

# THE CHRISTIAN COSMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

By Richard Kirby

SERMON FOR SUNDAY 6TH APRIL, 2008

**Place Written:** London, UK

**Theory:** The disorder of the cosmos is to be seen as the evil out of which comes the higher good of the higher levels of cosmic order – that is, ordering towards the infinite and supreme Good of God Himself. Cosmic disorder provides the impetus for growth towards the higher moral, ethical, personal and spiritual forms of order which God, by His Spirit, in His Triune Being, convokes.

**Purpose:** Cosmos-being-saved implies cosmology-being-redeemed and science-being-saved: theological science thus has the task of showing the difference between science as it appears in unregenerate man, and science as it may result in the regenerate man. Man the priest who is man the scientist must be redeemed-man as scientist; in this way the salvation of science from its contribution to cosmic disorder will lead both to the sanctification of science and a more general critique of unrestrained rationalism.

## CONCLUSION

### The New Cosmology and the Anthropic Cosmological Principle: The Christian Cosmological Principle

The idea of a cosmos or universe which is being shaped to God's purposes by His Spirit is the picture of a cosmos-being-saved, and this is the potential meeting point for cosmology and science. Where scientific cosmology asserts, if speculatively, the [Final] Anthropic Cosmological Principle,<sup>1</sup> the work of Torrance permits us to postulate the Divine [Final] Cosmological Principle,<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Barrow and Frank Tipler, The Anthropic Cosmological Principle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> The use of the word "Principle" would require careful definition in this theological context, even if Barrow and Tipler have used it more vaguely. If for example, "Principle" is considered (following the Latin translation of the Greek *arche* as *Principium*) to denote a construction principle of the cosmos, the Christian use of this word or idea in theo-cosmology

which in terms of the Triune Being of God could be expressed also as the Spiritual Cosmological Principle or the Christian Cosmological Principle, or in a higher state of development the Trinitarian Cosmological Principle (promise of Trinitarian cosmology). Torrance's theology provides resources for such a development. Whether it will prove necessary to incorporate his adaptation of Einstein's principle of the relativity of simultaneity,<sup>3</sup> such that the time of our resurrection in Christ here and now and the time of our bodily resurrection in the future are one and the same, remains to be seen. What can be said is that the application of the principle of the cosmos-being-saved demonstrating higher forms of order could helpfully be applied, in practical soteriology, to political forms of order, since the nations of the world exhibit such disarray or disorder.

The work of Torrance, more generally, invites a theological re-thinking of every component of the cosmological thought behind the anthropic cosmological principle. For example, the suggestion that the universe is what it is either in order that man (*anthropos*) may exist, or because man observes it, is paralleled by the Christian doctrine of Man, in which Man's end is to know God and worship Him and enjoy Him for ever; this is also a part of man's priestly role in the universe. The cosmos is not simply a place which has given rise to reflective mind; it is a place where religious experience has occurred: not that the cosmos should be known, but that the Creator should be known and loved and worshipped.

In such ways, the work of Torrance provides for a complete rethinking of scientific cosmology, so that it rests on theological rather than philosophical principles – Trinitarian rather than natural theology. Such a reworking also provides the final key to the definition of disorder as a soteriological exercise.

---

would pertain to Christ as the animating Word; similarly, if "Principle" is taken to mean "Action-guiding maxim", it could also be considered that the Logos is indeed the One guiding Church and Cosmos alike. Barrow and Tipler's use of "Principle" sometimes seems almost to imply "hypothesis, or "heuristic idea", for the word "Principle" has evolved into a looser semantic principle than was the case in previous centuries. However, Torrance's theology has the resources to embrace all three meanings, as in Christ Being and Act are One; and He is One with His Spirit, Who is the Principle (in a certain sense) of inspiration and hence of all "heuristic" ideas. Whether or not the word "Principle" is used, the important theoretical point is to assert Christ as the central reality of the Cosmos, and so link the Christian doctrine of Creation to the science of cosmology. This is the logical next step for Torrance's theology of creation. It is the step which he does not however take in DCO – hence it is now needed. According to the logic of his own ideas, the next stage of theological cosmology beyond that would be to assert the triune Being of God as the (contingent) core reality of the Cosmos. This step is also lacking in DCO. However, the notion of the Christian Cosmological Principle is itself an hypothesis. The key to these abbreviations can be found [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> IA, p. 13.

