Narramore 1979), in which he proposes that secular and religiously minded psychologists cannot be said to share the same models for the relationship between science and religion. In only fourteen pages, he describes two fourfold typologies to cover the range of positions that secular counselors have toward religion and science and the same for religious counselors. Writing in near-outline form, Carter leaves much room for the principles he organizes to be expanded more fully in terms of their actual representatives—hence this essay. The potential ambiguity of his brief essay is that the division of sacred and secular typologies is subject to at least two major interpretations. The more personally oriented reading is that the difference in typologies is rooted in a difference between people's religious adherence or not. The other, more methodological reading followed here is that religious or not, professionals of different disciplines have different methods and points of departure for acquiring knowledge, whose particularity might be fruitful to

consider when constructing science/religion typologies. As implied above, theologians are usually incapable of explaining the scientist's field with an insider's justice, thus I will only develop Carter's sacred typology from the standpoint of religious studies, hoping that natural and social scientists will care to fill out their ends and thus add to the discussion in ways that only they can.

In following Carter's sacred typology, the discussion focuses primarily on theology's use of the behavioral sciences and the interpretation of religious experience, though relevant material to the natural sciences also appears. To capture the theologian's typology, I have broadened Carter's four labels, renamed as contrarian, apologetic, correlational, and synthetic. The contrarian argues essentially that scientific methods convey no spiritual benefit. The apologetic assumes that the scientific is knowledge's supreme form and attempts to conform religion to it. The correlational attempts to keep the disciplines separate but in tension, and the synthetic offers a broad worldview intended to account for both disciplines in harmony. These models are similar to Barbour's except that in focusing on religious motivations, the *Geist* behind these models, the reader will notice a different and hopefully complementary tone in which, for example, the contrarian model will expose the spiritual consequences of what Barbour's conflict model has already detailed, and we'll discover what is theologically at stake in integration.

Before embarking on the theologian's typology proper, it is important to make one definition clear, that of a model itself. The following pages will show that though a model might be formally defined as "a method for relating science and religion," a more vital definition is that a model is a reflection of religious concerns "in action," addressing problems of human existence in time. This definition is essential to understanding that no single model can be judged as *best* in an indisputable or timeless way, because the most adequate method only arises relative to both the constraints of a particular religious commitment and the model's effectiveness in carrying out a task that its adherents seek to accomplish. The following accounts will demonstrate that models arise out of particular religious attitudes and the problems that they address such that judging any model is indirectly to judge a religious perspective itself, a matter that reason has been unable to decide.

It should be noted that though all models answer to religious perspectives, the immediate criterion of adequacy is still its effectiveness, meaning that a single model can never exhaust the possibilities of any religious community in light of its questions. I know firm synthetic thinkers, for example, who lapsed into correlational thinking when questioning a common practice of praying for good weather. (A synthetic approach might allow that God works directly in nature, but the correlational will cast doubt on this direct function of prayer.) The adequacy of any science/religion model is a product of one's means for judging religious truth as that truth

is manifest in time and observed in handling various challenges to faith, and though most of us have a basic orientation toward judging religious truth, new challenges might require new methods and maybe even new attitudes. For full disclosure, I admit my leaning toward the correlational model, which is perhaps the attitude behind my saying that the best model depends on the person, the religion, the problem, and the occasion, really an overcomplicated way of stating that the burden for finding adequacy will have to rest finally on the individual conscience.

Given this introduction to our theologian's typology and the tack toward more hermeneutical sensitivity concerning the religious commitments behind its models, our inquiry can proceed with the contrarians and their concern to weigh the spiritual consequences of all approaches to knowledge.

### CONTRARIAN METHODS

Carter summarizes the contrarian attitude, what he calls "Scripture *Against* Psychology" ("theology against science"), as working from the presupposition that theology's task is primarily soteriological (concerned with salvation) and that salvation-granting revelation is against reason and natural knowledge. If scripture contains everything necessary for human solidarity and salvation, it reasons, then external viewpoints only stand to compromise what is divinely established. In Ian Barbour's typology, this view is paralleled on the theology side by those stalwart defenders of creation science: biblical literalists (1990, 8–10; 2000, 2; 2002, 1). Where Barbour offers a descriptive account of their position, I hope the contrarian model will enhance our understanding of *why* people with this religious attitude hold their views, which is primarily because creation science or any other form of contrarianism entails that God's very communication, and therefore human salvation, is at stake in the question of science and theology's relationship.

The contrarian view aligns with Karl Barth's temperament because it seems to deny natural theology or valid anthropology in secular research ([1932] 1986, 123; Holder 2009).<sup>2</sup> It finds expression in scholars such as Robert Roberts, who, though he desires to produce a robust psychology, believes that it can only come from within Christianity's classic tradition (Roberts 2000, 148–77). Roberts argues that if Christianity attempts to please culture on culture's own terms, religion will inevitably distort and lose its independent authoritative basis. Starting in scripture and the theological tradition through the church fathers, he says, Christianity has its own psychological method, whose framework will only be weakened by secular insights.

