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GOD'S INTERVENTION REVISITED: AN ILLUMINATION OF HIS CONTINUOUS PRESENCE

ABSTRACT

The belief that the triune God intervenes in creation is one of the foundations of the faithful's interaction with their creator. However, these beliefs lead to a discrepancy with natural science regarding God's relationship with natural laws. Were God to intervene in nature, he would apparently be breaking, suspending or simply not following the lawful order he created in the universe. From a theological perspective, the word "intervention" is also not helpful. If God "ventures" into creation, where does he come from, and for how long would he stay? I propose that God does "intervene" in creation, but not from somewhere above space and time, breaking into his own created order, and uprooting natural laws. What we might call "intervention" is rather a specific illumination of his ongoing revelatory work in creation. The value of this hypothesis may lie in connecting God's upholding work and his special work.

1. INTRODUCTION

The belief that the triune God intervenes in creation is one of the foundations of the faithful's interaction with their creator. People pray, because they truly believe that God is capable and willing to bring about a certain outcome in everyday life. These "acts of God" usually transcend the natural order and are difficult to empirically verify. These

so-called *special acts* of God are additional to his upholding of creation, as Scripture testifies. However, these beliefs lead to a discrepancy with natural science and cause tension between the sciences.

Silva (2015:100) clarifies this predicament. The dilemma of God's action in nature could be stated thus: Were God to intervene in nature, he would be breaking, suspending or simply not following the apparent lawful order he created in the universe, which would, at least for some, imply an inconsistency in God's nature. It would also appear that this situation threatens the foundations of the natural sciences, since it would be impossible to discriminate between the actions of God and those of nature. A universe ruled by law does not seem to allow for an external agent to act within it.

In addition, from a theological perspective, the word "intervention" is also not helpful. It is ambiguous in nature. If God "ventures" into creation, where does he come from, and for how long would he stay? Scripture (Phil. 4:5; Ps. 139) clearly mentions that God is among us. His continuous presence was promised by Jesus in Matthew 28.

The complexity and relevance of this issue is highlighted by the work that was done during the Divine Action Project¹ and the need to find spaces in creation that would allow for *non-interventionist objective divine action* (NIODA).² In this article, I propose that the need for a non-interventionist objective divine action model is overstated. The dilemma regarding God's perceived intervention is rooted in our intuitive impression of what intervention really means. I suggest that God does "intervene" in creation, but not from somewhere above space and time, breaking into his own created order, and uprooting natural laws. Rather, God is always present in, and through the fabric of creation and commands creation constantly through the upholding work of the Spirit (Pieterse 2012; Vondey 2009:4). What we might call "intervention" is rather a *specific illumination* of his ongoing revelatory work in creation. For a moment, the observer or believer experiences a distinctive act, where "normal" is transformed into abnormal, and impossible becomes possible. It is as if God's hidden presence in creation becomes clear within space and time,

1 The Divine Action Project was a CTNS/Vatican Observatory Joint Program: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action (CTNS/VO: 1990-2005). Beginning in 1990, CTNS and the Vatican Observatory co-sponsored a series of international research conferences on "scientific perspectives on divine action". The series produced six scholarly volumes with contributions from over fifty distinguished scientists, philosophers and theologians (CTNS 2019; Jaeger 2012:295).

2 Russell is known to be one of the prime architects of the so-called non-interventionist objective divine action model of divine action, developed in Theology and Science, the CTNS-Vatican project on divine action. All divine actions are thus mediated by natural agency, and God works without interrupting the normal workings of nature (Gregersen 2006:218, 219).

his agency rising to the surface, visible to an observer through the lens of faith. Does this proposition settle the ongoing deliberation about intervention? Probably not, unless natural science and theology realise the need to embrace the value of a convergent approach to the sciences (Pieterse 2015).