**The disorder of the cosmos is to be seen as the evil out of which comes the higher good of the higher levels of cosmic order – that is, ordering towards the infinite and supreme Good of God Himself. Cosmic disorder provides the impetus for growth towards the higher moral, ethical, personal and spiritual forms of order which God, by His Spirit, in His Triune Being, convokes. Soteriology and cosmology are natural partners in the non-dualistic fashioning of a better cosmos and a better cosmology. The incarnation of Christ demonstrates that the Anthropic Cosmological Principle is not only, at a deeper level, a Christian Cosmological Principle, but that the latter is the Salvific Cosmological Principle.**

**Salvation is ingredient to the cosmos, and soteriology is revealed in Christ as the true heart – moral, metaphysical, philosophical and theological – of science. Science and love are one in Christ: this is the deepest meaning of the theology of T.F. Torrance, and this is the key idea of the non-dualistic future of theological cosmological science. Mention of love should remind “theological scientists” that “Man as [cosmic] priest” must also be man as [cosmic] chaplain/pastor and prophet. Man the priest of creation is pastor, prophet and chaplain to the cosmos (including for example, natural ecology and the animal kingdom) and not just a rationalistic priest-as-scientist. A Pastoral Theology, and a concept of the prophetic role of man, is needed to accompany the priestly theology of the cosmos; otherwise the latter tends towards an unbalanced rationalism, objectivism and scientism.**

### **The redemption of the cosmos and the salvation of science**

**Torrance’s work illuminates the divine initiative for the consummation of the salvation of the cosmos. In the onto-relational thought which Torrance has described, the disorder of the cosmos can only be comprehended in terms of the higher reality of the divine salvation of the world: that is, the redemption of the cosmos. It is not just time but the cosmos concerning which theology must explicate the reality of redemption.**

**It has been shown in this study that non-dualistic thought requires the simultaneous consideration of the cosmos and the extant theories of the cosmos, that is, cosmology and cosmologies. Alfred North Whitehead has already been cited in this study as speaking of philosophy as the critic of cosmologies, and theology likewise offers an analysis of the errors and the redemption of the errors of cosmologies: for the redemption of the cosmos includes the redemption of cosmology.**

Torrance's "thinking together" of science and theology, of cosmology and eschatology, is part of the wider cultural task of thinking together science and soteriology. Since science is conducted by man-fallen, with the human mind which takes part in the fall of man and which perpetrates cosmic disorder, science merits salvation as does any cultural enterprise. Torrance's work in inquiring into the soteriological significance of natural science has its onto-relational counterpart, its non-dualistic obverse, in the apparently opposite issue: the soteriological needs of natural science; it behoves the "theological scientist" to inquire into the salvation of science. If it should be said that science cannot be saved, since it has not fallen, only men have, it must be responded from within Torrance's own thought that if it is legitimate to speak of the redemption of time, it must also be to speak of the salvation of science, or at least of scientists.

The juxtaposition of the great cultural themes of science and the doctrine of salvation does indeed call for Torrance's "mutual modification". Cosmos-being-saved implies cosmology-being-redeemed and science-being-saved: theological science thus has the task of showing the difference between science as it appears in unregenerate man, and science as it may result in the regenerate man. Man the priest who is man the scientist must be redeemed-man as scientist; in this way the salvation of science from its contribution to cosmic disorder will lead both to the sanctification of science and a more general critique of unrestrained rationalism.

Since the human mind is precisely the locus of the Fall, in Torrance's view, it is important that science, to which he ascribes so great a role in theology and indeed in the cosmos, should proceed from redeemed mind, that is, redeemed man. Torrance's theology thus implies a systematic initiative for the regeneration of science in Christ. It is regenerate science rather than natural science in which lies the hope of man-the-scientist as priest of creation/cosmos. However, such a recognition of the partaking of science in the consequences of the fall would necessitate a much more tentative view being taken of the moral or theological worth of the great achievements of rationalism such as Einstein's theory. This does not mean that the Christian as scientist is *eo ipso* telling the truth, or finding the truth, over against the atheist as scientist: nor that the converse is true. The "Galileo episode" shows this.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Arthur Koestler, The Sleepwalkers. A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe, Part V.2, "The Trial of Galileo", pp. 471ff. (London: Hutchinson, 1959), for an account of the "Galileo Episode".

