



Grace Communion Seminary

TH504 – T.F. Torrance’s Scientific Theology

Short Syllabus

Instructor: Rev. John McKenna, Ph.D.

Course Description:

This course introduces the work of Thomas F. Torrance, the great Edinburgh theologian. We will study his theology in the light of the covenanted relationship between God, humanity, and the world and the actual nature of the relationship that exists between Christian theology and natural science. We look at his contribution to the Church’s understanding and announcement of the kingdom of God in our time.

Required Reading:

Torrance, T.F., *Space, Time, & Resurrection*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976, 1998.

ISBN: 978-0567086099. About \$40 new; \$26 used.

———. *Divine and Contingent Order*. Oxford Press: 1981, ISBN: 0-19-826658-8; T&T Clark, 1986, 2005. About \$33.

———. *Theology and Natural Science*, Wipf & Stock, 2002, ISBN: 1-57910-790-7, \$30.00.

Recommended Reading:

Torrance, T.F. *The Mediation of Christ*. Helmers & Howard, 1992. ISBN 978-0939443505. (This book is an excellent recapitulation of Torrance’s main concerns in his three books that we are reading in our course.) \$39.99

----- *Reality and Evangelical Theology*. IVP: 1999. ISBN: 0-8308-1586-4. \$22.

McKenna, John E. *The Great AMEN of the Great I-AM*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2008. <www.wipfandstock.com> ISBN: 978-1597528474.

———. “The 7th Chapter of *The Arbiter* by John Philoponus.” *Quodlibet Journal*:

- Volume 1 Number 3: June 1999. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/mckenna-arbiter.shtml>
- . “Comforted by the Word.” 1999. Available online at <http://www.gci.org/bible/comforted>
- . “The Concept of Nature in the Thought of John Philoponus.” <http://www.gci.org/science/philoponus>
- . “The Divine Names and Titles.” 1999. <http://www.gci.org/God/names>
- . “The Freedom of the Person of Christ.” 2000. <http://www.gci.org/jesus/freedom>
- . “John Philoponus, Sixth Century Alexandrian Grammarian, Christian Theologian and Scientific Philosopher.” *Quodlibet Journal*: Volume 5 Number 1, January 2003. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/mckenna-philoponus.shtml>
- . “God and the Nothingness.” *Quodlibet Journal*: Volume 2 Number 3, Summer 2000. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/mckenna-nothingness.shtml>
- . “The Great I-AM of God in Biblical Covenant Relationship with His People in the Old Testament World.” *Quodlibet Journal*: Volume 1 Number 8, December 1999. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/mckenna-iam.shtml>
- . “The Great I-AM of the Lord God in Covenant with His People in the New Testament.” *Quodlibet Journal*: Volume 3 Number 2, Spring 2001. <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/mckenna-nt.shtml>
- . “Hosea: The Great Reversal of the Great I-AM.” *The Worldwide News*, 1998-1999. <http://www.gci.org/bible/hosea>
- . “On Theology of the Word of God.” <http://www.gci.org/god/godtheology>
- . “Transformations in the History of Cosmology.” <http://www.gci.org/science/cosmology>
- . “A Visit With Tom Torrance: Master Theologian.” <http://www.gci.org/news/visit/torrance>

Torrance, Thomas F. *The Ground and Grammar of Theology: Consonance Between Theology and Science*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980, 2005. See also Torrance’s audio lectures with this title at <http://www.gci.org/av/tftaudio>.

———. *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science*. Helmers & Howard, 1989. Out of print, but used copies available for \$25.

- . *Theological and Natural Science*. Wipf & Stock, 2002. Out of print.
- . *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Faith*. T&T Clark/Continuum, 1988, 2003. \$54.00

Student Learning Outcomes for GCS

Grace Communion Seminary has five core goals for its students (see the document on our website titled GCS Philosophy). This course, TH504, serves largely to support goal number 2, which is that students learn to reason from a sound theological basis as new covenant Christians centered in Trinitarian Incarnational faith.

Student Learning Outcomes for TH504

1. To describe the biblical and dogmatic theology with which Professor Torrance sought to champion a ground upon which Christianity is called to stand to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God in the history of God's creation.
2. To explain the way in which the Christian Church is made able to stand and understand, in the name of Jesus Christ, the word of God as the revelation of the Trinity the Great I-AM is, as the Lord and God of his people among the nations in the history of the creation.
3. We will synthesize the conclusion that the word of God as this One Redeemer-Creator is the source of all truth, the truth of God and his revelation, the truth of humanity and our destiny with him, and the truth of the nature of the universe as his creation to describe, with increasing clarity, the impact of this revelation and apply its relevance to us in our time.