The value of this hypothesis may lie in the challenge to bring God's upholding work and his special work closer together. In addition, I present as a fallacy the idea that the laws of nature and God's faithfulness to himself and creation are opposed to one another.

I construct my argument in the following manner. First, I give a very brief orientation *vis-à-vis* the reflections on God's agency in creation. Then I discuss the problem of intervention in general. Finally, I submit a premise, arguing that a new model or word – for example, *Teolucimergence* – is required to speak about God's *specific* providential work in creation.

2. GOD'S AGENCY IN CREATION

The research done during the Divine Action Project aspired to explain or unlock God's agency in creation. It is not viable or in the interest of this article to even begin to give a full account of the proceedings or the results of this monumental project.³ However, any deliberation about intervention necessarily implies that God's agency is at stake. Therefore, I limit myself to a few introductory remarks.

It is important to note that God's agency in creation is primarily an issue of faith, although this did not deter scholars from trying to prove this conviction.⁴ Unfortunately, their efforts are not beneficial to either theology or science.⁵ Their good intentions sometimes led to, for example, *creationism* (2003), where faith-based proposals became dependent on scientific plausibility. Alternatively, and equally disturbing was the mistrust of any scientific endeavour, in general.

Nevertheless, Silva (2015:99, 100) reminds us of the necessity to formulate an account on how it is possible to understand that nature has its own laws and regular activities along with the claim that God can participate actively in the production of natural effects. It is crucial, then, for theologians

3 See, for example, Conradie (2013:Chapter 5).

4 Traditionally, reformed theology distinguished between God's general revelation and his special revelation in, and through Christ Jesus. The division is not without its critics. See, for example, Berkhouwer (1979:10-17).

5 Lennox (2007:68-73) explores the relevancy of the fine-tuning of the universe and the anthropic principle in postulating a creator.

and philosophers of religion to give believers (and scientists) an intellectually viable account of divine action in the universe.

In addition, Russel (2007:202) states that, unless we as Christians can say what we mean by providential divine action in nature, presupposing but going beyond God's act as the constant primary cause of every event in nature, the importance of God's continuous creative activity would seem marginalised. Thus, to contemplate about God's agency in creation is, from a *theological perspective*, not about proof, but to assist and broaden the sciences' understanding of a bigger reality. Scientific reductionism deprives creation from its complexity and ontological heritage.

What does God's agency in creation mean? Debate(s) between theology and science regularly highlight God's upholding work as part of his providential caring for the cosmos.⁶ This confession naturally leads to further investigation. If God's agency in creation is continuous and not deistic in character, is it possible to localise individual acts of God? And, if so, how does this interaction with nature reflect on, for instance, the regularity of natural laws?

The aim of the Divine Action Project was to take scientific research and the lawlike nature of creation seriously, in order to address the issue of God's agency, especially regarding *special individual acts* of God (Silva 2015:100).

Therefore, most of the accounts and, in particular, those developed by scientist-*theologians*, strive to provide a model of divine action that is compatible with contemporary physics and does not involve any violation of physical laws (Jaeger 2012:296).

To attain these goals, different hypotheses were put forward. One of the most influential is Russel's proposal of *non-interventionist objective divine action*.⁷ He argued that the indeterminism of quantum events offered scholars the conceptual framework in which to place God's action, without disrupting the natural causal order, but determining its outcomes, nevertheless. Because the very laws of nature show that there are events which are open to several distinct outcomes, God could simply choose which outcome to determine without breaking those laws (Silva 2015:101).

How is this possible?

6 Traditionally, God's providential agency in creation was divided between his upholding (*reservatio*) and his governance (*gubernatio*) over creation. In the past two centuries, the issue of man, as God's representative, was highlighted and his possible co-operation (*concursum*) with God was explored. See, for example, Heys (1988:148).

7 Other proposals include the following. Polkinghorne argued for divine action in, and through chaotic systems; Peacocke suggested models of top-down divine causation, and Clayton held that theories of emergence could best describe God's agency within a natural framework.

