

Thought for the Day 27th July - John Reed

Read Psalm 8

I have always been a fan of Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I first heard it listening as a teenager at boarding school. Every Friday night I – and half of the people in the dormitory – when we were supposed to be in bed, lights out and silent, hid my little radio under my pillow, with that old single-wire headphone tucked into my ear listening to it.

There are scores of great lines and scenes. One in particular is the “Total Perspective Vortex,” which Adams describes as the worst form of torture any sentient being can be subjected to:

For when you are put into the Vortex you are given just one momentary glimpse of the entire unimaginable infinity of creation, and somewhere in it a tiny little marker, a microscopic dot on a microscopic dot, which says "You are here."

The Total Perspective Vortex derives its picture of the whole Universe on the principle of extrapolated matter analyses.

To explain - since every piece of matter in the Universe is in some way affected by every other piece of matter in the Universe, it is in theory possible to extrapolate the whole of creation - every sun, every planet, their orbits, their composition and their economic and social history from, say, one small piece of fairy cake.

The man who invented the Total Perspective Vortex did so basically in order to annoy his wife.

Trin Tragula - for that was his name - was a dreamer, a thinker, a speculative philosopher or, as his wife would have it, an idiot.

And she would nag him incessantly about the utterly inordinate amount of time he spent staring out into space, or mulling over the mechanics of safety pins, or doing spectrographic analyses of pieces of fairy cake.

"Have some sense of proportion!" she would say, sometimes as often as thirty-eight times in a single day.

And so he built the Total Perspective Vortex - just to show her.

And into one end he plugged the whole of reality as extrapolated from a piece of fairy cake, and into the other end he plugged his wife: so that when he turned it on she saw in one instant the whole infinity of creation and herself in relation to it.

To Trin Tragula's horror, the shock completely annihilated her brain; but to his satisfaction he realized that he had proved conclusively that if life is going to exist in a Universe of this size, then the one thing it cannot afford to have is a sense of proportion.

And yet, disconcertingly big as the universe may be, the prophet Isaiah tells us that God “with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens”. He goes on to say: *Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust ... Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.* (Isaiah 40:12;15;26).

And yet this God who is so much bigger than the universe knows and cares for each of us: *He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.* (Isaiah 40:29-31).

Modern man has been described as a cosmic orphan; isolated and bewildered in an ever-expanding universe. But here we are reminded that the God who plays with galaxies as we play with sand on the beach is intensely aware of each of us in our struggles, and offers to strengthen and comfort us.