This method is set against dividing the material and spiritual realms, the secular and the religious, if so doing implies that one realm is common and universal and the other is private and subjectively valued. It is

especially attuned to spiritual problems in counseling, acknowledging that whichever troubles appear, there are not purely mental or purely spiritual illnesses isolated from each other, but all illnesses are somehow spiritual. This view steadfastly keeps religious faith at the forefront of its concern, allowing it to dismiss any claims that psychological treatment outside of the faith's tradition can possibly orient individuals to religious truth. For Roberts, it guards the doctrinal principle that God saves people through his word, meaning that theology must set its own terms in transforming the individual and that religion's value can never be determined by scientific treatments. Whatever evils or good arise in human experience, their counteraction or continuation by scientific means is ultimately vanity if theology's values are neglected.

This method finds an ally in certain narrative or postliberal theologies that place the doctrine before the person, so to speak, a consideration apparently validated in researcher Peter Stromberg's analysis of conversion accounts. Postliberal thought, from its charter text (Lindbeck 1984), has steered away from the liberal attempt to ground theology in a universal human nature. Rather, it focuses on the specificity of theological language for determining the truth of religious expression in a religious culture's terms. The goal is not to find God in our intuitions but to let our intuitions be formed and sorted by "tyrannical" (Auerbach 1953) scriptural narratives and subsequent theological traditions. It presupposes that language, as a symbolic expression, forms experience. Doctrines here function as rules that guide theological speech, and by participating in the speech, the religious community revels in its own cultural tradition, forming individuals with uniquely religious character.

In an influential book on hermeneutics and speech analysis, Peter Stromberg documents this phenomenon (1993). Using recorded interviews of evangelicals telling their conversion stories, he demonstrates how their use of theological language sets the terms for their perception of reality such that for them there is no deeper reality behind the doctrine itself. Stromberg speaks of two kinds of language: the referential and the constitutive. The referential is the language of things. Certain words (e.g., "horse" or "bite") refer to concrete things/actions and often imply specific courses of action such as the signs at Grant's Farm, St. Louis saying "the horses may bite," or the phrase "this engine takes 10W30." In contrast, Stromberg contends that religious language, when it is learned competently, is constitutive language. It is not so much for discussing things but for practicing a ritual. Phrases such as "praise God from whom all blessings flow," or "forgive us our sins" are mistranslated if they are taken to have specific referents; their point is to have a disciplining effect over religious perspective and form people, for example, whose lives are stamped by praise, repentance, and the faith community's values.

Because contrarian religious narratives constitute, even overtake, the categories with which its members view the world and their relationships

to God, secular research into religion would not find a comfortable place because its nomenclature would constantly compete with theology's. The contrarian goal is to enrich and expand a community's commitment to its own traditions. The moment scientists begin to offer counter-explanations for religious tenets, the integrity of the faith stands to be diluted by foreign terminology from an external worldview. If, for example, the doctrine of original sin is translated as a biologically observable tendency for genes to seek their own self-preservation (e.g., Dawkins 1990), then the language of biology might usurp theological language, and the spiritual dimension of life will lose out to biological values and solutions.

This contra-scientific approach offers valuable counsel to contemporary theology. Perhaps its strongest contribution to religion is its warning against culture's seduction, which persuades people every day to reduce spiritual battles to chemical battles on psychology's side and church structures to corporate business models on sociology's side. This contrarian method acknowledges that the problems addressed by theology do not come in a universal form based on human nature but that individuals seeking religious truth must be transformed by that truth such that their problems are somehow fit into the scriptural narrative and not given the power to control theology's form in addressing them. As translatable as religions are amid cultures and people, they are also transformative of them and do not rely on any culture's rational foundation for validation.

However, as necessary as the contrarian method is for upholding the ultimate religious conviction, it has an overloaded degree of skepticism in ruling out the validity of secular research. Admittedly, in certain cases (e.g., spiritual ill) science's insights would only harm the case by distracting those involved from the true ailment. But in many issues such as faith development, research accounts can provide a unique window into human needs and nature. However incomplete, consistency and validity mark many empirical accounts of religious change and experience. To dismiss religion's psychosocial dimension will result in a theology that underestimates the universal human tendencies crucial to understanding religious belief itself. In neglecting them, the contrarian impulse is finally too narrow to address religion's diversity even within a particular faith tradition. Though it accounts powerfully for religious language's power and importance, it does not naturally comprehend the complexity of what stands behind the language.

#### APOLOGETIC METHODS

If the contrarian attitude is weighted heavily toward theology, its opposite in emphasis is surely the "Scripture of Psychology," or apologetic attitude that is weighted toward science. Carter explains that it treats science as the fundamental form of knowledge that religion should not compete against but accommodate. In comparison with Barbour's models, this model is

especially interesting because it finds no obvious parallel, a case that reflects the post-Enlightenment status of this question. Since Descartes's and Pascal's time science has needed to defend itself to religion less and less, and religion has had to defend itself to science ever more. The apologetic is one model that is not easily discovered by dual-discipline typology because its motivations are unique only to modern theology.