Russel (2007:203) replies that quantum mechanics can only offer a probabilistic explanation of the occurrence of certain events such as radioactive decay or electron tunnelling. There simply is no natural cause that acts to bring about the specific decay of a uranium atom, for example. If that is true, then we are free to interpret this point theologically as an instance of non-interventionist objective divine action.

The distinct feature of all the models put forward was the search in creation for causal gaps in nature, where God could bring about a specific outcome of events. God was essentially the proverbial *God of the gaps*.

Any attempt to formulate a hypothesis regarding God's agency must negotiate certain unavoidable difficulties. The lure of human subjectivity remains unavoidable, as Kuhn (1996) illustrated. For instance, the observer's preconceived opinion about the relationship between the sciences could influence a proposed model. In addition, the subject matter concerns the sciences, in general, as well as theology, philosophy, and the philosophy of science. The hypothetical nature of scientific endeavour and the inability to sometimes get an empirical assessment leads to an *inference of the best explanation*, as noted in Big Bang cosmology. Therefore, although the quest for gaps in nature, where God could potentially bring about change, was accepted in the Divine Action Project, Jaeger (2012:297) disputes the fact that any *gaps* exist and argues that

[a]ccounts using quantum mechanics and chaos theory try to make space for divine action by appealing to what is seen as indeterminacies left open by physical theory. But in fact, it is an illusion to think that quantum mechanics or chaos theory leave holes in the scientific description of a system, holes which can be filled in by divine action.

The reason being that quantum mechanical probabilities do not stem from our ignorance but are genuine features of the system. In Jaeger's opinion, it is not possible to disrupt or nullify any natural laws.

Some scholars maintain that it is possible to speak about God's agency without the need to seek gaps in nature where God could potentially act. In the Middle Ages, Aquinas⁸ famously argued that God employs secondary causes⁹

8 According to Barbour (1990:11), St Thomas held that God intervenes miraculously at particular times and also continually sustains the natural order. God, as primary cause, works through the secondary causes that science studies, but these two kinds of cause are on completely different levels.

9 The same effect, for Aquinas, is ascribed to a natural cause and to God, not as if God were complementing the lack of causal power in the natural cause, or the insufficiency of causality. It is not that part of the effect is performed by God and part by the natural cause. Rather, for Aquinas, the whole effect proceeds both from God and the natural cause, yet in different ways:

in his process of a *creatio continua*. This idea was embraced throughout the ages and a new sense of Thomism revealed itself in different eras.¹⁰ Silva (2015:110) re-examines these thoughts, stating that God, as the primary cause, is the cause of every operation of created causes in nature. In this way, God is acting in, and through every natural cause. Jaeger (2012:305) concurs that, in the framework of creation, God's agency is the very foundation of any natural event. While this ancient argument is appealing, there are some reservations. Wildman (1996:55) affirms that, with the advent of the Enlightenment and the knowledge of rigid natural laws and universal causality, this view of divine action became unmanageable.

Unfortunately, many of the current approaches leading to the formation of proposals about God's agency are, from a theological point of view, epistemologically flawed. Jaeger (2012:303, 304) points out that any attempt at seeking scientifically acceptable accounts of divine action reduces God to a causal factor in nature. This attitude inevitably leads to an idolisation of physics and a God that must compete with natural causes.¹¹ No theologically satisfactory account of God's action can be found along these lines. It may be wise to rather say less and agree with Ward (2007:118) that it is not possible to precisely map out the detail of God's agency. God's continuous creative transformation of the cosmos is only discernible through the eyes of faith. Does this mean that theology's contribution to the exploration of God's creativity is forever veiled, safe from any critical scrutiny?

To the contrary, Polkinghorne (2011) maintains that faith is not a question of shutting our eyes and believing impossible things, because some unquestionable authority mentions that that is what we have to do. Faith is belief and commitment. It is a leap not into the dark but into the light.

