

**INTERVIEW WITH PROTOPRESBYTER  
GEORGE DION. DRAGAS  
REGARDING T. F. TORRANCE**

**Matthew Baker** [hereafter MB]: *Dear Father George, I've been blessed to have known you for a number of years now, during which time we have enjoyed many conversations together about a common interest: your beloved friend and teacher, Thomas Torrance. Please tell our readers a little about yourself, where you're from, and when and how you came to know Professor Thomas Torrance.*

**GDD:** Dear Matthew, thank you for facilitating this interview, which is very important for me, because Professor Torrance, of blessed memory, has been much more than a friend and teacher to me. He was a mentor, a guide, a supporter, a caring father, a key person in my life and career, whose memory is always alive in my heart and mind and to whom I owe a great deal for what I am today. If I write my memoirs or biography, as students and friends have been urging me to do, T. F. Torrance will be shown to be my great companion and benefactor in many pivotal circumstances and events. I will restrain myself in answering this interview in a detailed fashion, as I would have liked, and stick to your questions, answering them succinctly and focusing on Torrance himself and his extraordinary person and work, rather than on what he means to me personally.

As regards myself, I was born and raised in Athens, Greece, where I received my first education in science, and developed my theological interests and aspirations. At a crucial moment in my life I went to Scotland, basically to learn English, which I had found impossible to learn in Greece. But thanks to a scholarship I received, through the support of an unexpected (really, God-sent) philhellene friend, Principal Norman Porteous, Professor of Old Testament, Hebrew and Semitic languages, I ended up not only with learning English, but also with earning a theology degree from Edinburgh University. It was there at this university that I first heard of and met with Professor Torrance, and it was Principal Porteous who urged me to become acquainted with him. Torrance was one of my professors, to whom I was greatly attracted from the beginning, and who embraced me and became my supporter, mentor and guide for many years long after. There were at that time, in the 1960s, a very noticeable number of international students from all over the world that attended his lectures, many of whom had come to do research under him.



**MB:** *As a young theology student in a foreign country, what were your first impressions of Torrance? How did he conduct himself – in personal interactions, in the classroom? What kinds of things did you learn from him then?*

**GDD:** Having spent a year in the philosophy department, learning English and studying philosophy, I passed the *Hellenicum* (Higher Greek) and the *Hebraicum* (Higher Hebrew) and acquired the Attestation of Academic Fitness (the Scottish equivalent to the English GCE – a prerequisite for enrolling in the University) by sitting Higher exams (in Greek and Science), I entered the first year of Theology – thanks to my first benefactor, Professor Porteous, who guided me in my first year in Scotland. Professor Torrance taught Christian Dogmatics in the second year, but his name, along with that of Karl Barth, resounded in the corridors of New College and in the Student’s Residence annexed to it, especially at meals. It was precisely this constant talk of “TFT,” –as students called him – that made me venture a secret entry into one of his introductory lectures. This was the first time I saw him and heard him speak. Having entered the classroom on the second floor, I was surprised to see a Greek Archimandrite sitting among the students. I approached him, asked for a blessing and introduced myself to him. He was Fr. Cornelius from the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem (now Geron Metropolitan Cornelius of Petra). He told me that Torrance was a brilliant professor and that he had been sent there just to follow his lectures. I learned from him that there was also another Greek student, an assistant to Professor Panagiotes Trempelas of Dogmatics in the School of Theology of the University of Athens, Constantine Dratsellas, who had also been sent there to do a doctorate under Torrance’s guidance on St. Cyril of Alexandria’s Soteriology.<sup>1</sup> Torrance lectured on Christology and Soteriology. He spoke freely, but he also passed out lengthy lectures in typed form. I still have them all and treasure them as a great heirloom, although most of them have now been published: my fellow-student and friend Robert Walker, a nephew of Torrance, has recently edited them in two impressive volumes on the *Incarnation* and the *Atonement*.<sup>2</sup>

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1 I established a life friendship with both Archimandrite Cornelius Rodousakes and Constantine Dratsellas. Shortly afterwards I typed Dratsellas’ PhD thesis, with my two little Greek and English typewriters, as I was eager to learn what a PhD thesis was all about. It was entitled *Questions of the Soteriological Teaching of the Greek Fathers with special reference to St. Cyril of Alexandria* and was published in the Journal *Θεολογία* (Athens 1969).

2 *The Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, edited by Robert T. Walker (Paternoster Press and IVP, 2008), and *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, edited by Robert T. Walker (Paternoster and IVP Academic, 2009).