Course Requirements

We will read the Preface, Introduction and Chapters 1-8 of Torrance's *Space, Time, and Resurrection*. We will attempt to interpret the significance of Torrance's argument for a relational view of space/time in the light of our modern scientific culture. Once this point is grasped, we will attempt to grasp his concept of contingent rationality and its implication upon an hermeneutical science for interpretation in our time.

I have written assessments for each of the unit assignments, with the hope that we will in the course of our reading be able to discuss together the challenge Torrance is to us. You will be required to write a short response to each these assignments. I have added Torrance's *Divine and Contingent Order* and *Reality and Evangelical Theology* with the hope of deepening for many of you the significance for the proclamation of the power of the Gospel of the understanding the Revelation and Reconciliation of God and Man as correlated to the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ in His Creation for our theology and science even today. *The Mediation of Christ* may be read as a summary of the theological concepts important to Torrance's 'Theological Science.' This will lay the groundwork for writing an essay (10 pages) on the relationship between the Incarnation and the Creation.

You will also provide a reading report on the total amount of reading you have done during the weeks of the course. Reading 1500 pages is standard requirement for course work on the level of most university educations. You may accumulate this amount from any number of books.

Grading

Your nine short responses to the contents of *Space, Time, and Resurrection* will comprise 40% of your grade. The 10-page essay will count for 40%, and the final 20% will come from your participation in our interactions with me, at our website and via e-mail. The written lectures themselves are shorter than the average course; these interactions replace the lectures that might be included in a course given in a classroom somewhere. The reading materials listed above are background materials, to serve as a supplement to the contents of the books we will be studying directly. We only expect you to do your best. Do not worry about the challenges you face in this course!

The Schedule (The units may or may not correspond to a weekly system!)

Overview: We will introduce the work of Thomas F. Torrance, the great Edinburgh theologian in our time. We will seek to challenge the student, not with any description of the works, but with regard to the direction in which Professor

Torrance sought to send the Church of Jesus Christ with his theology, a direction we believe is vital for 21st Century Theology and Proclamation of the Word of God. We shall attempt to come to grips with this direction and thus face in the Light of the covenanted relationship between God, Man, and the World the actual nature of the relationship that exists between Christian Theology and Natural Science. In this way, we hope to contribute to the Church's understanding and announcement of the Kingdom of God in our time.

Unit 1 *Introduction to the Course*

My interaction with Professor Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007): We met in 1981 at Fuller Theological Seminary, when he became my mentor and then a friend that I came to consider a father in the Christian Faith. His challenge to take seriously the need of the Church to relate Christian Theology and Proclamation to our scientific culture needs to be taken seriously.

Unit II *Preface and Introduction to Space/Time & Resurrection (STR)*

Professor Torrance was one of the foremost interpreters of Karl Barth to the English-speaking world. With Professor G.W. Bromiley, Torrance sought to give access to Barth's *Church Dogmatics* to the United Kingdom and the United States. His interaction with the great Swiss Theologian is recorded significantly in his introductory remarks to STR.

Unit III *The Biblical Concept of the Resurrection, Chapter 1*

Torrance explores the way the reality of the Resurrection Event clashes with the cosmology and epistemology of the ancient Graeco-Roman world. The time of Jesus, bodily risen from the Dead, is to be taken seriously with our modern notions of world history and scientific progress and change.

Torrance argues that we must learn to allow the nature of the object we seek to know to inform our knowledge of it in any field, and that the Revelation of God in Christ in space and time demands a dynamically open and free relationship with the nature of the Truth to which God is utterly committed with His Servant.

The Resurrection and the Person of Christ, Chapter 2

The Resurrection is not merely a point in time, an event among all the events of world history, but the Event of Christ, the Messiah of Israel's prophetic hope and the Great I-AM the Lord God is as the Lord and Savior of the Church. We cannot understand the Person of Christ except in the context given us with His Biblical Revelation.

Unit IV *The Resurrection and the Atoning Work of Christ, Chapter 3*

The Theology of the Resurrection belongs to the Revelation of the Redeemer-Creator, the One who is the Reconciler of His Mankind and His Creation. The Atoning Work of this One is to be grasped as the New Man of the New Creation created, with His Holy Love, out of the Old Man of the Old Creation. Atonement is more than a particular event (The Cross of Christ), but a Passion the pathos of which is to be understood in both the Old and the New Covenants of the Prophecy of Christ. Atonement is more than a case of the forensics of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, but the Promise kept of life for the People of God, quite beyond their steady resistance to the One they were called to worship and love.