This attitude of being religious in a scientific way makes apologetic thinking a theological counterpart to Carl Jung, for instance, who believed that humankind has inner, spiritual archetypes (i.e., fundamental values of life and survival) that can be accessed through religious practice to increase human well-being. An essential element to happiness, he thought, was to come to terms with our inner mythological beliefs and understand them psychologically (Jung and Kerényi 1969, 74–79). Jung acknowledged in his doctrine of the *collective subconscious* that human thought is irreducibly religious just as lungs irreducibly breathe (Jung 1933, 117).<sup>3</sup> The best attempts at demystifying our ancient conceptions of deities are at best translations from one metanarrative to another, better-accepted version in modernity's eyes. This acknowledgment of a universal human religiosity is the starting point of apologetic methods in theology. While contrarians are skeptical of the ability to know human nature through rational inquiry, the apologetic alternative expresses a disproportional confidence in secular methods. In comparing these adverse methods together, it becomes evident that they don't work on the same plane or for the same goals. The contrarian's ultimate goal is salvation, and if individuals must suffer through mental anguish, the struggle is worthwhile in the final destination's light. But the apologetic views religion in its this-life implications, leading it to concentrate on more tangible goals than life after death. In holding rational approaches to knowledge as fundamental even to revelational approaches, it seeks happiness and mental health through them. Of all the possible methods, this one is the most pragmatic in that it continually tests theology in terms of its adequacy to address the human dilemma as defined by humans.

This method ties into liberal brands of theology in that it concentrates on an anthropological basis in which specific religious doctrines are symbols of a deeper, affective basis of revelation. The most influential is Friedrich Schleiermacher's great, nineteenth-century system. When attacks from biblical scholarship, rationalism, and the scientific revolution had severely damaged theology's traditional way of understanding God's relationship with the world, Schleiermacher developed a method to hide the truth of religion in a universal human feeling of God consciousness, what he called "the feeling of absolute dependence," *das Gefühl Schlechthiniger Abhängigkeit* ([1820] 1960, 28). Rather than understanding doctrines as revealed truths about the significance of salvation history, Schleiermacher qualified doctrines as symbolic expressions of an affective means to know God. Though Schleiermacher appeared a generation before Wilhelm



Wundt and the rise of modern psychology, his viewpoint is remarkably similar. His doctrine of Christ is a good example, positing Jesus as the example of the perfectly God-conscious man. Church ministry is encouraged to use Jesus' example to further the inner and outer peace that God-consciousness inspires once the congregation feels its absolute dependence on God as the meaning of existence. Here, Schleiermacher is close to the mental health concerns of modern researchers. Though he greatly compromised the traditional particularity of theological truth claims, a sympathetic account will admit that he was taking the only route he could find to shelter his faith from rationalistic attacks and establish ground for Christianity among its "cultured despisers" ([1799] 2004).

Though Schleiermacher lived about two hundred years ago, he is important to remember for the brand of theology that he started that continued on in the next century through thinkers such as Paul Tillich (1951), Bernard Lonergan (1972), and David Tracy (1975). These theologies are congenial to the apologetic method in that they all resist considering doctrines as coming from God in a direct and indisputable way. Revelation for them is something less specific and more affectively gripping.

In contemporary psychology, one advocate of this general method is Hope College's David Myers (1991; 2000, 54–83). Though he would not accept the liberal strain of thinking found in Schleiermacher, he is united with this tradition in contending for an apologetic theology that fits into the contemporary scientific outlook. In my interpretation, his concern is to avoid Copernican revolutions that theology sets up by making claims about material reality on the same level as scientific analysis. If theology claims that Earth is the center of the universe and science proves otherwise in a practically effective manner, then theology is discredited. One of Myers's examples is homosexuality. If theology claims that all individuals are capable of being converted to heterosexuality and science concludes that some individuals are unconvertible, then theology, if it were wrong to contend thus on a scientifically testable level, stands to be eminently frustrated. Prayer is another example. Ever since Francis Galton's studies on the efficacy of prayer for missionary ships' safety, scientists have attempted to offer counter-explanations for Christian claims to answered prayer, especially claims to divine blessings of material prosperity and health (1872). Myers tries to prevent theology from claiming that prayer is answered in a way that clearly contradicts the results of studies. Instead, he directs the theology of prayer in a way that does not require it to manipulate temporal events. If prayer is to remain meaningful, he contends, it must have a fundamentally personal function that allows individuals to recognize God's sovereign providence over all of time and does not result in humans attempting to use God to alleviate their ailments supernaturally (1991, 407).<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps this method's greatest strength is its inherent tendency not to make theology compete directly with scientific research. This strength

is evident in Schleiermacher's concern to shelter religion's truth from its despisers and also Myers's untangling theology from empirical research. There are times when theology must criticize science directly, where empirical mythology has run far beyond its due humility and representation of evidence. However, theology should not underestimate the Copernican challenge. If automotive mechanics explains that your car won't start because the alternator was decrepit and left the battery uncharged, a religious explanation about persecution from spiritual forces will appear vague and unhelpful next to the contemporary Ockham's razor that finds the clearest explanation. If dividends are increased by 0.25 percent per share in your stock fund, the explanation of God's direct blessing seems somewhat superfluous to the explanations of greater share prices from earnings growth prospects.