I was captivated by that first lecture to the extent that I ran to his office afterwards to introduce myself to him and to seek his permission to attend his classes, although I was at this time only a first year student. This was my first full encounter with him, which I cherish as a momentous event, because he gave me the starting point to my studies. He let me into his office, expressed his happiness that I was a Greek and then, showing me an icon of St. Athanasius,<sup>3</sup> which was placed in the center of his room, he told me that this was "*the theologian*" that I should make my primary mentor. The emphasis on St. Athanasius had already emerged in the lecture that I had attended. I clearly remember his statement, that if we wish to become theologians we must read and absorb three great books: Athanasius' *De Incarnatione*, Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* and Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*. These books, he said, bring us face to face with the basis of Christian Dogmatics, the event of the Incarnation, the fact that God has become man. Without this basis we could not really understand Christian doctrine.

With regard to Torrance's interaction in class, I would say that it was overpowering. He taught with tremendous conviction and profound erudition. He sounded like a prophet who communicated the word of God that was coming down from heaven into the class. Sometimes I felt that his lectures were like attending a Liturgy. It was word, imbued with sacramental quality. It was like a full river that moved constantly and consistently. But at the same time there was gentleness to it all, which came out in his answers to all sorts of questions raised by keen, confused, or even disagreeable students. On the whole, students' reactions to him were positive, but there were also some negative or lukewarm. I consider myself one of his luckiest undergraduates, because on numerous occasions he invited me to have lunch with him at a small Chinese restaurant behind New College, where we discussed the theological questions that I constantly raised. He had no other free time to address my questions and chose this option because he did not want to disappoint me. He also invited me to accompany him to several important debates and special lectures in the University and on one occasion he enrolled me in the Edinburgh University philosophical society, in the David Hume Tower, and encouraged me to participate in the open debates that were conducted there involving students and professors. There were, of course, other students who enjoyed the same kindness, but I always thought that I did better, because of my keenness to raise questions and clarify the profound points of his teaching.

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<sup>3</sup> This icon was an original, painted by a well-known Greek iconographer, Rallis Kopsidis. It had been given as a gift to Torrance by another Greek theologian, Angelos Philippou (or Philips), whom Torrance praised to me as the most brilliant of the Greeks, due to his extraordinary Oxford DPhil thesis on *The nature of evil according to Gregory of Nyssa*. I had the privilege later to read his thesis and to meet him in America.

**MB:** *If I recall correctly, your first publication was a translation into Greek of one of Torrance's articles. Which article was that and where was it published? How did this all come about?*

**GDD:** The article I translated into Greek was "The implications of *Oikonomia* for Knowledge and Speech of God in early Christian Theology," which was originally published in Hamburg-Bergstedt, Germany (1967) in a volume dedicated to Oscar Cullmann on his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday.<sup>4</sup> My translation into Greek was published in the Journal of the Patriarchate of Alexandria *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, which was reactivated at that time by Archbishop Methodios (Fouyas) of Aksum.<sup>5</sup> As to how this came about, I recall that I was given an offprint of this article by Iain Torrance, TFT's son, and I was so fascinated in reading it that I translated it into Greek with the intention to publish it. The opportunity for publishing it arose in Edinburgh when I met with Archbishop Methodios for the first time. He had come to Edinburgh with Patriarch Nikolaos VI of Alexandria and Archbishop Athenagoras (Kokkinakis) of Thyateira and Great Britain to receive honorary Doctorates at the University – an event prompted by Torrance. The article was reprinted in a revised form much later (1995) in Torrance's volume on patristic hermeneutics entitled *Divine Meaning* – a volume which Tom very lovingly dedicated to my wife Ina and to me. What fascinated me about this article was the constructive theological and epistemological character of Tom's reading of patristic hermeneutics. I should add that hermeneutics is one of Torrance's special contributions – an amazing contribution that fully flourishes in his books *Divine Meaning* and *Theological Science*.

**MB:** *After finishing your BD at Edinburgh, you did a Masters at Princeton Theological Seminary. Torrance was at that point a visiting scholar in Princeton, and Georges Florovsky was also teaching there. If memory serves me right, you had the unique benefit of having them both as readers for your Masters thesis. How did all this work out? What was your topic? And what was the relationship like between Torrance and Florovsky?*

**GDD:** At my graduation in 1970, Torrance gave me a letter, written to him by the external examiner Eric Mascall of King's College London, which placed me at the top of the finalists in Dogmatics and suggested that I should be

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4 See: *Auszug aus Oikonomia: Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie*, edited by Felix Christ (published by Herbert Reich Evang. Verlag GMBH, Hamburg-Bergstedt, Germany 1967), pp. 223-238.