This surge into the light compels us to continue the search for a satisfactory account and understanding of God's agency, and to rectify some misconceptions that may cloud this glorious endeavour. What is the problem with intervention?

"just as the whole of the one same effect is ascribed to the instrument, and again the whole is ascribed to the principal agent" (Silva 2015:112).

10 See, for example, the idea of double agency (Farrer 1967), and top-down/whole part causality (Edwards 2010).

11 Scientism is the belief that science, especially natural science and, in the post-modern era, physics, for example, is the only custodian of true knowledge.

3. INTERVENTION, A WRONG WORD IN THE RIGHT PLACE

The concept of "intervention" is familiar in the social sciences. Through certain actions or the combined intervention of a group, a specific outcome is mediated in someone's life. What do we mean when we speak of God's intervention?¹²

Von Wachter (2015:5, 6) clarifies the concept, stating that a *divine intervention* is an event brought about by God in an action and has no preceding cause and that occurs instead of an event towards which a causal process was directed. A divine intervention is thus a choice event of God that interferes with a causal process.

This action of God is additional to his upholding work in creation. The difficulty presented by the word "intervention", when speaking about God's agency in the cosmos, begins with the notion "to intervene". If God must intervene in the processes and laws governing nature, in order to bring about a specific outcome, the very essence of God is at stake. If God's character is deistic in nature, then intervention would be a logical choice, although surprising, in the description of specific acts of God.¹³ If we refer to the triune God who reveals himself in Scripture through Christ Jesus, then the word "intervention" is problematic. In the Old Testament, the psalmist uses symbolic language in Psalm 139 to describe the encompassing nature of God's very being. In his commentary, Weiser (1965:802, 803) states that God's omniscience and omnipresence is so sublime and comprehensive that the very idea of a place in creation where God is not present is unthinkable. The New Testament affirms this ancient confession. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus declares that he will be with the faithful until the end of days. In response, Hendriksen (1989:1003) declares that there is no vagueness about this assurance; it is stated as a fact. Although these statements appeal to faith, it does not erode their truth or validity. These are only two examples of a golden thread that runs throughout Scripture, that entrenches not only the transcendence of God, but also his immanence in creation, as stated in the theological construction of general revelation. This presence of God is also declared in historical confessions such as the Heidelberg Catechism Question/Answer 27, 28, where the nature of God's providence is explained.¹⁴ The Catechism affirms God's omnipresence

12 For a detailed analysis, see Plantinga (2008) who highlights the complexity of the concept within the quantum mechanical framework and presents a proposal where intervention and special divine action are compatible.

13 Deism (2019) is a movement or system of thought advocating natural (see natural entry 1 sense 8b) religion, emphasising morality and, in the 18th century, denying the interference of the creator with the laws of the universe.

14 Question 27: What dost thou mean by the providence of God? Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs

and governance to such an extent that, without his will, no creature can but move on its own. Therefore, *the question vis-à-vis intervention relates to the specific manner of this continuous presence of God*. From a Scriptural point of view, God's intervention does not imply that he is ever absent, or so pre-occupied that he must come from somewhere to bring about a specific change. He is already present and actively involved with creation.

During the research done by the Divine Action Project, most of the scholars agreed that any form of special divine action should exclude intervention. Wildman (2008:141) points out that their reservations centred around their understanding of God's faithfulness. If God is faithful to himself and to a creation he endowed with self-sufficiency and a lawlike governance, then any intervention would be interpreted as unfaithfulness. To Murphy (1997:254), it seemed irrational that God would create laws, only to disobey them. A faithful God would respect the sovereignty of nature. In the words of Silva (2015:106): "If there is a natural cause, then God is not acting there (and certainly could not be acting there)". God may be present, but he is bound not to intervene. In addition, why would God act only sometimes in a certain or special way? This led Polkinghorne (1996:244) to remark that "[God's action] ... must be continuous and not fitful, correctly referred to as 'interaction' rather than 'intervention'". This specific exegesis of God's faithfulness led most of the scholars associated with the Divine Action Project to seek gaps in nature where God could act freely, without the constraints he had placed on himself.

