

Theology of Coherence: An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Relationship between Systemic Coherence Principles and Understanding of the Divine

Authors

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Abstract

This article presents an interdisciplinary approach that integrates concepts of systemic coherence, derived from the Z(n) framework, with theological reflections on the nature of the divine and its relationship with creation. Through an analysis that combines theology, complexity science, quantum physics, and religious phenomenology, we propose a theological model based on the principle of coherence as a fundamental expression of divine reality. We explore how the equation "Time + Light + Sound → Coherence" can be reinterpreted in theological terms as an expression of God's creative activity, and how the relationship "Coherence = Empathy = Value" finds its parallel in understanding divine love (agape) as the unifying principle of the cosmos. The article demonstrates how a theology of coherence offers new perspectives for classic questions in systematic theology, including creation theology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, while providing a foundation for dialogue between science and religion in the 21st century.

Keywords: Systematic Theology, Systemic Coherence, Theology and Science, Complexity, Process Theology, Neurotheology, Interreligious Dialogue.

1. Introduction

The relationship between science and theology has been historically marked by tensions and misunderstandings, but also by fruitful moments of dialogue and mutual enrichment. In the contemporary context, the development of new scientific theories about the nature of reality, particularly in the areas of quantum physics, complexity theory, and information science, has opened new possibilities for deeper dialogue between these two forms of knowledge [1].

In this article, we present an innovative approach that integrates concepts of systemic coherence, derived from the Z(n) framework developed by Aurumgrid [2], with theological reflections on the nature of the divine and its relationship with creation. The Z(n) framework proposes the fundamental equation "Time + Light + Sound → Coherence, and Coherence = Empathy = Value" as a model for understanding how complex systems can generate states of coherence through synergistic integration of multiple vectors [2].

Our central hypothesis is that this principle of systemic coherence can offer valuable insights for theological reflection, particularly when reinterpreted through the lens of religious tradition. We propose

that coherence is not merely a physical or systemic principle, but also a fundamental theological category that can help elucidate the nature of God, the process of creation, human identity, and the ultimate destiny of reality.

This article is structured as follows: in Section 2, we present a literature review on the dialogue between science and theology, with special focus on approaches that use concepts of complex systems and coherence. In Section 3, we detail our interdisciplinary methodology. In Section 4, we develop the concept of theology of coherence, exploring its implications for various areas of systematic theology. In Section 5, we discuss the practical implications of a theology of coherence for spirituality and religious practice. In Section 6, we consider objections and limitations of our approach. Finally, in Section 7, we present our conclusions and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Dialogue between Science and Theology in the Contemporary Context

The dialogue between science and theology has experienced a significant renaissance in recent decades, driven by the recognition that both disciplines seek to understand complementary aspects of reality [3]. Authors like John Polkinghorne [4], Arthur Peacocke [5], and Karl Rahner [6] have argued that science and theology offer different yet mutually enriching perspectives on the nature of reality.

Particularly relevant to our discussion is the work of Ian Barbour [7], who proposed four basic models for the relationship between science and religion: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. Our approach aligns with the fourth model, seeking genuine integration between scientific concepts of systemic coherence and traditional theological reflections.

2.2. Theology of Complexity and Systems

In recent decades, a theological current has emerged that uses concepts from complexity theory to rethink classical theological questions. Authors like Philip Clayton [8] and Arthur Peacocke [9] have explored how emergence, self-organization, and complexity can inform our understanding of God as creator and sustainer of an evolving universe.

Particularly influential is the work of John Haught [10], who argues that the universe reveals an "information theology" where God can be understood as the source of information that guides the cosmic process toward increasing levels of complexity and consciousness.

2.3. Coherence in Physical and Biological Systems

The concept of coherence has been extensively studied in various scientific fields. In physics, coherence refers to the fixed phase relationship between field values at different points in space or time [11]. In biology, recent research has demonstrated that living systems exhibit remarkable forms of coherence, from quantum coherence in photosynthetic processes [12] to synchronization of biological rhythms across multiple scales [13].

Studies demonstrate that cardiac coherence, measured through heart rate variability (HRV), is associated with states of physical and emotional well-being [14]. Additionally, research indicates that coherence between individuals can be measured through synchronization of physiological patterns, suggesting a biological basis for empathy and social connection [15].