But these considerations imply the need for an ascetical theology of science itself. This is also proved by Ravetz's analysis of the pathology of scientific experience, and its potential for "institutionalised psychopathy".<sup>5</sup>

To conclude, if theology is to go "through science", the reverse must also be true in the mutual modification of which Torrance speaks. Science must go through theology – that is, through the Gospel of repentance and faith (Mark 1:15). What this sanctification of science will produce cannot be known in detail, only that theologically speaking, ex hypothesi, the redemption of science will reduce the disorder of the world of science and its technological products, and will reduce the capacity of scientific theories to impute disorder to the world and project it there. The redemption of man necessitates the redemption of science in an age of science, not to know which is to be a barbarian.

The theological key to the "definition" of the disorder of the cosmos is thus the explication of the salvation of the cosmos, man, his cosmology and indeed all his science (and theology? included. The elucidation of cosmic disorder as including, or even being focussed in, the disorder of the mind of man, the cardinal instrument of reason and science, proves the necessity of defining the solution to cosmic disorder – that is, its essential meaning in Christ – as being the redemption of that mind and all its works. Accordingly, to elucidate the practical significance of Christ's mediatorial salvation of the cosmos, as is the concern of this chapter, is to hold fast to the golden thread of the reality of cosmos-and-man as overlapping elements of the created order (both partake of the Order of Creation) which still suffer the effects of the Fall, and which require the consummation of God's redemptive and salvific purposes by His Spirit.

Though in a certain, distal, sense "salvation" pertains only to the once-for-all salvation wrought by Christ in His Cross and Resurrection, in theological practice the concept of salvation is more fluid, and shades off imperceptibly into the concepts of redemption, justification and sanctification.<sup>6</sup> God's salvific purposes, in Torrance's view, include the consummation of creation's re-ordering.

---

<sup>5</sup> J.R. Ravetz, "The Varieties of Scientific Experience", in A.R. Peacocke (ed.) The Sciences and Theology in the 20th Century (London: Oriel Press, pp. 189-90).

<sup>6</sup> Torrance's theology does not lay these out in a formal scheme, as noted above. This gives to his theology a fragmentary, episodic character, sometimes appearing *ad hoc*. It is difficult to avoid this character when writing about his work; one cannot easily impose a systematic structure upon a theology which often has more of the character of a response to apologetical needs of the Church, for example in relation to the achievements of modern science.

For this reason, no ultimate distinction can be made between the salvation and the sanctification of cosmos, man, science and theology, and civilisation. This conclusion is thus essentially concerned to hold together the twin themes of “theology through science” and “salvation through Christ” while expounding the mediation of Christ in incarnation, atonement and Trinitarian action.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to doing theology “through science”, T.F. Torrance sees a “new science” coming to being. This new science starts from a unitary science and supersedes the era of “merely analytical science”.<sup>8</sup> The new science is integrative and avoids the disintegration wrought by analysis per se. Atomistic thinking is replaced by relational thinking. The new science discerns a cosmos growing in order, in a stratified ascent towards and beyond the realm of higher intelligibility.<sup>9</sup> Science is leading the universe, and its cosmology, to God. When cosmology reaches God in this way, it discovers Him as Redeemer as well as Creator. The study of the creation is thus also the study of the redemption of the cosmos. The new science, like the cosmos itself, is a science-being-redeemed, in keeping with its place within a cosmos-being-saved.

The explication of the relevance of soteriology for science, as well as the reverse, also brings out the residual problems in Torrance’s “scientific theology”, as they have been identified in this study. These include, with reference to the issue of “theology through science”: problems of alienation, the question of Einstein vs. Quantum Physics,<sup>10</sup> the problem of Quantum indeterminacy in relation to non-order as an alternative ideal to “order vs. disorder”. On “Theological Science”, it has been suggested that “Theology of science”, including the redemption as well as the imitation of science, may be a better programme for Christian theology. On science itself, the problem of science as ideology and myth must be addressed by future “theological scientists”. For theologians working with Johannine exegesis, the definition of “cosmos” raises the problem of cosmos = disorder versus cosmos = order.

---

<sup>7</sup> Since sciences are the results of human thought and action, it could fairly be said that as in Adam all sciences die into sin, alienation and error, in Christ all are “made alive” – which in this context could almost be translated as “made personal”, pertaining to the “order of persons” rather than the “order of machines”. This is true also of the “philosophies of science” – to use Rom Harré’s epithet entitling his book of that name. The Adam/Christ distinction pertains to the goals and values of the science in question, to its methods and epistemology, to its contribution to society and its technology, to its concept of community and so on. To some extent the “truth” of the Adamic nature is impersonal and atomistic, of the Christ nature personal and relational.