The Nature of the Resurrection Event, Chapter 4

A new 'diastasis' has been established with the Resurrection between God and His Eternity and Man and His Time. History in this event must become redefined to serve the actual destiny of the human race with our Redeemer-Creator in the space and time of the Creation. The Lord of space and time has come into space and time for the sake of the New Man of the New Creation. His Providence, Presence, and Prophecy are the One Word of God who is both King of the Kingdom as well as Head of the Church. The new dimensions of the Resurrected Christ, bodily raised from the Dead cannot be overlooked. It is perhaps these new dimensions that cause us to face a challenge where all of our presuppositions and assumptions about the nature of the world and the race are called into question by the Act the Word of God is as the Revelation of the Father, Almighty Maker of the 'All'.

Unit V *The Ascension of Jesus Christ, Chapter 5*

Fully established at the Right Hand of His Father, and our Father, Jesus Christ, the Word and Son of God reigns as King over His Kingdom, over time past, present, and future. Torrance's Reformed Tradition sought to articulate the dimensions in terms of the three-fold office of the Messiah, King, Royal Priest, and Royal Prophet. A full grasp of His Ministry cannot obtain without an appreciation of these offices of His Personhood. As such, He is the One Mediator between God and Man even in our time. The renewal depends upon the Wisdom of His Life among us.

The Nature of the Ascension Event, Chapter 6

Begin with 'the forty days' the Resurrected Lord spent with His disciples upon the earth in Palestine before His Ascension and understand that, in the Ascension Event, the space & time of the bodily risen Christ have been posited forever within the structures of the Creation. It is this space & time that we are challenged to take seriously for our lives. It is with space & time that, by the Spirit of God, God's Eternity has been related to our space & time. Eternity is ministered to us from Christ in the Spirit of the Father in this way of the Grace and Truth of the Revelation, Redemption, and Reconciliation of Mankind in the Creation. We must not think of the 'coming down from heaven' as space & time travel, but as the Wisdom and Power of the Lord God to make Himself present and known and followed according to the Word He is in His Acts with His Being for us. There is not withdrawal from the world in the *nature* of this event, but rather a created and creative move for the sake of Promise to His People in His Creation. It is a move to fulfill the covenanted relationship He has made with Israel and the Church as the People of God. The implication is clearly that we cannot understand Him except within the structures of space & time and the matter we are in the Universe.

Unit VI The Ascension and the Parousia of Christ, *Chapter 7*

Parousia appears in the New Testament only in the singular. The two comings of Christ popular in the articulating of the relationship of Christ to

time (present, eschatological, and apocalyptic) is a convenience associated with the difficulties we have in counting the unaccountable. In a certain sense, there is no pause in the coming of Christ, but there are uncountable elements that bear down upon what we can count with our clocks and calendars and so forth. Here, Christian Theology is very much bound up with Cosmological considerations, as we can easily show in the history of the great transformations that have occurred in the Church's relationship to our developing scientific culture. Perhaps Karl Barth's concept of the Lord of Time needs to possess an objectivity that cannot be divorced from the invisible objectivity upon which much of our modern physics depend.

The Lord of Space and Time, Chapter 8

I have written a book entitled *The Great AMEN of the Great I-AM* (www.wipfandstock.com) in which I have laid down an argument, Biblical and Dogmatic, for the relationship we must find between Christian Theology and our scientific culture. I have studied John Philoponus, the Sixth Century Alexandrian Grammarian, to help me in this area. Torrance's final book, a group of essays compiled by his son, Dr. Thomas Speak Torrance, speaks much of this man and the potential of his impact upon our post-modern problems with this relationship. Until we are able to take the relationship seriously, we are committed either to a 'docetic' or an 'adoptionistic' notion, spiritual and material fragmentations of the *nature* of God in His Acts with His Word in the history of His Creation, unable rightly to grasp in all of its depths the significance of Incarnation in God's Creation. If you read Torrance's *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, you will get in touch with the way he would develop the Witness of the Incarnation to both our scientific cultures and the theological enterprise. We cannot remain unable to integrate in the Being of the Word of God in His Acts as His Providence, His Presence, and His Prophecy with us in our times.

Unit VII *Divine and Contingent Order* (Video)

Unit VIII *Divine and Contingent Order* (Review)

Unit IX *Theology and Natural Science*

Unit X *Theology and Natural Science*