However, it is only reasonable to ask: Is there only one way to interpret God's faithfulness? God committed himself in Christ to all of creation *in time*. This temporal incarnation led to countless confessions, albeit in a pre-scientific era, of a God who challenged our modern (post-modern?) conception of the causality of the natural order. Having said that, if causality in nature is important in this argument, it is also necessary to explain what type of causality we are talking about (Silva 2015:113).

I want to raise the question: What does God's faithfulness to, and in creation really mean? I propose that a faithful God is a God who does not leave his creation to run down like an old clock. Faithfulness implies commitment and a special kind of caring, especially in a creation where everything is not as it

heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand (Heidelberg Catechism 2008). Question 28: What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence still upholds all things? Answer: That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from his love; since all creatures are so in his hand, that without his will they cannot so much as move (Heidelberg Catechism 2008).

is supposed to be.¹⁵ Because God is faithful to himself, special divine action is not only plausible, but a realistic account of God's continuous agency in creation. However, the word "intervention" may be problematic from both a theological and a scientific point of view. Perhaps there is another way to describe this special agency of God.

4. AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE – *THEO-LUCI-MERGENCE?*

If we pursue a credible account of special divine action in creation, it is imperative that there is agreement on certain fundamental principles from which the quest is launched.¹⁶ During the research of the Divine Action Project on special divine action, most of the scholars agreed that the idea of intervention is not conceivable in accordance with specific convictions about the laws of nature and the modus of God's presence.

Hence, certain assumptions could act as a guide to assist this proposal. First, the acknowledgement that God does act temporally and specifically in, and through the agential mandate of nature. Secondly, the acceptance that God's omnipresence and guidance of creation is intricately connected to his special acts. Jaeger (2012:305) agrees and proclaims that nature is not only dependent on God, but that his active and continuous involvement upholds nature's very existence. Murphy (1997:330) concurs that "both doctrine and logic suggest that if God acts at all, God is acting in everything that happens". Although both seek a closer knit between God's general providence and special divine action, Murphy is referring to God's agency within certain perceived gaps in nature, whereas Jaeger denies that any gaps exist at all.

Gregersen (2006:221) refines this concept even further. He argues that the purpose of the theological distinction between God's general agency and his special agency is only to explain how God acts in different events.

Special divine action is the very substance of God's general providence. Briefly, the concept "special divine action" should be given ontological priority over the concept "general divine action". The ordinary workings of nature are the net results of myriads of individual events that are each individually created and sustained by God's creativity (Gregersen 2006:219, 220).

15 See McGrath (2018:Chapter 10).

16 Larmer (2015) argues convincingly in his article (regarding special divine acts) that the objections typically raised against special divine acts, conceived as interventions in the natural order, are pseudo-problems and pose no reason to abandon the traditional conception of such acts.

Although this perspective may be too general or inclusive for some, it resonates with the ancient Scriptural confessions of a God who is totally committed to a temporal agency taking on different forms in creation.

Is it possible to define the nature of the triune God's presence in creation? Scripture and the church historically affirmed that God's agency is condensed in, and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Within the context of this article, it is necessary to make a few introductory remarks regarding the Spirit's mediation in nature. In his book, *The spirit of creation*, Yong (2011) constructs a pneumatological theology of emergence. He argues that a pneumatological reading of the creation narratives in Genesis could liberate Clayton's theory of emergence from theological dualism, and, most important, hold the transcendent and immanent aspects of divine presence and agency together (Yong 2011:163).¹⁷ His aim is

to propose an eschatological and teleological theory of divine action that locates and explains the Spirit's activity in the world in accordance with the work of Christ (Yong 2011:226).