2.4. Neurotheology and Phenomenology of Religious Experience

The emerging field of neurotheology explores the neural bases of religious experience. Research using neuroimaging demonstrates that spiritual practices such as meditation and prayer are associated with specific patterns of neural coherence [16]. Andrew Newberg and other researchers have documented increased gamma coherence in the brain during mystical states, suggesting that religious experience may involve a state of maximum neural coherence [17].

Phenomenological studies of religious experience, such as those conducted by Rudolf Otto [18] and Mircea Eliade [19], consistently describe encounters with the sacred as experiences of fundamental unity and coherence, where apparently disparate elements of reality are perceived as integrated into a meaningful whole.

3. Methodology

Our methodological approach is interdisciplinary, integrating elements from systematic theology, philosophy of science, complexity theory, and religious phenomenology. The research process involved the following steps:

1. **Systematic Literature Review:** We conducted a comprehensive review of relevant scientific and theological literature, identifying key concepts of coherence in different disciplines and their potential theological applications.
2. **Conceptual Analysis:** We performed a detailed analysis of the Z(n) framework and its fundamental equation, identifying conceptual parallels with traditional theological categories.
3. **Interdisciplinary Synthesis:** We integrated scientific concepts of coherence with theological reflections, developing a coherent model that respects the integrity of both disciplines.
4. **Theological Application:** We applied our synthesized model to specific areas of systematic theology, including creation theology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.
5. **Critical Reflection:** We considered potential objections and limitations of our approach, seeking to identify areas for future development.

It is important to note that our approach is not reductionist; we do not seek to reduce theology to science or vice versa, but rather to identify patterns and principles that can mutually illuminate both forms of knowledge.

4. Theology of Coherence: Conceptual Development

4.1. God as Primordial Source of Coherence

In the theology of coherence, we propose understanding God not merely as a being among others, though supreme, but as the very principle of coherence that sustains and unifies all reality. This understanding resonates with various theological traditions:

In the Christian tradition, the concept of "Perichoresis" - the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity - can be understood as the perfect expression of relational coherence [20]. The Trinity is not a collection of separate individuals, but a community of perfect love where each person exists fully in relation to the others. This theological image suggests that divine nature itself is relational coherence in its purest form.

In the Islamic tradition, the concept of "Tawhid" (unity of God) expresses the idea that all reality derives its coherence from the fundamental unity of the Divine [21]. God is not merely a unified being, but the unifying principle that gives coherence to all creation.

In the Hindu tradition, the concept of "Brahman" as ultimate reality, from which all things are manifestations, can be understood as the foundation of cosmic coherence [22]. The multiplicity of the phenomenal world finds its ultimate unity in Brahman.

This understanding of God as principle of coherence offers an alternative both to classical theism (which may overemphasize divine transcendence) and to pantheism (which may eliminate the distinction between Creator and creation). Instead, it proposes a dynamic panentheism, where God is both immanent as principle of coherence in the world and transcendent as infinite source of possibilities.

4.2. The Divine Equation: Time + Light + Sound = Sacred Coherence

The fundamental equation of the Z(n) framework - "Time + Light + Sound → Coherence" - acquires new depth when reinterpreted theologically:

4.2.1. The Time Vector in Theology

In the theology of coherence, time is not merely a physical dimension, but the field of divine action in history. The temporal vector represents several fundamental theological dimensions:

Kairos: The opportune time, the moment of divine revelation. In the Christian tradition, the incarnation of Christ represents the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), the moment when divine eternity fully enters historical time [23].

Salvation History: The understanding that God acts in human history coherently, guiding it toward its ultimate purpose. This vision is central in biblical theology, where history is understood as the stage of God's progressive revelation [24].

Eschatology: The teleological direction of time, its movement toward divine consummation. In the theology of coherence, time is neither cyclical nor merely linear, but spiral, moving toward increasing levels of divine coherence [25].

4.2.2. The Light Vector in Theology

Light is one of the most universal symbols of the divine in religious traditions. In the theology of coherence, the luminous vector represents:

Revelation: God's self-communication to creation. In the Christian tradition, Jesus is identified as "the light of the world" (John 8:12), the supreme revelation of God [26].

Illumination: The action of the Holy Spirit in human minds and hearts, enabling them to understand divine truths. This tradition traces back to Augustine and his emphasis on "divine illumination" as a condition for true knowledge [27].

