ABC Theology — Daily Research Note III

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Proximate Causes, Ultimate Grounds, and the Non-Exhaustion of Religious Explanation

Status: exploratory theological-philosophical research note. Scriptural commitments, historical descriptions, philosophical arguments, and mathematical proposals are distinguished below.

1. The initiating observation

Marx was right to treat religion as a human and social phenomenon requiring explanation. People reasonably ask both what immediately produces an observed phenomenon and whether it has an ultimate ground. A sociological account may explain how religious practices arise, spread, or change without thereby deciding whether God exists. Conversely, affirming God as the ultimate ground does not eliminate the need to study the proximate human, cultural, and institutional causes of religious life.

2. Two different explanatory questions

Proximate-cause inquiry asks how a particular religious practice or belief develops through family, education, social conditions, language, psychology, and history. Ultimate-ground inquiry asks whether the reality to which a religious claim refers exists independently of these processes, and what grounds human life, moral obligation, and cosmic order. These are related questions, but an answer to one does not logically settle the other.

3. Three proposed classes of interpretation

Dr. Zhao proposes three working categories: (1) False Interpretation; (2) Partially Relevant Interpretation; and (3) Truly Right Interpretation. In his proposed ABC assessment, Marxist atheistic explanation is classified as false at the level of ultimate theological conclusion; general theism as partially correct or relevant; and ABC Theology as seeking a truly right interpretation. These are the author's evaluative proposals, not established classifications. Their responsible use requires explicit criteria: fidelity to the evidence, logical validity, explanatory scope, consistency with biblical exegesis, and willingness to correct error. A particular social observation by Marx may be accurate even where its atheistic philosophical extension is disputed.

4. The non-exhaustion principle

Proposed principle: Social, psychological, and historical explanations of religious phenomena may identify genuine proximate causes, but they do not by themselves establish or exclude the ultimate reality to which religious claims refer. The fallacy to avoid is moving directly from "this belief has identifiable human causes" to "its object does not exist." The reverse inference is equally unwarranted: the inadequacy of a social explanation does not itself prove the existence of God. This is a methodological constraint, not a proof of theism.

5. Conscience, moral law, and cosmic order

The discussion extended beyond religious sociology to the moral law experienced inwardly and the ordered cosmos observed outwardly. Kant's well-known juxtaposition of "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me" (Critique of Practical Reason, conclusion) offers a useful philosophical comparison. Kant did not treat this phrase as an empirical proof of God; his treatment of God belongs to

his carefully qualified account of practical reason. ABC Theology may ask whether moral normativity and cosmic intelligibility require ultimate grounding, but should not assume that a single inference has already answered both questions.

6. Classical Christian theocentrism and divine antecedence

Traditional Christian theology confesses that God is real, antecedent to creation, and not produced by human religious consciousness (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1–3). Human religious life is a historically mediated response to divine reality and may be faithful, partial, distorted, or mistaken. This theological confession is distinct from a neutral sociological finding. In ABC terminology, Divine Antecedence (God's Proto-Order) must remain distinct from the created order; human access to either is not exhaustive. Scripture is normative for the theological proposal, while its interpretation remains accountable to careful exegesis.

7. The proposed (0,1) intrinsic-unit representation

Dr. Zhao proposes investigating (0,1)_IU as part of the ABC/AZF search for a truly right interpretation. Within the mathematical program, the Intrinsic Unit is tied to its own defined structural organization and accessibility. At present, no deduction from this mathematical notation to the existence, identity, or nature of God has been established in this note. A mathematical representation is not the divine reality represented. Any future bridge requires independently stated definitions, valid mathematical results, philosophical argument, and biblical constraints; analogy alone cannot function as proof.

8. Research discipline and open questions

The next stage should (a) distinguish Marx's explanatory sociology from his atheistic conclusions; (b) define the criteria that separate false, partially relevant, and truly right interpretations; (c) examine whether proximate and ultimate explanation are compatible without explanatory redundancy; (d) read Kant's account of moral law in its own context; and (e) formalize (0,1)_IU strictly within mathematics before proposing any theological correspondence. The goal is truthful inquiry, not a premature claim to comprehend God.

Working formulation

"The human and social genesis of religious belief is a legitimate object of inquiry, but its explanation does not exhaust the question of ultimate reality. ABC Theology seeks truth through Scripture, philosophical accountability, and carefully delimited mathematical representation, without identifying representation with God."

Closing prayer

LORD our God, grant us humility before Your truth, patience in study, integrity in argument, and charity toward those with whom we disagree. Keep us from confusing a partial explanation with the whole of reality, or our representations with Your being. Guide our work in faithfulness and love. In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Primary texts and reference points

Genesis 1:1; John 1:1–3. Karl Marx, "Introduction" to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (written 1843, published 1844). Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason (1788), conclusion. These references are research anchors; this note does not claim fresh archival verification.