Yong's proposal emphasises the need to acknowledge the presence and work of the Holy Spirit when contemplating God's agency in creation. The fine detail of the Spirit weaving novelty within a temporal framework of the created order remains a mystery.

This need of contemporary theology to affirm an all-encompassing account of the Spirit's flow within creation is also present in Moltmann's work, *The spirit of life* (1992).¹⁸ Although a robust creational pneumatology may entice theology to flirt with panentheism (Kärkkäinen 2015:63), I believe that a theist proposal, triune in nature, is possible.

Therefore, *I propose that God's special action (incorrectly referred to as intervention) is rather an illumination of his continuous presence in creation. I recognise the inability of any human attempt to fully comprehend or describe*

17 "The best way to describe the interdependence between God and the world for Clayton is through the concept of emergence. Emergence may be explanatory, epistemological, or ontological. Ontological understandings of emergence, which Clayton supports, hold (1) monism but not physicalism, (2) properties emerge in objects from the potentiality of an object that cannot be previously identified in the object's parts or structure, (3) the emergence of new properties giving rise to distinct levels of causal relations, and (4) downward causation of the emergent level upon prior levels." (Culp 2020).

18 Kärkkäinen (2015:62) argues that modern theology no longer has any need for the cosmic divine Spirit as the explanation for the processes in the natural world. Therefore, the Spirit's work came to be associated only with personal salvation. Inversely, a post-modern need for an ecological pneumatology led to various "green" pneumatologies with a restrictive and limited view of God's agency (Kärkkäinen 2015:224, 225).

the full nature of God's agency in creation. Thus, a metaphor may be helpful, although it also has its limitations.

We may imagine that reality is like a pond, where every molecule is relationally connected and intertwined (for example, quantum entanglement on a sub-atomic level) and everything is held in place through natural laws that are totally dependent on God's continuous caring.¹⁹ Our temporal consciousness could be described as the surface tension of the water, with the triune God constantly present. Often, certain inexplicable events such as, for example, the problem of evil or the theodicy dilemma, seem to break the surface tension of the water and cause ripples to circulate from this point, seemingly upsetting the natural order to the detriment of our collective or individual experience. Then, in and through these undulations, we may have an awareness, as if God's hidden presence in creation becomes clear within space and time, his agency rising to the surface creating novelty, and visible to an observer only through the lens of faith. This restoration, and often a renovation within the surface tension, is what Scripture calls a miracle, and the Divine Action Project labels God's special divine action. To the observer, what is visible only through the eye of faith *is instead an illumination of God's continuous presence. Theo-(theos)-luci (elucidate)-mergence (emerge). His specific agency comes to the fore in definite deeds, not as an intervention from somewhere, but rather as an exposition of his presence.*

An observer might argue that the concept of faith is once again the weak point in this argument, as so often referred to in the debate between the sciences. To the contrary, faith is a perfectly normal construction, even for the natural sciences. Haught (2012:19) remarks that scientific enquiry requires from any scientist, whether s/he believes in God or not, a robust faith that nature is lawful, predictable, and intelligible. In addition, Popper (Thornton 2019) argued conclusively that true objectivity and untainted empirical observation without any subjective input from the observer are indeed a fallacy.

This thought experiment naturally leads to specific difficulties. The *first question* may be asked: What is the nature of God's relationship with the natural elements? The answer to this inquiry is complex. Research on God's agency in the world identifies certain models that scholars employ to clarify the subject. These templates fluctuate between a monarchical view, where a transcendent God almost mechanically determines the outcome of everything

19 Conradie (2009) highlights the potential to express God's agency through the work of the Holy Spirit, specifically on sub-atomic level in the complex systems of nature. According to Vondey (2009:4), post-Newtonian physics increasingly defines the physical universe in terms of energy, radiation, field theories, and waves. Recent theological contributions speak of the Spirit in similar terms, among them notions of energy, space and light. God's general providence is not deistic in nature.