Divine Glory: The visible manifestation of God's presence. In biblical theology, God's "glory" (kabod) is frequently associated with luminous phenomena, from the pillar of fire in Exodus to Christ's transfiguration [28].

4.2.3. The Sound Vector in Theology

Sacred sound manifests itself in theology through multiple expressions:

Creative Word: In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God creates through the word ("And God said: Let there be light" - Gen 1:3). In the prologue of the Gospel of John, Christ is identified as the "Logos" - the divine Word through which all things were made [29].

Prophetic Revelation: The spoken word of prophets as means of divine communication. In the prophetic tradition, God's word is living and active, accomplishing what it announces [30].

Prayer and Praise: The human response to the divine through spoken and sung word. In practically all religious traditions, sound - whether in the form of mantras, psalms, prayers, or chants - is a fundamental means of connection with the sacred [31].

When these three divine vectors integrate in the theology of coherence, **Sacred Coherence** emerges - the perfect harmony between Creator and creation, between eternal and temporal, between transcendent and immanent. This coherence is not static but dynamic, inviting creation to participate ever more fully in divine life.

4.3. Coherence = Empathy = Divine Love

The second part of the Z(n) framework equation - "Coherence = Empathy = Value" - finds its most perfect theological parallel in the concept of Agape - unconditional divine love. In the theology of coherence, we reformulate this equation as:

Coherence = Compassion = Holiness

4.3.1. Coherence as Divine Compassion

Divine coherence manifests itself fundamentally as infinite compassion - God's absolute empathy for the suffering of His creatures. This understanding is deeply rooted in religious traditions:

In the Christian tradition, Christ's incarnation is seen as the supreme act of divine compassion, where God assumes the human condition to share our suffering and redeem us [32]. The concept of "compatio" in Thomas Aquinas refers precisely to this divine capacity to "suffer with" His creatures [33].

In the Buddhist tradition, compassion (karuna) is one of the four sublime attitudes and a fundamental attribute of enlightened beings [34]. Buddha is frequently described as the "compassionate one" who acts to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings.

In the Islamic tradition, the divine names "Ar-Rahman" and "Ar-Rahim" (the Merciful, the Compassionate) are among the most frequently mentioned in the Quran, indicating that compassion is a central attribute of divine nature [35].

4.3.2. Compassion as Holiness

In the theology of coherence, divine compassion is not merely a feeling, but the active principle that moves divinity to act in favor of reconciliation and redemption. This compassionate action manifests itself as holiness - the full realization of divine purpose in creation.

Holiness, in this perspective, is not primarily a matter of separation or ritual purity, but of relational fullness - the perfect realization of divine coherence in all dimensions of existence. This understanding resonates with the prophetic vision of God's Kingdom as a state of perfect harmony and justice (Is 11:6-9).

4.3.3. Holiness as Supreme Value

The supreme value, in the theology of coherence, is holiness - not as an abstract concept, but as the concrete reality of a universe totally aligned with divine purpose. This value is not externally imposed but emerges intrinsically from the nature of things when they are in full coherence with their Creator.

This understanding offers a theological basis for ethics that does not depend merely on arbitrary divine commandments, but on the recognition that actions coherent with divine nature lead to full realization both individually and collectively.

4.4. The Human Being as Microcosm of Divine Coherence

Theological anthropology gains new depth when we understand the human being as a system designed for divine coherence. In the theology of coherence, the image of God in humans (Imago Dei) is primarily this innate capacity for divine coherence - the ability to integrate the multiple dimensions of existence into a harmonious whole that reflects the Creator's coherence.

This understanding integrates various dimensions of traditional theological anthropology:

Relational Dimension: The human being is created for communion - with God, with other humans, and with creation. This relational capacity is fundamental to human coherence [36].

Structural Dimension: The human being possesses a complex structure (body, soul, spirit) designed to function in coherence when aligned with divine purpose [37].

Teleological Dimension: The human being is oriented toward an ultimate end - participation in divine life, which is the maximum realization of human coherence [38].

Sin, in this perspective, is fundamentally a break of coherence - the disintegration of harmonious relationships between God, humans, and nature. Salvation, in turn, is the process of restoring this primordial coherence, initiated in Christ and brought to fullness by the Holy Spirit.

Research in neurotheology offers empirical support for this vision, demonstrating that states of neural coherence are associated with experiences of unity, transcendence, and well-being - characteristics frequently associated with profound religious experience [39].