5 See: *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, vol. 51 (1969-70), pp. 32-48, 186-200.

encouraged to pursue further studies. As a result of this, Torrance called me and suggested to me that I consider going to Princeton to work with Florovsky on Athanasius. He also suggested that I concentrate on the disputed paternity of Athanasius' two treatises *Against Apollinaris*. In his view, these two treatises were genuine Athanasian works, but had been characterized as pseudepigrapha because they were an obvious obstacle to a 19<sup>th</sup> century scholarly casuistry that saw a latent Apollinarianism in Athanasius' Christology (!) – a point that had been and still is adopted in the general manuals of *Dogmengeschichte*. Torrance praised Florovsky as the only theologian who would make him think twice if he disagreed with what he proposed or wrote, and advised me that it would be an excellent opportunity for me to get into the great Athanasius, whose theological legacy he considered fundamental in his efforts for theological reconstruction, having Florovsky as my guide.

In September 1970 I met Florovsky at Princeton University for the first time, and he accepted me as a postgraduate student working on Athanasius' anti-Apollinarian treatises. He praised Torrance as a leading theologian to whom Orthodox theologians ought to listen very carefully and said that he was delighted that I had been his student. Being at this time a visiting professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, where I had been enrolled for a Th.M. degree, Florovsky could be, and accepted to be, my supervisor. By divine providence, it happened that Torrance too was visiting professor at PTS in the following year and he too acted as my advisor. My thesis, reviewing and evaluating the debate between supporters and opponents on the paternity of the two "Athanasian" anti-Apollinarian treatises and defending the former, was accepted unanimously by Florovsky and Torrance, both of whom encouraged me to work further on it and produce a PhD thesis. I followed their advice two years later, having published a summary of my Princeton ThM thesis in Archbishop Methodios of Aksum's journal *Abba Salama*.<sup>6</sup>

**MB:** *You taught patristics from 1974 to 1995 at the University of Durham. You also wrote your PhD dissertation on Athanasius Contra Apollinarem there. Did Torrance have anything to do with your going to Durham? What was his involvement with your dissertation? I know he wrote the introduction when it was published in 1985.*

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6 See "St. Athanasius' two treatises *Contra Apollinarem*: second thoughts on the research of the critics," *Abba Salama*, 6 (1974) 84-96. This essay has been reprinted in my collection of Athanasian essays, entitled: *Saint Athanasius of Alexandria: Original Research and New Perspectives* (Orthodox Research Institute, Rollinsford NH, 2005), pp. 133-150.

**GDD:** After Princeton I went to Greece for a short interim, and in the Fall of 1973 I returned to Edinburgh to continue my research on Athanasius' two treatises *Contra Apollinarem* under the direction of Torrance. I had hardly finished my first PhD year when at the prompting of Professor Tom I applied for a Lectureship in Patristics in Durham University. My referees were Torrance, Florovsky and Archbishop Methodios Fouyas. In September 1974 I started teaching at Durham and a year later transferred my PhD registration from Edinburgh to Durham, where I continued my research on my own. This new development was decisive for my future career and although I recognize the grace of God in all this, I have no doubt that Torrance was God's primary agent. It was Torrance that introduced me to Athanasius and supported me in Edinburgh. It was he again that sent me to Princeton and introduced me to Florovsky who sealed my commitment to Athanasius and the Fathers of the Church. It was Torrance who also introduced me to Archbishop Methodios Fouyas in 1970, who later came from Ethiopia to baptize my two sons in Durham and a little later ordained me to the priesthood in 1980 when he became Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain and made me a close collaborator in his ecclesiastical and academic pursuits. Finally, it was Torrance who suggested to me the topic of my PhD thesis and fully appreciated and recognized the tremendous labor that I put into it – including pioneering literary research using computers – and its significance for Patristic studies, calling it an epoch-making work, whereas others who came to know it tried to suppress it or passed over it in silence because it signaled a radical revision of the set views on Athanasius' Christology in the standard manuals of the early history of dogma (Grillmeier, Kelly, etc.).