in creation, with hardly any or no input from creation, to an organic view, where the boundaries between creator and creation are questioned and blurred.²⁰ I limit myself to a cursory focus on three concepts present within these models: pantheism, panentheism, and theism. I am convinced that the incarnation of Christ provides a pivotal moment in God's relationship to the world. It presents a balance between God's transcendence and immanence in the cosmos. This equilibrium is challenged from a pantheist viewpoint. According to pantheism, the boundaries between creator and creation cease to exist, and creation itself becomes godly in character. Pantheism was always in opposition to the biblical account of God's relationship to the cosmos (Sonderegger 2009:151) and is not a viable alternative in the debate on God's agency.

Instead, some scholars view panentheism as a sustainable option. Yet, it also poses specific challenges. From a pure technical perspective, scholars identify different types of, and different definitions associated with panentheism. Clayton (2003:206) defines panentheism as "(a) view that the world is within God, though God is also more than the world". According to McFague (1993:149),

God is in all things and yet God is not identical with the universe, for the universe is dependent on God in a way that God is not dependent on the universe.

The metaphysical nature of the concept often leads to a vagueness in meaning. In addition, and important from a theistic perspective is Barbour's (1990:259) criticism that it does not allow sufficiently for the independence of God and the world. Thomas (2006:655) objects that God's immanence is intensified to the detriment of his transcendence.

What then is God's relationship to the natural elements? I accept a theistic notion, meaning that God is independent of his creation and does not need a special relationship to accentuate his being.²¹ Yet, the incarnation of Christ, specifically relating to the work of the Cosmic Christ in Colossians 1, confronts us with God's innate relationship with creation. Therefore, I believe that it is possible and necessary to frame the above analogy within a theistic account of God's presence in nature. In his reflections on the being of God, Hoeksema (1976:52) writes that both God's immanence and transcendence, his likeness and his otherness are revealed in Scripture, and both must be maintained in deliberations about his presence in nature. In addition, space and time are both creations. In Christ, God incarnated into space and time, or spacetime as modern physics clarifies. Conversely, space and time are not

20 For a detailed analysis of the different options, see Pieterse (2010).

21 It is important to distinguish between different types of theism, for example sceptical, process, and so on (Viney 2018; 2016).

applicable to him. It is between and within this fine balance of immanence and transcendence that God's special agency, mysteriously through the flow of the Spirit, transpires. Is it possible to give a detailed analysis of the processes? Mercifully not!

The *second question* our thought experiment beckons to answer relates to the laws of nature. Does God's emergence to bring about a specific outcome to an event contravene his own "created" laws? I want to touch briefly on two arguments that dispel these fears.

First, Platinga (2008:374, 375) engages with the problem from the perspective of nature as a so-called *closed system* and the *law of the conservation of energy*. He argues that the Newtonian picture of the cosmos is not bold enough for claiming that God's "intervention" is in violation of natural laws. Moreover, Newton himself believed that God periodically adjusted the orbit of the planets. The modern dilemma emerges with the acceptance that nature is a closed system. If nature was an isolated system, any interference from God could indeed be an unlawful intervention. In addition, energy would not be conserved in the system as prohibited by physical law.

Ironically, no part of Newtonian mechanics or classical science generally declares that the material universe is a closed system. We will not find that claim in physics textbooks (Platinga 2008:375, 377).

The laws of nature tell us how things work out (apart from conservation) if there are no outside influences and the universe is causally closed. It is not their intention to tell us how things always go! The presumption that nature is a closed system is a metaphysical and theological add-on. Laplace embraced and refined it, "and it is this Laplacean picture that guides the thought of the hands-off theologians" (Platinga 2008:377).²² Von Wachter (2015:21, 22) elaborates:

The laws describe what material things cause and that therefore, if an immaterial agent causes a material event, the laws say nothing about that case.