4.5. The Church as a System of Collective Coherence

Ecclesiology in the theology of coherence understands the church not primarily as an institution, but as a complex system designed to generate and maintain spiritual coherence. Just as the Z(n) framework uses multiple vectors to generate systemic coherence, the church functions through multiple vectors of grace:

Word: The doctrinal/illuminative vector that provides cognitive coherence and guidance for the community.

Sacrament: The ritual/incarnational vector that makes divine reality present in tangible form, creating coherence between the visible and invisible.

Community: The relational/empathetic vector that generates social coherence through mutual care and life sharing.

Mission: The temporal/historical vector that orients the church toward realizing divine purpose in the world.

When these vectors operate in harmony, the church becomes an effective sign of God's Kingdom coherence in the world. The unity of the church, so emphasized in the New Testament (John 17:21), would thus be not uniformity, but dynamic coherence - the capacity to maintain essential unity in diversity of expressions.

This ecclesiological understanding offers a basis for overcoming denominational divisions, focusing not on doctrinal or ritual uniformity, but on the fundamental coherence of Christian witness.

4.6. Eschatological Coherence: The Consummation of All Things

Eschatology in the theology of coherence understands the end times not as the destruction of the present, but as its transfiguration - the elevation of all reality to a state of perfect coherence with divine purpose.

This vision is rooted in the biblical hope of a "new heaven and new earth" (Rev 21:1), where the original harmony between Creator and creation will be fully restored. In this eschatological vision:

Coherence will be Universal: All things will be fully aligned with divine purpose, eliminating the dissonance between what is and what should be.

Coherence will be Relational: All forms of alienation - between God and humans, between humans, and between humans and nature - will be overcome.

Coherence will be Dynamic: The eschatological realization will not be a static state, but an eternal movement of love and self-giving in divine communion.

This eschatological vision offers hope not only for individuals but for all creation, which "groans and suffers as in labor pains until now" (Rom 8:22) awaiting its liberation and transfiguration.

5. Practical Implications of the Theology of Coherence

5.1. Spirituality of Coherence

A theology of coherence suggests new approaches to spiritual life. Instead of seeing spirituality primarily as asceticism or ecstasy, we can understand it as the intentional cultivation of divine coherence in all dimensions of life.

Traditional spiritual practices gain new meaning in this perspective:

Prayer: As alignment of internal vectors with divine coherence. Prayer is not primarily about changing God's mind, but about aligning our mind with God's.

Meditation: As cultivation of mental and emotional coherence through quietude and mindfulness.

Fasting: As simplification of material vectors to enhance spiritual ones, creating greater coherence between body and spirit.

Community: As an extended system of spiritual coherence, where individuals mutually support each other in their quest for divine alignment.

Service: As external expression of internal coherence, where divine love flows through us to the world.

Recent research in positive psychology and neuroscience offers empirical support for this approach, demonstrating that spiritual practices associated with coherence are correlated with greater psychological well-being, resilience, and physical health [40].

5.2. Ethics of Coherence

A theology of coherence offers a renewed foundation for Christian ethics. Instead of focusing primarily on rules or consequences, an ethics of coherence emphasizes alignment with the divine pattern of love and compassion.

In this perspective, moral actions are those that promote greater coherence - in ourselves, in our relationships, and in our communities. Ethical coherence manifests itself through:

Integrity: Alignment between beliefs, words, and actions.

Justice: Pursuit of relational coherence in social structures.

Peace: Cultivation of coherence where there is conflict and division.

Creation: Promotion of ecological coherence between humans and nature.

This ethical approach offers a foundation for responding to complex moral dilemmas, asking not only "what is permitted?" or "what are the consequences?" but "what promotes greater coherence with God's purpose of love and reconciliation?"

5.3. Interreligious Dialogue

A theology of coherence offers a promising foundation for interreligious dialogue. Instead of focusing primarily on doctrinal differences, we can identify patterns of coherence that transcend particular traditions.

Many religious traditions share the intuition that ultimate reality is fundamentally coherent, and that authentic spirituality involves aligning with this coherence:

- In Hinduism, the concept of "rita" (cosmic order) and "dharma" (right duty) reflect an understanding of the fundamental coherence of the universe [41].
- In Buddhism, the concept of "Dharma" as natural law and the eightfold path as means of achieving inner coherence [42].
- In Taoism, the concept of "Tao" as the unifying principle underlying all things [43].
- In Abrahamic traditions, faith in a creator God who sustains the universe in coherence [44].