**MB:** *Did you continue to see Torrance frequently while you were teaching in England?*

**GDD:** Yes, we met often and exchanged letters frequently. In 1973-74, when I started my doctorate in Edinburgh, I was his research assistant. Then, in '74, through his insistence, I applied to Durham and with his support I was elected lecturer in Patristics at Durham University. He was delighted, as this was close to Edinburgh. All through the '70's, I visited him on many occasions as I gave lectures to different societies in Scotland. Every time I crossed the border I visited him. In 1976, I published an essay devoted to him, on the significance of his being made Moderator of the Church of Scotland, at the request of Archbishop Methodios of Aksum.<sup>7</sup> In 1978 I was present with my wife at Guildhall in London,

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<sup>7</sup> "The significance for the Church of Professor T. F. Torrance's election as General Moderator of the Assembly of the Church of Scotland," *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, 58 (1976),

when he received the prestigious *Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion*. Again in 1978, he introduced me to the Brussels based *Academie internationale des Sciences Religieuses*, of which he was the president. As a matter of fact, I was invited for three successive years to address the themes of the year for this assembly, and as a result I was voted in as life-member and then elected to serve as vice-president during the years 1981-1984. Also, in the late 80's and early 90's, I served as priest in Glasgow while teaching in Durham, and my wife and I would visit him on several occasions on our way back to England. Every new essay or book he published, I was among the first to receive a copy. He supported me twice to become a professor of Church History in Scotland – in Aberdeen and in Edinburgh – and he nearly succeeded, except for the fact that his opponents got in the way. And of course, we also met many times in the context of the official Orthodox-Reformed Theological dialogue in the 80's and early 90's. In 1981 at a gathering of family, friends, colleagues and former students at Carberry Tower for his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1993, I toasted him with a paper, which was also published in Archbishop Methodios' journal *Ekklesia kai Theologia*.<sup>8</sup>

**MB:** *Who were some of the other important theological figures connected with Torrance during this period?*

**GD:** Some of the important figures associated with him during the period of our interactions were John Zizioulas, Roland Walls, and James Torrance, his assistants, John McIntyre and his other colleagues in the Faculty of Theology in Edinburgh, Alastair Heron, Donald McKinnon, Eric Mascall and many important professors in Europe and America, especially those connected with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Brussels based International Academies of Philosophical and Religious Sciences. His Orthodox connections included Methodios Fouyas, Chrysostom Constantinides, Constantine Dratsellas, Nikos Nissiotis, Angelos Philippou and others. I am aware that there were a great number of theologians who corresponded with him, but what is most impressive in this connection is his prompt response to each of them. I remember him telling me that he responded to all his incoming mail on the day it arrived, before going to bed, and this certainly applied to me, as well. He used a unique typewriter, because it had mixed Greek and English letters – n=η, e=ε, p=ρ, etc.!

**MB:** *Methodios Fouyas was the Archbishop who ordained you to the priesthood in 1980. It seems to me that his relationship with Torrance was one that ran*

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214-226.

8 "Professor T. F. Torrance on his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday," *Ekklesia kai Theologia* 12 (1993), 566-76.

*rather deep. What kinds of scholarly and ecumenical activities did they engage in together?*

**GD:** Fouyas did his doctorate in the 1960's in Manchester, before becoming a bishop in the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Fouyas' *Doktorvater*, Arnold Ehrhardt, was a friend of Torrance. When I first met Fouyas in Edinburgh on the occasion of his receiving the doctorate in 1970, he told me that he had exchanged extensive correspondence with Torrance and that my name was frequently mentioned in his letters to him. Tom and Methodios collaborated through the 70's and 80's and in various academic and publishing ventures, including Fouyas' journals, *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* and *Abba Salama, Texts and Studies in Church and Theology*. I was also involved in several of these.

In 1973, Tom visited Addis Ababa for the "Year of St Athanasius" (d. 373) celebrations with Methodios, who was at this time Archbishop of Aksum. Tom delivered lectures there, which were later published in one of Fouyas' journals, and I believe he subsequently visited Alexandria at this point as well. On this occasion he was given the honorary title of Protopresbyter of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and a pectoral cross, which is a sign of the office of protopresbyter. This unprecedented and unusual event caused some controversy among the Orthodox at the time. It was officially explained, however, that this honor was an *ad hoc* event, and did not in any sense establish a precedent. It was, rather, a spontaneous act of honoring a person who had made such incredible contributions to the understanding of the legacy of the Church of Alexandria, and especially of St. Athanasius the Great, bishop of Alexandria, as well as to the rapprochement of Reformed Christians to Orthodoxy.

When Tom was elected Moderator in 1977, it was through Fouyas' mediation that Tom was able to visit the Patriarchate of Alexandria and other Orthodox Churches – an unprecedented event; he was the first Reformed Moderator to visit in his term of office Orthodox Churches along with sister Churches of the Reformed tradition. Further close and extensive collaboration took place in the 1980's, after Methodios became Archbishop in England. This was also the period of the Official Orthodox-Reformed dialogue.