In guarding against the Copernican problem in which religious views of the world lose out to scientific evidence, the apologetic method naturally casts doubt on straightforward or literal attributions to divine activity. Though explaining religious experience as God's direct presence in an individual's life might be natural and compelling from faith communities' standpoints, these experiences should not be judged as true (in the apologetic view) because of their supposed divine origin but because of their long-term benefits for life. For example, Jonathan Edwards witnessed this point inadvertently in America's Great Awakening of the 1730s ([1737] 1834: 344–64). He initially witnessed the great religious enthusiasm of that era with approval, but when he saw the long-term effects and subsequent apostasy of many formerly passionate converts, he grew extremely suspicious of religious affections as a sign of individuals' predestination (Edwards [1746] 1959). Notably, William James agreed with Edwards's eventual understanding of extreme religious affections, avowing that the difference between the radically religious person and the "natural" person begins and ends with religious experience but does not necessarily continue in matters of moral consequence ([1902] 1997, 195; also Wimberley et al. 1975, 162–70).<sup>5</sup> This example shows how the social and psychological forces detected by apologetic methods sometimes play a greater role in religion than contrarian approaches acknowledge. As psychologists Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle argue, the surest predictor of religious affiliation is parental or family influence (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997, 99), making competing theological explanations of this affiliation seem somehow out of place.

Despite its faults in giving up too much ground to science, the apologetic method at least introduces sophistication into the human side of faith that too often tempts religious adherents to take the vagaries of experience as directly revealing the divine. The method helps to avoid making theology compete with science on matters that would discredit the loser of the competition, and it guards against a zero-sum game in which

a gain for science immediately produces a loss for theology. Granted this contribution, the apologetic method still operates on the level of human concerns, and though it won't allow theology to be vanquished by the sciences, it will allow theology to change shape to accommodate modern criteria of adequacy. The concept of sin might take the form of insufficient self-assertion, rather than a moral corruption in the traditional understanding (Pargament and Mahoney 2004, 485).<sup>6</sup> Operating on a religiously experiential level, it is inherently slanted against doctrine as an independent source of truth, meaning that any sympathizers of the contrarian method will find it tragically deficient. If one takes Christ's resurrection from the dead as the ultimate meaning of history and the hope of salvation, it would appear horribly short sighted, from a contrarian viewpoint, to dwell on the resurrection as a powerful expression, for instance, of our ability to quell existential anxiety over death (Tillich 1951–1963).

Looking at the extremes, contrarian and apologetic, true comparison is difficult because of their reflections of radically different kinds of religious attitudes. The one centers around religion's internal logic and tradition, the other seeks to develop traditional categories symbolically in a contemporarily accommodating fashion. One seeks well-being primarily in this life, while the other is willing to sacrifice happiness for a higher spiritual truth. The question of which is superior cannot be decided objectively but entails debate between competing religious visions, and in the end, adequacy must rest on the individual conscience.

Because of these extremities, some mediating approaches have arisen that can potentially harness the best principles already noted. The first is correlational, which juxtaposes scientific and religious accounts but recognizes the inherent tension between them; the second is synthetic, seeking more optimistically to resolve the tension between accounts and come to a systematic philosophy of both. The correlational is similar to the apologetic in refraining from challenging science on its own level, but it is similar to the contrarian in allowing theology to have its own authoritative basis. The synthetic, because it ultimately prefers a religious framework for fitting all disciplines, is a liberal corrective to the contrarian way; but it also seeks, like the apologetic, to make theology cohere with rational criteria (though without giving up as much).

#### CORRELATIONAL METHODS

Carter categorizes correlational methods as "Scripture *Parallel To Psychology*," capturing the tenor of science and theology dialectically parallel but never effacing each other. The two disciplines rather function as dialogue partners offering different perspectives on a topic. If both theological and natural means of knowing are valid, then both must be

allowed a voice in theological discourse even if opening up the floor to diverse voices without a clear authority structure to organize them will inevitably cause tension. Comparing this method with Barbour's categories, the correlational method seems to cover either his independence or dialogue model depending on how close the correlation is carried out. Perhaps the most provocative question this method elicits is whether independence and dialogue are distinctions of kind or only of degree, and the correlation method here constructed tends to convey that a yoking of science and religion is inevitable, making pure isolation impossible. Though it can't be argued fully here, it is helpful to recall that even the most isolationist scientists will still have sensibilities about the good and even ultimate; and the most isolationist religious sectarians will still borrow philosophical language to express that God has a *nature* (in Greek, *physis*, e.g., 2 Peter 1:4).