<sup>8</sup> GGT, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald W. Clark, Einstein, pp. 325ff, passim.

**This study has also noted problems in the analysis of disorder through (a) Science (with reference to limitations and difficulties with the concept of “Entropy” in thermodynamics, and indeed the problems of choosing this science alone); (b) Theology (in disorder approached through theology, we have noted the problem of the reification of “evil”).**

**More generally, Torrance would appear to have underestimated the effect of the Fall upon science itself as conceived, practiced and deployed, although the reality of this effect is an ineluctable conclusion from the two premises which he himself has presented: that science is the expression of man’s rational mind, and that that mind is fallen into estrangement from God. Furthermore, while Torrance has duly recognized the sociality of science in his paper on the transcendental role of wisdom on science, he has perhaps not given sufficient attention to the nature of fallen scientific sociality, as expressed in the magnified greed and aggression of pollution and war. His account of science awaits attention to the redemption of (fallen) scientific sociality. For without such redemption, science is only the power of magnification of human perversity, alienation and malice.**

**Despite these problems, the achievement of T.F. Torrance is easily listed: he has undoubtedly made a signal contribution to the creation of a theological cosmology, in achievement of his own ambition: “What is ultimately envisaged is a reconstruction of the very foundations of modern thought and culture, similar to that which took place in the early centuries of the Christian era, when the unitary outlook of Judeo-Christian thought transformed that of the ancient world, and made possible the eventual rise of empirico-theoretic science.”<sup>11</sup>**

**Torrance’s work is laying the foundation for the theological reconstruction of that science, especially cosmological science. In this way he has both illuminated the nature of cosmic disorder and showed the ways by which it can be diminished until, by God’s grace, it is ultimately annihilated. In the meantime, during the time of Christ’s patience, the redemption of cosmos and cosmology will be the work of man-redeemed as, by the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, he lives out his vocation as man of science in the Church of Jesus Christ. Since Torrance is concerned that theology and science should together prevent the destruction of the world,<sup>12</sup> and since it is (unredeemed, unregenerate) science**

---

<sup>11</sup> RST, p. x.

<sup>12</sup> It must be pointed out that Torrance’s theology should not be regarded as asserting that science, still less theology, can be expected to “save” the world; this would be an illegitimate incursion into the realm of divine agency or action. Salvation is by God in Christ – by divine, not by human agency. Cf. Christoph Schwoebel (“The Creature of the Word”, op. cit.) on “what the Church cannot do” (pp. 148-150) and “what the Church Can Do and Must Do”

which has brought the world to the brink of destruction, through what Torrance calls “malevolent technology” and what Oppenheimer termed the “sin of the physicists”, it is appropriate that theology should lead science and technology, in the deepest layers of their corporate being, to that repentance<sup>13</sup> and amendment of life which is the beginning of human response to the Gospel on the path of eternal salvation (The Gospel according to St. Mark, 1:15, and the “shorter ending” of this Gospel).

**Sermon Word Total:** 2,334

**Meditation Seed Thought:** The incarnation of Christ demonstrates that the Anthropic Cosmological Principle is not only, at a deeper level, a Christian Cosmological Principle, but that the latter is the Salvific Cosmological Principle.

**Feedback/Comments:** Please email your comments at:  
[sermons@newgenius.com](mailto:sermons@newgenius.com)

Please also visit [www.wnrf.org](http://www.wnrf.org) & [www.stuartcoddinstitute.org](http://www.stuartcoddinstitute.org)

---

(pp. 151-155) as an organised human community of witness (p.154); It is *God* Who acts and saves: “We can only witness to God’s faithfulness who will complete the work he has begun by creating the Church as the creature of the divine Word.” (p.150). The one who falls into sin and rebellion, and who brings about the destruction (Man/Adam), cannot also be the One Who saves (Christ). But the salvation of science can diminish cosmic disorder.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Sherrard, in his The Rape of Man and Nature, An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1987), urges theologians to call for this repentance, in the light of what he calls “Modern Science and the Dehumanization of Man” and the “Dehumanization of Nature” (pp. 63 – 112).