It was also Tom who arranged for Methodios to give the opening sermon to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 1981, which was later published as a pamphlet and was distributed to all the parishes in Scotland. I distinctly remember how Fouyas, the Orthodox Archbishop in Britain – since I was accompanying him as his chaplain – charmingly asked the Moderators of the General Assembly, who entertained him to tea in the Moderator's official Edinburgh residence, why they used the term "Assembly" – why not "Synod,"



since that is what it was, and that was the ancient term? And why not say "Bishops" or "Archbishops" since that is what Moderators of Presbyteries and of local Presbyterian Churches were? "Of course, Tom Torrance," he said, "would really like to be Patriarch of Alexandria, and that we cannot give him; but we would recognize him as Patriarch of Scotland!" "My dear Methodios, you are too kind to me," Tom replied afterward.

**MB:** *Torrance was elected Moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1976. It was shortly after that he also made the first motions to open up an international theological dialogue between Reformed and Orthodox Christians. You participated together with Torrance in the 1980's and early '90's in numerous meetings of this dialogue. Please tell us something about all this.*

**GDD:** As Torrance explains in his introduction to the first volume of the official dialogue papers, the roots lay in the Faith and Order movement in the 1950's – he particularly mentions here his dialogue with Florovsky and Constantinides in that context. Then, there developed in the early 70's in different countries various local discussions between Orthodox and Reformed. But the specifically international dialogue grew more directly out of Tom's friendship with Fouyas and his connections with the Patriarchate of Alexandria.

In 1977, Torrance paid official visits as Moderator of the Church of Scotland to Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios in Constantinople, and then, accompanied by Fouyas, to Archbishop Seraphim of the Church of Greece, Archbishop Makarios of the Church of Cyprus, Patriarch Nicholaos VI of Alexandria and Patriarch Benediktos of Jerusalem, indicating his interest in the Orthodox Churches and proposing rapprochement of Orthodox and Reformed through theological dialogue. When in Constantinople he submitted to the Ecumenical Patriarch an official proposal from the Geneva-based World Alliance of the Reformed Churches (WARC) for joint theological dialogue between Reformed and Orthodox. The official response of the Patriarch was positive and suggested that a delegation of Reformed Theologians from the WARC visits the Fanar in order to discuss the matter further and specify procedures. Thus, in 1978 a Reformed delegation headed by the President James I. McCord of WARC and including Torrance visited the Patriarch and the appropriate Committee of the Patriarchate headed by Metropolitan Chrysostom (Constantinides) of Myra and they agreed to hold initial Consultations to explore the prospect of holding an official theological dialogue (three of these were actually held in 1979, 1981 and 1983). On this occasion President McCord also submitted two Memoranda for the proposed Dialogue, which explained the Reformed position and suggested that the dialogue should

begin with the doctrine of the Trinity. TFT was behind these Memoranda and there is a story to tell which to me marks a sort of "new phase" in my relation to him.

Earlier in that same year we were at a meeting of the *Academie des Sciences Religieuses*. During an interlude he approached me and said to me, "George, I need your opinion about something. Can we meet privately for half an hour or so?" "Yes, of course," I said. We met in my room, and he presented to me a Memorandum – actually the second Memorandum, which McCord later presented to Patriarch Demetrios. "Read it," he said, "and tell me what you think. Be frank and critical." I read it. It was detailed, and in the heart of it there was a specific proposal that the theological dialogue should start with the doctrine of the Trinity according to the Nicene theology of Athanasius and Cyril and not that of the Cappadocian Fathers. He justified this by pointing out certain serious problems that Orthodox theology had developed over the years by over-reliance on the Cappadocians to the neglect of the Alexandrians and more or less suggested that the dialogue with the Reformed theologians would supply the answers to the problems of the Orthodox!

After I read it, Tom asked: "Well, what do you think, do you agree?" I said: "I don't." He said: "Why? Tell me." I replied: "Professor Tom, this will not fly. Let me go through it and explain why." He listened to me for a half an hour without saying a word (!), while I went sentence by sentence through his memorandum. Among other things, I said: "No Orthodox would approve of this opposition between the Alexandrians and the Cappadocians – we do not see the Fathers this way. Likewise, when you first go to approach an Orthodox Patriarch to ask him for a dialogue, you should not come with criticisms about his Orthodox theologians and their theological tradition. Rather, you should first present your credentials as Christians and state that in faithful obedience to the will of Christ you approach the Orthodox with a wish to be reconciled. You need first to explain to them who you are, what you believe and practice as Reformed Christians, that you have ordained clergy and sacraments, synods and so forth, and what all these mean to you." I also suggested that he give the patriarch a copy of the Reformed Prayer Book as a gift. He was baffled, and asked: "Which Prayer Book? Every Reformed Church has its own." "All of them that your delegates represent (!)," I said. Then after being silent for a moment, he replied: "George, can I ask you a favor? Can you write a memorandum as if you were the Reformed, requesting a dialogue with the Orthodox?" On his insistence I did so and sent it to him a little later. He revised it and used it for his memorandum to the Ecumenical Patriarch.