The fundamental stake of this approach is to depict scientific and religious truth claims as valid within their respective levels of explanation, recognizing that each discipline operates according to its own peculiar logic. While they can be juxtaposed, they ultimately explain different things, and even if they describe the same phenomenon, they do so from different concerns and presuppositions, precluding any single interpretation that brings both accounts into harmony. For example, remembering Dawkins, if biology finds that humans are greedy in their very genes, self-interested, and lacking sympathy for the preservation of human community as opposed to individual legacies, then it seems plausible on the surface to say that Dawkins has really discovered original sin—a biological root of rebellion in us all. The synthetic method discussed below as a great unifier of science and religion might draw this conclusion. The correlational, in contrast, will allow that biologically based greed is legitimately interpreted as an expression of depravity, but it comes to that conclusion by applying an independent theology to the phenomenon without hanging the credibility of its viewpoint on science's results. It recognizes that theology's depravity doctrine can never be made contingent on a scientific foundation. If Dawkins eventually overturned his conclusion and argued that humans, when researched even more extensively, are actually good-willed and magnanimous at heart, the change in result would not shake the depravity doctrine's traditional basis. Even if theology and science recognize inherent avarice in the human race, they do so for vastly different reasons and with different expectations: the one, perhaps, to attempt to master human nature and improve society, the other to bring people closer to God.

Because the correlational method gives a forum for multiple voices, it is notably loose and versatile, according to psychologist Gary Collins (2000, 112). The religious attitude behind it is one of cautious openness, using many sources to discover theological truth. Rather than a formal method taking precedence over a certain theological problem (such as

the contrarian method forcing problems into its internal logic or the apologetic method looking for religion's subjective kernel), the problem defines which sources of input will best handle it. In this respect, it is similar to existentialist thinking by putting existence before essence (Sartre [1946] 1970),<sup>7</sup> acknowledging that theology takes place within concrete human problems and that handling them is the process by which the faith community's ultimate values are both determined and revealed. These values are revealed when problems force the community to act, and they are determined by the problem-solving process that translates values into action.

To illustrate, let us suppose that a young group of Hare Krishnas decides to evangelize to a nearby city by chanting and handing out information at an annual street festival. The group's action in evangelizing (as opposed to only discussing its evangelistic imperative) reveals the truth of its missional conviction, but it might find that its methods do not have a lasting impact on people. Though their convictions were solid, their results were disappointing. This lack of effectiveness might cause the group to re-determine its beliefs about evangelism and take up a new style, perhaps incorporating social relief to reach people who are hurting most.

This kind of scenario happened to Dr. Curt Rhodes, founder of humanitarian organization Questscope International, based in Amman, Jordan. Inspired by a steady relationship with the Navigators group, he traveled to Beirut, Lebanon in 1982 in part for missions. Trying for years to communicate to the Arab world, he found that evangelical methods did not connect with them and eventually found that he had to take a more subtle approach. He became involved with humanitarian work in Jordan, ultimately attempting to show God's love through action and only discussing theology when people wanted to hear more about his motivations. The continual, early frustrations revealed Dr. Rhodes's earnest theological commitment, but his belief about how it should be expressed was determined by the concrete problems of social work in the Middle East.

These examples are intended to demonstrate that the correlational method's practical focus entails that it probably has the fewest rules of the four methods here described. While both the contrarian and apologetic methods are clearer in their goals, the contrarian in upholding a religion's traditional integrity and the apologetic in facilitating healthy spirituality, the correlational method allows individuals to decide their own goals more autonomously (though still within the confines of this general religious attitude). Though the correlational model reflects definite religious commitment to doctrine's independent authority, it is more purely methodological in maintaining a discussion forum for theology but not a particular goal. As the examples above demonstrate, meaningful theology is a product of experience that arises through the application of doctrinal

values to concrete problems of existence. The reward of this method is its versatility; the risk is its vagueness in lacking an inherent criterion of value.

Contrasting the contrarian way, correlation does not require that research be religious, only that it be put to religious use, and it thereby presupposes that secular anthropologies are valid conversation partners with scripturally derived anthropologies. In fact, its vagueness allows that any sources of information might be helpful if held widely enough apart that the one's presuppositions do not eclipse the other's claims. This general tone expresses optimism in science but a qualified optimism because in contrast to the apologetic model, the correlational is designed to keep secular sources of knowledge at bay by an *a priori* recognition of their limitations. The heart of correlational thinking is what H. Richard Niebuhr would call "Christ and Culture in Paradox" (1956, 149–89), entailing that tension will always exist between secular and theological accounts of religion. We should not try to use one to vanquish the other, and we should not expect to find an ultimate resolution between them.

A provocative case of this tension is evident in studies such as a particular "sanctification test," where psychologists replicated the Good Samaritan parable, testing forty Princeton Theological Seminary students to determine if they would stop to help a young man "shabbily dressed, slumped, coughing, and groaning, in a doorway in an alley" (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993, 346–47). Results showed that only sixteen people stopped, leaving a solid 60 percent of "less-than-good" Samaritans, so to speak. The only discoverable predictor to determine why some stopped and not others was the degree to which these seminarians were in a hurry. Studies of this kind are humbling to theologians because they tend to point out the lack of discernable difference between religious people and everyone else; but at the same time, a correlational approach will detect that these studies do have an entrapment quality and that religious ethics is a deeper set of concepts than what the behavioral sciences are able to measure empirically. The correlational method will not eliminate this basic tension, that steadfast religion should be evident through action and that those seminarians really should have had their priorities in line to stop and assist the ailing young man.