This approach does not seek to minimize real differences between religious traditions, but rather to identify common ground for mutual dialogue and collaboration for the common good.

6. Objections and Limitations

6.1. Risk of Reductionism

A potential objection to the theology of coherence is that it may reduce the complex reality of the divine to an abstract principle. In response, we emphasize that our model does not intend to exhaust the divine mystery, but to offer a complementary perspective that can coexist with other theological approaches.

The theological tradition has always used analogies and partial models to speak of the divine, recognizing that no human language can fully capture the reality of God. The theology of coherence should be understood as another of these approximations, valuable but limited.

6.2. The Problem of Suffering

How can we reconcile a theology of coherence with the apparently incoherent reality of innocent suffering? This is one of the most persistent questions in theology, and our approach does not offer a simple solution.

In the theology of coherence, suffering is understood not as part of divine purpose, but as a temporary dissonance in the cosmic movement toward full coherence. Christ's cross is seen as the point where God fully enters this dissonance, transforming it through the coherence of sacrificial love.

This response may not completely satisfy the intellectual demand for logical explanations, but offers a foundation for trusting in divine faithfulness even amid suffering.

6.3. Religious Diversity

How does a theology of coherence deal with the apparent incoherence between different religious traditions? Again, we do not offer a definitive solution, but some directions for reflection:

Religious diversity can be understood not as a threat, but as expression of the inexhaustible richness of the divine. Different traditions may capture diverse aspects of divine coherence, each contributing with its unique perspective to human understanding of the sacred.

Furthermore, the theology of coherence suggests that ultimate truth is not necessarily in doctrinal uniformity, but in coherence of life and practice - to the extent that different traditions promote love, compassion, and reconciliation, they participate in divine coherence.

6.4. Empirical Validity

A methodological objection to our approach is its limited empirical basis. While we rely on scientific research on coherence in physical and biological systems, the application of these concepts to theology remains speculative in many aspects.

We acknowledge this limitation and emphasize that the theology of coherence should be understood as a heuristic model - a tool for exploring new possibilities in the dialogue between science and theology - rather than an empirically verifiable theory in all its aspects.

7. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

In this article, we presented an innovative approach that integrates concepts of systemic coherence with theological reflections, developing what we call "theology of coherence." We demonstrated how the fundamental equation of the Z(n) framework - "Time + Light + Sound → Coherence, and Coherence = Empathy = Value" - can be reinterpreted theologically as an expression of God's creative activity and divine love as the unifying principle of the cosmos.

Our approach offers new perspectives for various areas of systematic theology, including creation theology, Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Additionally, it provides a foundation for dialogue

between science and religion in the 21st century, suggesting that both fields can mutually enrich each other through the concept of coherence.

The theology of coherence also has significant practical implications for spirituality, ethics, and interreligious dialogue, offering a renewed foundation for religious life in the contemporary context.

We acknowledge the limitations of our approach, including the risk of reductionism, the challenge of suffering, the question of religious diversity, and limited empirical validity. However, we believe that the insights offered by the theology of coherence justify further exploration and development.

For future research, we suggest several promising directions:

1. **Empirical Development:** Conducting empirical studies to test hypotheses derived from the theology of coherence, particularly in the areas of neurotheology and psychology of religion.
2. **Interreligious Dialogue:** Deeper exploration of how the concept of coherence can facilitate dialogue between different religious traditions.
3. **Practical Applications:** Development of spiritual and communal practices based on the principles of the theology of coherence.
4. **Integration with Other Areas:** Exploration of how the theology of coherence can dialogue with other areas of knowledge, including ecology, economics, and politics.

Ultimately, the theology of coherence invites us to see God not as a distant and abstract reality, but as the dynamic principle of coherence that permeates all creation, calling all things to harmony and fullness. In this vision, the spiritual journey becomes an increasing quest for coherence - ever deeper alignment with the divine pattern that gives meaning and purpose to all things.

Just as the Z(n) framework seeks to create technological systems that operate in resonance with human processes, a theology of coherence calls us to actively participate in the realization of God's Kingdom - cultivating patterns of coherence that reflect divine harmony in our lives, communities, and the world as a whole.

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