After he returned from his visit to the Phanar in July 1979, he wrote me a letter and thanked me for my help with the memorandum. He said that he presented both memoranda, the one that I wrote and the one that he wrote and I did not agree with! And, he added, Patriarch Demetrios was delighted with both! Patriarch Demetrios was a gentle, benign man, to whom Torrance later dedicated an edited book of essays, *The Incarnation*, commemorating the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ecumenical Council in 1981, in which I also had an essay. That was yet another way of emphasizing the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea 325) over the Second (Constantinople 381).

Two more initial exploratory consultations for the international Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue took place at the WARC headquarters in Geneva in 1981 and at the Patriarchal Center in Chambésy in 1983, where papers were offered dealing with the Trinity and with authority in the Church. TFT was a contributor and chief player. It was only after this point that the process started to invite all the autocephalous Orthodox Churches to send delegates for an official bi-lateral dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). Professor of Canon Law at Aristotle University in Thessalonica, was president of the dialogue on the Orthodox side; Lukas Vischer, the new President of the WARC, who succeeded President McCord of Princeton, was on the Reformed side. The first official theological consultations took place in Leuvenberg in 1988, in Minsk in 1990. The papers from these meetings and the two memoranda presented by the Reformed to the Ecumenical Patriarch can be found in the two published volumes of the dialogue papers, which Tom edited.<sup>9</sup>

**MB:** *The International Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue produced an Agreed Statement on the Holy Trinity in 1991. Regarding the former statement, which I believe you had a hand in drafting together with Torrance, I have been asked why it is the Orthodox today seem to take no notice of it, or else have forgotten it. Could you enlighten our readers on the status of this document, its particular nature and scope?*

**GDD:** With the agreement of the plenary, the Statement on the Trinity was drafted by Tom and myself during the year 1989, revised at a meeting of the dialogue in Geneva in 1991 and was finally ratified and made public in 1992.

Tom and myself had been appointed to prepare a draft to be considered by the joint Commission at its next meeting. The process of writing up this document

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<sup>9</sup> *Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Reformed Churches*, ed. By Thomas F. Torrance, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, vol. 1 1985, vol. 2, 1993.

was an interesting one. We had hardly come back from the first Consultation in Switzerland when, two or three weeks later, I received a full draft from Tom. "George, I have done my piece, and I need your reaction!" I phoned him, and said that I need a little time, given my many other academic responsibilities, and also regularly travelling every week to Glasgow from Durham to take care of the church services and other pastoral needs there. He phoned me several times expressing his eagerness to get my reaction and collaboration in order to produce the agreed statement draft in good time. He was quite determined to get things done quickly – a typical characteristic of "Torrancian" behavior!

My concern was that his draft of the statement was much too Reformed and "Torrancian." There was terminology there which, while claiming to be patristic and Athanasian, was in fact full of neologisms, which would be unfamiliar to the Orthodox. Thus, to avoid the confrontation, which was inevitable, I produced my own full draft, explaining that this presented a more Orthodox approach and should be considered along with his Reformed draft! It hardly passed a week when I received a new draft from Tom, which had married the two. Tom attempted to assure me that my concerns had now all been taken care of, and we could now have a meeting to go over it together and then send the document to the members of the joint commission, so that it could be used at the next meeting. He suggested that we meet at his home the following Monday: after my morning services in Glasgow, I could spend the night at his place and we could do the work early in the morning before I returned to Durham.

I really did not fully agree with his new, combined statement. It was still dominated by his original draft, and mine was just watered down at crucial points. My main problem was his insistence of putting his "Athanasian-Cyrrillian axis" (his term) against the "Orthodox Cappadocian deviation" (his term also). So I prepared my strategy very carefully for our meeting. We met at his home in Edinburgh. He was up early; he had prepared breakfast, and he said that everything was ready (two clear copies placed on a table!) for our discussion. He probably sensed that I wasn't keen on the meeting! I will never forget the moment when he looked at me and said: "I'm all ears, George." "Professor Tom," I said, "I appreciate very much your prompt responses and the hard work that you have put into this document. I understand your position very clearly, having been your student for several years. Nevertheless, I have serious questions and doubts about its structure. It is still dominated by your Reformed understanding of the Fathers – a point that we have discussed before. But the main problem I have with this new document is the terminology. Although this is in accord with your perspective of doing theology in reconstruction, which is a very fine ecumenical prospect for rapprochement, some

of the key terms you use are not found in the patristic theology of the Orthodox and stand in contradiction to what they hold to be the case."