Because of its sensitivity to the tension between theology and culture amid concrete human problems, this method has some precedence in Lutheranism. Correlational thinking has an analogy if not a specific expression in the so-called "Wittenberg Theological Method" that guided the Protestant Reformers in their efforts to establish doctrinal norms from Martin Luther's time to their last official confession in the *Formula of Concord* (Kolb 2005). This theological style placed life over theory, directing doctrinal statements toward the sinner's comfort before God. This style is clear in the debates over predestination and the final resolution of the *Formula*, urging the church to seek its comfort in Christ and not to

explain salvation and damnation either from an arbitrary decree of God or a choice burdening humans with responsibility (Frank 1865, 4:140–41). Instead, pastoral concern colors predestination's application, comforting the troubled conscience by resting speculative doubts in epistemological humility about predestination and the reality of Christ (Wengert 2006). The Wittenberg method holds as an early example of correlational thinking in that the Reformers used the experience of comfort and the gospel as parallel dialogue partners. If they disregarded comfort, then they would have shifted toward contrarian thinking and if they had made comfort a foundation for belief in the gospel then they would have tilted toward apologetic. Indeed, if comfort were the only goal, they might have attempted medieval psychiatry by hedging the gospel with ale! But they continued to take the gospel on its own authority and used it to comfort troubled consciences, and even if consciences were not automatically unburdened, they still did not abandon their theology.

This point strikes one of correlational methodology's greatest strengths in allowing various disciplines freedom to operate on their own terms yet in dialectical fashion. Like the apologetic, correlational methods do not naturally force scientific and theological conclusions about faith to compete directly because they generally describe different objects, and even if they do describe the same object, they work on such different levels of explanation that one description does not cancel the other as in a zero-sum game. In modern theology, this stratification of levels explains, in part, Rudolf Bultmann's theological method in that he refused to let the validity of the kerygma (proclamation of the gospel) be contingent on a particular culture's success as did his liberal, nineteenth-century predecessors. Instead he emphasized the uniqueness of Christianity's concept of existence in contrast to anything that natural reason can discover (Bultmann 1961, 211).<sup>8</sup> Following the neo-orthodox spirit, he emphasized revelation as the only means of knowing God, and like Barth he resisted building any philosophical foundation for the gospel and instead emphasized faith's suspension above any rational ground (Bultmann 1961, 211).<sup>9</sup> But unlike Barth, Bultmann conversed with Heidegger's philosophy at length and used it to help explain the authentic existence (characterized by openness to the future) that he felt the gospel gives.

In terms of recognizing theology's independent authority, the correlational method preserves the strength found in the contrarian, but in being open to secular research, it preserves the cogency of the apologetic. Without making theology compete directly with science, it gains a valuable insight from the apologetic method, but where the apologetic method tends to make the truth of faith contingent on empirical phenomena (i.e., spiritual health), the correlational resists setting up this kind of foundation.

Altogether, the correlational method is probably the most broadly applicable because of its interactive effort for balance, though a correlationally

minded person might still find other methods more effective for certain problems. True spiritual battles might most competently be handled by the contrarian, and mental health/chemical imbalance problems are probably best handled by the apologetic. The central difficulty with the correlational method is its lack of clarity. Though it reflects a kind of religious attitude (*viz.* that theology is independent but in tension with science) it does so vaguely. It lets the individual thinkers determine their own goals and balance of information sources, which creates a kind of relativism even within its own parameters. Correlational thinkers with clear senses of purpose might not be threatened by this problem, but the method still does not provide a natural solution. The synthetic method, in contrast, is designed to close the correlational gap, filling in the missing clarity by constructing a pervasive, theologically constituted worldview. The central question is: How successful can it be?

#### SYNTHETIC METHODS

The model most optimistic about finding harmony between religion and science falls under Carter's category: "Scripture *Integrates* Psychology." It parallels Barbour's integration model almost completely, especially under the "systematic synthesis" category, but it adds that a pervasive worldview is theologically at stake. Carter summarizes its religious outlook under the axiom that "God is the author of all truth" (1991, 442). Rather than holding scientific and religious accounts of truth as different kinds of statements in tension, it aims to harmonize them into a unified system, evincing a religious attitude of optimism in finding God everywhere.

While the correlational approach focused on practical concerns, letting problems elicit their specific means of resolution, the synthetic way has a more constructive hue intended to build a pervasive, religious worldview that not only inspires redemptive hope for the future but also provides an accurate picture of the world now. Where correlational theological statements operate on a different level than the empirical and generally describe different phenomena, synthetic theological statements intend to describe the same things in complementary fashion. Synthetic statements are thus less personally oriented and more theoretical/ontological in setting categories to make sense of the world's spiritual and material reality. The fundamental premise of synthetic thinking is that creation naturally reveals the divine. If "the heavens declare the glory of God" and "the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1 NIV), for example, then God is somehow discernible in nature. Its task is to find true statements about reality that do not only reveal reality but God himself. Secular researchers, then, can find truths that are directly compatible with theology, but without theology they lack the hermeneutical whole that this method is designed to establish. For instance, Karl Marx's rage against proletariat exploitation



might not only be a discovery of unfortunate consequences in England's industrial age but of sin itself, perhaps inspiring a theological imperative to counteract labor alienation.