Larmer (2015:79) extrapolates the argument even further. If God changes the material conditions to which the laws apply (for example, tossing an extra billiard ball on the table), none of Newton's laws of motion are compromised, but it could lead to a different outcome of the game! He thereby produces an event that nature would not have produced on its own, but violates no laws of nature. It is thus clear that whether the physical universe exhibits

22 Platinga (2008:392, 393) argues that the Copenhagen interpretation of Quantum Physics undermines this Laplacean determinism.

causal indeterminacy or, as even some interpretations of quantum mechanics require, is deterministic in its functioning, God as its creator can act upon it. Therefore, Platinga, Von Wachter and Larmer concur that natural laws are no threat to special divine action.

In addition, Stannard (2012:131) reminds us that the laws of nature are, strictly speaking, at best approximations of the truth. For example, Newton's inverse square law of gravity breaks down under conditions of very strong gravity close to a black hole. Previously, it was thought that the law was set in stone. The same could be said of the law of conservation of energy. The quantum uncertainty when dealing with subatomic particles sometimes leads to fluctuations in energy. The laws of nature are not as fixed, predictable, and closed as some would suggest!

The second argument against intervention as a contravention of natural laws relates to the ontological status of the laws themselves. Gregersen (2006:221) reminds us that, concerning the laws of nature, we must first distinguish between scientific descriptions of the laws of nature and the putative "laws of nature" themselves. Next, we must clarify whether such "laws of nature" should be treated as having a Platonic status, existing independently of, and prior to their material manifestations, or whether the idea of "laws of nature" should be regarded as real-world regularities, which (under some conditions) are so persistent that it is appropriate to dub them, in an Aristotelian vein, "laws of nature".

Barrow (2007:124-128, 202-211) contemplates the same issue. He reiterates that natural scientists traditionally accepted that the laws of nature are realistic in nature. They exist in a mind-independent state and have a constant character. This perspective is a philosophical belief about ontology and precedes scientific endeavour. Yet, sometimes physical evidence comes to the fore. In 1999, scientists analysing the light of distant quasars and relying on the "*fine structure constant at the redshift*" for their data, realised that this constant of nature is not so regular as they previously believed (Barrow 2007:127). Empirical research confirmed that the "constant" changed with time. Similar conundrums in quantum mechanics led some scholars (for example, Polkinghorne²³) to accept that the laws of nature are but scientific descriptions of regularities, and not godlike in nature preceding reality itself.

23 Polkinghorne (2004:74) describes natural laws as "a downward-emergent' approximation to some more holistic account of physical reality". There may be other regularities yet to be discovered by science. Although Polkinghorne proposes that God acts within the "gap" provided by chaos theory, he believes that the resurrection of Christ was an exception to that rule.

The question regarding the ontological essence of natural laws has a direct influence on our opinion of intervention. Gregersen (2006:216) states that the laws of nature do not have

the ontological status of necessitating specific outcomes that God would have either to conform to, or to violate. Divine actions may sometimes be describable as being fully understandable (thus 'compatible') with scientifically well-known patterns of regularity, but may at other times transcend what can be described through our known scientific laws of nature.

Therefore, it is possible to confess that God's agency in creation includes special divine action. This belief is not in violation of specific physical laws described and documented by natural science.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to reframe God's intervention in creation. I argued that God's special divine action is intimately connected to his continued presence in creation through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, intervention is not an emergency measure implemented by a God who was caught off guard. Rather, it is a *specific illumination* of his ongoing revelatory work in creation. It does not contravene natural laws. Instead, it expands the scope of natural science in the realisation that physical processes are even more complex than currently understood and interrelated with other disciplines in creation. In addition, it challenges theologians to engage with other sciences, and to accept that God's agency transcends the spiritual realm. In an increasingly technological world, a new and robust confession of God's all-encompassing presence is needed.

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