I was not sure how best to explain this, other than by translating the draft into Greek for him to see – to show precisely the difficulty of translating his problematic terms, and how unacceptable some of this terminology was to the Orthodox. To give an example: it would be most odd to speak of "*hypostatic essence*," or "*personal essence*," or "*essential hypostasis*" in Greek – the language in which the Fathers to whom Torrance appealed allegedly wrote: *hypostatike ousia*, *prosopike ousia*, *ousiodis hypostasis*? These phrases are strange, and do not appear in the Fathers. This is just but one example. Other problematic examples could be produced from some of his language regarding "the divine monarchy" and "the doctrine of *perichoresis*." These neologisms are unheard of in any Orthodox patristic or theological manual. And this was more than a merely terminological problem. The real problem, it seemed to me, was a certain tendency almost to cancel out the distinction between *essence* and *hypostasis*, which is basic to Orthodox patristic theology. Tom's indefatigable energy produced another revised common draft, which was presented to the next meeting in Minsk. I was unable to attend that meeting, but apparently a further revision was requested by the Orthodox! We did this together, and at another joint meeting of us two with the two co-chairmen in Geneva a final Statement was produced. This was approved by the full Commission at Kapel (near Zürich) in 1992 and was included in the second volume of proceedings that Tom published in 1993.

As regards this official Agreed Statement on the Trinity several things should be known. It was a general and balanced agreement on initial points, which was not accepted as if it clarified all problems or questions. The critical question of the *filioque* was never actually discussed in the dialogue: in fact it was strategically left for later – and that was on my advice to Tom, because I said, "If you start with the *filioque* we will never get anywhere." Further, it must also be understood, that in the Orthodox Church, it is not enough that all the autocephalous churches send official delegates to a dialogue and sign on to an agreed statement. This is still an initial step, although a significant one. For such a statement to be considered authoritative by the Orthodox requires official acceptance by the holy synods of all the Orthodox autocephalous churches, which constitute one conciliar Orthodox Catholic Church. On a final note, I would add that the commentary on the *Agreed Statement*, which Tom published in the second volume of dialogue papers as well as in his book *Trinitarian Perspectives*, although it is entitled "A Common Reflection on the Agreed Statement," was pretty much all a work of Tom but was

respectfully received by the full Commission. So, it was all a significant exchange, and a starting point, which still calls for further work and discussion.

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**MB:** *Could you summarize then, if possible, your view of some of the criticisms that Orthodox theologians might perhaps legitimately raise against Torrance's Trinitarian theology?*

**GDD:** Torrance emphasized the monarchy of the whole Trinity *against* the unique monarchy of the Father. This emphasis was supported by his employment of his doctrine of *perichoresis* (or co-inherence) of the three persons with reference to the origin of the persons themselves, *against* the explicit patristic doctrine of the Father being the "source" or "cause" of the persons of the Son and the Spirit. Both of these emphases are based on Torrance's premise that what God is in his revelation, that also he is "antecedently and eternally in himself" – in other words, a premise that Torrance shared with Barth, Rahner, and with many Western theologians more generally: that the Trinity as revealed in the economy is wholly identical with the essential Trinity in eternity.

From the Orthodox point of view, this simple *tout court* identification is not acceptable or adequate, because God does not reveal his essence, or *what* He is, in his economic activity, but rather reveals Himself as the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, through his energies. For the Orthodox, all the Fathers, Alexandrians and Cappadocians, and not only the Greek-speaking, but also the early Latin Fathers (Hilary, Ambrose, etc), state that we do not know *what* God is (his essence - *ousia*), but *that* he is (his existence – *to einai*). Tom in fact accepts this statement when he says that theological statements "are not descriptive, but indicative." What he does not, however, go on to say, is that this "indicative" is based on God's acts (energies – *energeiai*) towards us in creation and salvation (in the economy), which, while they are not separated, cannot be simply *identified* with God's eternal essence. Actually, this distinction is found precisely in St Athanasius, as well as all the Greek Fathers after him. It was also acknowledged even by some of the medieval doctors in the West.