Synthetic thinking has an implicit hope, contrasting correlational, that many secular studies are "halfway there" and should not only be consulted but redeemed from the inside out by their direct incorporation into a theological worldview. Like the contrarian method, it looks for the spiritual aspect in all of its topics, but in stark contrast, its optimism opens it up to any sources that will enhance this worldview and perhaps even help religious doctrines to compete directly with naturalistic doctrines. Though technically inaccurate, it might be claimed that where the apologetic method turns theology into science (by deriving doctrine from a universal anthropology), the synthetic turns science into theology (by granting scientific claims spiritual meaning in terms of their placement in a spiritual worldview).

A possible illustration is psychologist Raymond Paloutzian's study of ninety-one college students at the University of Idaho (Paloutzian 1991) in which he discovered a higher sense of purpose in life in converts (regardless of religion) over nonconverts and hence a health benefit. An apologetic method would essentially agree with the study's claim that religion exists because human beings are so constituted to function better under faith. The synthetic method would quite possibly acknowledge that claim but also argue that it misses the point, contending additionally that the advantage of religion over unbelief is an expression of God's common or creative grace that somehow extends to all things. To understand the blessing of faith in general is to understand something about human nature, creation, and ultimately God's desire to be in fellowship with human beings.<sup>10</sup>

A prominent expression of synthetic thinking in contemporary theology is Wolfhart Pannenberg's system (1991–1998). While he is too sophisticated to opt for a "God of the gaps," whose putative intervention into creation is contingent on science's explanatory limitations, he does call for a brand of theistic evolution (1994, 1–174). Discontent with naturalistic accounts of evolution, Pannenberg has synthesized them with his creation doctrine and theology of the Holy Spirit. He links the very phenomenon of life to the Spirit's force field, which animates all things including the evolutionary process (1994, 34).<sup>11</sup> In contrast, a correlational account would be interested in evolution either not at all or only concerning its implications for anthropology and human values.

The most general criticism of synthetic thinking is that it attempts too much in trying to harmonize science and faith as much as possible. The enterprise is a grand one. Many religions hold that a fuller revelation of reality lies beyond this life, perhaps one that will make obvious the harmony between all sources of knowledge, but for now, this grand unification is often too ambitious and perhaps even dangerous. While its framework is

helpful for making sense of the world, synthetic thinkers forget that the religious belief is irreducibly (though not exhaustively) existential. Religious truth has meaning first as a personal message whose ontological significance is important primarily in being taken to heart. To concentrate on facts is to risk forfeiting spiritual significance.

Another risk related to this concentration on facts is the potential to make theology's truth somehow contingent on results of scientific research. Philosophy saw this problem in Descartes's obsession to find a philosophical ground for theism in his own undeniable consciousness ([1641] 1993, 13). Theology's authority and the validity of religious life will stand to lose if made directly contingent on their ability to synthesize with contemporary strains of science. Jonathan Edwards again illustrates the point. The prevalent theology of his time synthesized the social phenomenon of emotional paroxysms (often in revivalist conversion experience) as direct attributions of the Holy Spirit's presence. But in betting his theology on these observable phenomena, it was only a short time before he was bitterly disappointed to discover that many people were falling into a role-playing mentality bereft of lasting spiritual value.

Despite this critique, synthetic thinking is valuable in modest use. In conversion, dramatic experience is a poor predictor of lasting religious conviction, but over time and in retrospect, theological attributions to religious experiences are less misleading, meaning that a conservative synthetic approach is possible. There is also a need for faith communities to argue for their beliefs as a coherent world-picture to protect the credulity of their members and thus support their infrastructures. One significant study of religious conversion and apostasy shows that though rational argumentation usually did not lead people to faith, many apostates were persuaded out of their faith by an encroaching materialistic worldview (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1997). The synthetic method can potentially demonstrate a religion's meaningful way of viewing life even against challenges from the outside. Contrasting the apologetic method, it is better positioned not to capitulate to the vagaries of secular research. And unlike the contrarian method, it is open to gaining from secular sources, even if that very virtue also invites risk. It does preserve the contrarian's valid concern to see all problems in their physical and spiritual expression. The effectiveness of the synthetic method depends on wisely balancing the sources of knowledge, most especially in a fashion that does not hang theology's validity on a metal hook, so to speak.

