

## Introduction

### T. F. Torrance and Orthodoxy

The year 2013 marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of T. F. Torrance. The editors of *Participatio* have chosen to mark this occasion with a special issue of the journal devoted to exploring a neglected theme of longstanding importance to Torrance.

The crucial significance of Orthodox theology, and the Orthodox tradition in general, as a matter of importance for Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians is presently beyond doubt. Yet when Torrance began his theological work, this was not so. Together with Yves Congar, Michael Ramsey, Jean Danielou and a few others, Torrance belongs to a very small category of Western theologians of his time engaged in a deep and significant dialogue not only with the ancient Fathers of the East, but likewise with contemporary Orthodox theologians. In this sense, he anticipated many of the most important theological conversations and themes of the present.

Although its fruits began to be shown only slowly in his work of later decades, the roots of Torrance's interest in Eastern Orthodoxy were deep. One wonders what impact might have been made by his visits to Athens, Istanbul, and the Middle East in 1936 as a recipient of the Blackie scholarship for classical studies, during which time Torrance attempted even to master modern Greek. Torrance's PhD research on the Apostolic Fathers, while reflecting a viewpoint unacceptable to the Orthodox and which Torrance himself would later leave behind, also foreshadows the running interest in patristics that would characterize his mature work.

According to his own account, Torrance's living dialogue with Orthodoxy began within the Faith and Order movement, through interactions with Orthodox theologians like Georges Florovsky and Chrysostom Constantinides in various commissions and study groups through the 1950's and early 60's. His friendship with Methodios Fouyas, Metropolitan of Axum (Ethiopia) and later Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Great Britain, was also a crucial context for exchange and collaboration between the late 1960's through to the early 90's, particularly as regards the significance of the Alexandrian Fathers for theological convergence and theology-science dialogue. Torrance was closely involved with Fouyas' "Foundation for Hellenism in Great Britain" as well as various journals



founded by Fouyas under the aegis of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria: *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, *Abba Salama*, and *Ekklesia kai Theologia*. Torrance's ecumenical friendships with the Greek theologians Nikos Nissiotis (a former student of Barth) and Angelos Philippou are also worthy of note.

Another forum for Torrance's engagement with Orthodoxy was his teaching. Torrance had important relationships of mentoring and theological exchange with several students of Greek Orthodox background at New College, Edinburgh. Among these were George Dragas and Constantine Dratsellas. Dragas went on to be closely involved with Torrance in the international Orthodox-Reformed dialogue from the late 70's through the early 90's, co-drafting with him the agreed statement on the Trinity. Dragas recounts the story of how, following the completion of Constantine Dratsellas' first doctorate in Athens, the prominent Greek theologian Panagiotes Trembelas told Dratsellas he must study with "the two best theologians in the West": Joseph Ratzinger at Regensburg, and T. F. Torrance at Edinburgh. Dratsellas wrote a PhD thesis on the soteriology of St. Cyril of Alexandria under Torrance's direction. Torrance's Christian charity and fatherly devotion toward his students were demonstrated when he took a week out of his work to fly to Athens in order to spend several days praying at the bedside of Dratsellas, who was dying a premature death from a brain tumor.

Torrance was also essentially responsible for introducing to the English-speaking world the figure who would later become the leading Orthodox theologian on the ecumenical stage: John Zizioulas. Zizioulas taught as Torrance's assistant in dogmatics at Edinburgh in the years 1970-1973 before moving on to Glasgow. A tacit debate between Torrance and Zizioulas, of great importance and still being continued, runs as a sub-current through their respective writings on the Trinity, personhood and nature.

The 1970's saw Torrance's dialogue with Orthodoxy move to wider scale. In 1973, Torrance had the unusual and unprecedented honor of being named "honorary protopresbyter" of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. When serving as Moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1976-1977, Torrance took the unusual step of making his first foreign visits as Moderator, not to other Reformed communities, but to the ancient Orthodox patriarchates of the East. It was at this time that he made the request to open an official international Reformed-Orthodox Dialogue. The papers from this dialogue still call for a deeper consideration and assessment. But perhaps of greatest significance for Orthodox theologians was Torrance's work on patristic hermeneutics, collected in his 1995 volume, *Divine Meaning* (a work Torrance dedicated to George Dragas and his wife Ina).

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The present volume constitutes nothing less than an international symposium on Torrance's thought, with authors hailing from Bulgaria, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, Russia, Serbia and the United States. The contributors are predominantly Orthodox, but Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars have had a part as well. Following a centenary overview on Torrance's life and work by Tom Noble, the exploration of our specific theme opens with an informative interview with Fr. George Dragas regarding his relations with Torrance and collaboration with him in various scholarly and ecumenical activities, including his own Orthodox appraisal of Torrance's Trinitarian theology and the exchanges that led to the Orthodox-Reformed Agreed Statement on the Trinity co-drafted by him and Torrance and published in 1991. This is followed by a memoir by Fr. Brendan Pelphrey, an Orthodox parish priest, on his studies under Torrance in the early 70's and the impact Torrance made in leading him to Orthodoxy.