## CONCLUSION

As a discipline-specific way of addressing science and religion's relationship, the theologian's typology grants insights that are difficult to discover from typologies that unify the work of scientists and theologians under

a common set of symbols. In inquiring not only how models work but why, this approach offers the hermeneutically rounded definition of a model as a reflection of nonrational religious attitudes. Though models must also answer to the test of their problem-solving effectiveness in action, religious attitudes about what theology is for and how it should treat science operate at every stage of interaction, even determining what constitutes a problem (a point struck in remembering how evolutionary science has created far more problems for contrarians than for apologists). Because of models' religious moorings, the contention for one over another is a debate only superficially about methodology and more deeply about faith itself. However, it is certainly possible that a person or faith community might evince more than one religious attitude depending on the problem faced.

A model's adequacy will always depend on these two criteria: its compatibility with religious attitudes and its effectiveness in time. With Carter I've attempted to clarify the major attitudes at work in order for students of religious studies to be more self-reflective in their appropriation of science. If scientists read this typology and find inspiration for mining the insights possible through specifically scientific typologies, I am confident that the dividing of disciplines will ultimately facilitate greater clarity between scientists and theologians in order that we might better grasp what Hegel called "the whole."

#### NOTES

1. Barbour himself appears to offer the beginnings of a scientist's typology in his book *When Science Meets Religion* because he tackles specifically scientific issues in terms of their religious impact (2000).

2. "Sagt man aber 'Gott mit uns,' dan sagt man das, was keinen Grund und kein Möglichkeit außer seiner selbst hat, was in keinem Sinn vom Menschen und von seiner Situation aus, sondern nur als Erkenntnis Gottes aus Gott, als freie unverdiente Gnade zu erklären ist." Essentially: God is only known where he reveals himself in undeserved grace.

3. In this respect, Jung differs sharply from Freud, who sought to explain religion as a sexual sickness. Jung writes: "A convincing example of [the problem of subjectivity coloring science] in Freud's case is his inability to understand religious experience, as is clearly shown in his book: *The Future of an Illusion* (Freud 1928). For my part, I prefer to look at man in the light of what in him is healthy and sound, and to free the sick man from that point of view that colors every page Freud has written. Freud's teaching is definitely one-sided in that it generalizes from facts that are relevant only to neurotic states of mind; its validity is really confined to those states. . . In any case, Freud's is not a psychology of the healthy mind."

4. "Once we regarded flashes of lighting and claps of thunder as supernatural magic. Now we understand the natural processes at work. Once we viewed certain mental disorders as demon possession. Now we are coming to discern genetic, biochemical, and stress-linked causes. Once we prayed that God would spare children from diphtheria. Now we vaccinate them. Understandably, some Christians have come to regard scientific naturalism as 'the strongest intellectual enemy of the church.'"

5. James wrote: "Were it true that a suddenly converted man as such is, as Edwards says, of an entirely different kind from a natural man, partaking as he does directly of Christ's substance, there surely ought to be some exquisite class-mark, some distinctive radiance attaching even to the lowliest specimen of this genus, to which no one of us could remain insensible, and which so far as it went would prove him more excellent than ever the most highly gifted among mere

natural men. But notoriously there is no such radiance.” As a psychologist, James could not appreciate Edwards’s doctrine of salvation, however. Wimberley et al. (1975) on Billy Graham’s crusades argue that people giving themselves to the Lord are actually performing a ritual at these revival-type meetings, which they continue to do as part of the social pressure and expectations of charismatic religion.

6. “Namely, the cardinal ‘sin’ of women is in their failure to acquire a strong sense of self, and thus assume responsibility for their lives through reasoned and free decisions. Moreover, the traditional Christian emphasis on self-sacrifice as the prime virtue paradoxically may undermine women’s ability to develop any core self at all.”

7. Sartre reacts to Catholic theological trends: “*L’existentialisme athée, que je représente, est plus cohérent. Il déclare que si Dieu n’existe pas, il y a au moins un être chez qui l’existence précède l’essence, un être que existe avant de pouvoir être défini par aucun concept et que cet être c’est l’homme ou, comme dit Heidegger, la réalité humaine.*” In summary: the concerns of existence precede and form our ontological categories (or essence).

8. He writes: “The whole world is profane, though this does not make any difference to the fact that ‘*Terra ubique Domini*,’ [the world belongs to God] which is something which can only be believed in contrary to all appearance. It is not priestly consecration which makes the house of God holy, but only the word of proclamation.” Note how the only revelation is that received in proclamation.

9. “The man who wishes to believe in God as his God must realize that he has nothing in his hand on which to base his faith. He is suspended in mid-air, and cannot demand a proof of the Word which addresses him. For the ground and object of faith are identical. Security can be found only by abandoning all security, by being ready, as Luther put it, to plunge into the inner darkness.”

10. This claim is not speculative on my behalf but based on a lecture I heard at Calvin Theological Seminary in which the professor interpreted the health benefits of religion as an expression of common grace.

11. “Insofar as we may follow Henri Bergson and Teilhard de Chardin in characterizing the evolution of life as a process of producing increasingly complex and therefore increasingly internalized forms, the sequence of forms may be seen as an expression of the increasing intensity of the participation of the creatures in the divine Spirit of life. At no stage does this growing participation in the Spirit eliminate distinction from God, for the creatures share in the life of the Spirit only by moving out of their own finitude.”

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