The articles in this volume have been divided into two sections, reflecting distinct emphases. As is appropriate both to Orthodox theology and to T. F. Torrance, however, patrology and systematics, as well as ancient and modern, intersect in both. The essays in the first section, focusing on patristics, both give careful attention to Torrance's own interpretation of Church Fathers (Vladimir Cvetkovic on Athanasius) and pursue Torrance's thinking further by relating it to areas and figures of the patristic tradition which he engaged only suggestively or not at all (Cvetkovic's comments on Maximus; Donald Fairbairn on justification in Cyril of Alexandria; Mark Mourachian on Ephrem the Syrian; Alexis Torrance on the theology of baptism, Mark the Monk, and ascetic theology).

The second section of articles focuses on Torrance and Orthodox systematics, with a stress on modern debates. Nikolaos Asproulis' essay is a close study of Torrance's differences with John Zizioulas regarding the interpretation of the Cappadocian Fathers and the implications of this debate for theological method. Affinities between Torrance and the Romanian theologian Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae on the theme of the rationality of the cosmos are explored in the essay by Taylor Carr. The pieces by Stoyan Tanev and Deacon Alexei Nesteruk, both physicists with theological training, consider and extend critically Torrance's inquiries into theology and modern science with a deeper engagement of the later patristic tradition up to St. Gregory Palamas, as well as more recent thinking in physics. And an important article by the leading theologian of the Church of Greece, Fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos, represents the latest in the debate opened by Torrance with Zizioulas regarding "person" and nature" in the patristic tradition, now expanded

beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> century Fathers and having come to focus on natural will in St. Maximus the Confessor.

The symposium concludes with an appendix of several valuable primary sources relating to the theme of Torrance's relations with Orthodoxy. Torrance's correspondence with Georges Florovsky is published here, with annotations and a scholarly introduction by Matthew Baker discussing the context and content of their interactions. Finally, two little-known pieces by Torrance, "The Relevance of Orthodoxy" and "The Orthodox Church in Great Britain," are reprinted to close the volume.

This issue affords the students of Torrance's theology the opportunity to discover a more detailed and in-depth response to Torrance's thought from the Orthodox than can be found anywhere else. It also offers Orthodox readers and inquirers into Orthodoxy a glimpse into a historic theological exchange that up to this point has still remained far too unknown in Orthodox circles, especially outside of Great Britain. The discussions that took place between Anglicans and Orthodox in England beginning in the 1920's and continuing throughout the last century are fairly well-known and have been widely studied. Yet for all the importance of those exchanges, it might be argued that a far more dogmatically weighty conversation was being conducted from a center north of the border, in the person of Thomas Torrance and his Orthodox associates. That conversation deserves to be at least as well known as the Anglican-Orthodox exchanges that have so informed and shaped the popular perception of Orthodoxy in the English-speaking world today.

To that end, our volume would have been more complete had it included some more detailed discussion of the work of the international Reformed-Orthodox theological dialogue initiated by Torrance in 1977. Speaking in interview format, Fr. George Dragas has provided invaluable historical insights into the background of this dialogue at the opening of this volume. But the multiple boxes of unpublished papers and correspondence relating to this dialogue to be found in the Torrance archive of Princeton Theological Seminary await a future study by dedicated scholars, and they will no doubt bring many new things of interest to light. Likewise, the crucial import, via Methodios Fouyas, of Torrance's studies in Alexandrian Christology (extending also to his later interest in Severus of Antioch) for the non-Chalcedonian/Chalcedonian Orthodox dialogue is also a topic deserving of further exploration.

The official bilateral Orthodox-Reformed dialogue inaugurated by Torrance is now formally concluded, with little indication of any hope of revival. The "Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity" produced by this dialogue has received neither

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official acceptance by the holy synods of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches nor a wide reception by Orthodox theologians. Conversely, Torrance's theological vision was perhaps always too catholic, and Reformed identity too contested, to allow Torrance's theology to be considered as truly representative of all Christian bodies claiming that name. However, the present volume is an indication that the dialogue initiated by Torrance is continuing now in other forums. A new generation of Orthodox theologians is discovering Torrance's work, and the recent translation of Torrance's *Space, Time and Incarnation* into Russian by Alexei Nesteruk promises only wider engagement. Likewise, as the recent work of Myk Habets and Øyvind Rise on *theosis* and George Hunsinger on sacraments demonstrates, Torrance's re-orientation of Protestant theology after Barth towards the classical patristic tradition is now beginning to make its mark. It is to be hoped that this will lead some to follow Torrance, and even to go beyond him, into a deeper engagement with the evangelical witness of the Fathers and their Orthodox tradition.

As readers of this volume will discover, not everything Torrance had to say is acceptable to the Orthodox. The disagreements are real, and they are not trifling. But the affinities also are significant, and the mutual respect is profound. Orthodox theologians still have much to gain from Torrance on multiple fronts: his creative and forceful presentation of Athanasian-Cyrrilline Christology, most especially regarding the high priestly work of Christ; his re-articulation of patristic hermeneutics and rigorous treatment of theological epistemology in response to modern challenges; and his patristic-inspired forays into theology-science dialogue. One can hope, likewise, that it will be evident from this volume that those Protestant theologians continuing in the line of Torrance still have a great deal more to learn from Orthodoxy as well – not least, from a more extensive consideration of the later developed Byzantine patristic tradition, with its ascetic and liturgical dimensions, which Torrance surveyed very little. The dialogue begun between Torrance and his Orthodox friends and colleagues needs to continue, and move to a deeper level. This small offering, the first of its kind, is a gesture in that direction.

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*Feast of St. Katherine of Alexandria*