Torrance suspected a hint of Origenist subordinationism in the Cappadocians and especially in St. Basil. However, "cause" (*aition, aitia*) in St. Basil and later

Fathers does *not* mean that the Son and the Spirit are somehow less than, or subordinate to the Father. In my view, however, the Basil against whom Torrance reacted was the Basil of Zizioulas – he was reacting against the position which Zizioulas claimed to derive from Basil. Zizioulas not only defended, quite rightly, the monarchy of the Father in the generation of the Son and the procession the Spirit, but also went further – rather unwarrantedly – and claimed that the person (*hypostasis*) of the Father is the cause of the common divine *ousia*. In a way, he subordinated the divine *ousia* to the *hypostasis* of the Father. Torrance opposed this and pointed out, also rightly, that in the Nicene terms which Athanasius defended, the Son is from the essence of the Father (*ek tes ousias tou Patros*) and one in essence (*homoousion*) with the Father, which means that there is and can be no division between the cause and the effect in God which the monarchy of the Father suggests. But Torrance, too, went further than this, and claimed – also rather unwarrantedly – that Athanasius did not see the Father as the cause of the Son because the *homoousion* implies that there can be no subordination as suggested by the scheme of cause and effect. What he meant was the opposite to Zizioulas, namely, that the *hypostasis* is subordinated to the *ousia*. I remember my objecting to Tom’s statement that the Godhead (the term he prefers for translating *ousia*) is a “person” – as this actually emerges in a sentence in the *Agreed Statement on the Trinity*.

The difference between Torrance and Zizioulas here can be understood in terms of the alleged difference of the two “Nicene” Creeds, which is spelt out in the Western manuals of *Dogmengeschichte*: The Creed of Constantinople 381 changed the phrase “*ek tes ousias tou Patros*” of the Creed of Nicaea 325 to say simply “*ek tou Patros*,” which is how we recite the Creed today. Tom, for very specific reasons, favored a return to the earlier formula; Zizioulas, contrariwise, saw the later formula as a great advance upon the earlier, and invested it with his own perception. But in my view, there is no contradiction between these two formulae, and both Torrance and Zizioulas read too much later modern debate into the phraseology of these two formulae – as if they imply the priority of the person/s over the Godhead or the Godhead over the person/s. Nowhere does Athanasius deny the unique monarchy of the Father within the Trinity, or attribute the monarchy to a *perichoresis* of the three persons, as Torrance seems to claim. But, by the same token, nowhere does Basil say that the person or hypostasis of the Father is the cause of his own *essence*, which implies the absolute monarchy of the Father in the Divine Trinity, as Zizioulas seems to claim. To my mind, there is a false dialectic at work here in this debate. And it is also, on both sides, because both play Fathers against Fathers – something

that St John of Damascus precisely warned against in his *De Fide Orthodoxa* – but also say too much about the relation of ousia to *hypostasis* in the patristic doctrine of the Trinity, which is unwarranted in the teachings of the Fathers. In others words they say more about the Trinity *ad intra* than is warranted by the patristic tradition, Torrance because of his emphasis on ontological unity and Zizioulas because of his emphasis of the ontology of person.

Dear Matthew, as you and I know, there has been in recent years a great deal of academic discussion on Torrance's and Zizioulas' expositions of the doctrine of the Trinity. I am convinced that we need another interview, in order to go into further details on this much debated issue. One point I want to stress is this: that both theologians have contributed greatly to the revival in modern theological discussions between Eastern and Western theological traditions of the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity and of the early Fathers of the Church. As to the way forward, I would repeat what Torrance's main concern has been throughout his theological teaching and writing: that we need to cut behind the divisions that have been solidified in the divided Eastern and Western Traditions. To do this, in my view, means to rediscover the *consensus patrum*, by following the call of Father Florovsky, Torrance's greatly respected friend, and Zizioulas' respected mentor, to return to the sources, the Fathers, and produce a "neo-patristic synthesis."

**MB:** *Is there anything more that you'd like to add regarding this good and brilliant man in Christ, your teacher and friend Professor Tom – his personality, piety, life and mind? Or, if you like, what are your last impressions of him?*

**GDD:** Iain Torrance once said to me something that answers this last question perfectly: "People like my father are unique and appear extremely rarely in the history of the Church." The dedication, the vision, the faith, the generosity, the piety, the brilliance – there is hardly any virtue that graces a human being that was not remarkably evident in Professor Tom. I was blessed with exceptional teachers and mentors. But this one seems to be always with me. When I left Britain for America in 1995, Professor Tom gave me his blessing, so to speak, but not without expressing his regret that he would be "losing" me. I assured him that this would never happen. My mother, who just reposed in the Lord this year, had also expressed a similar sentiment when I left Greece, to which I always responded that the bodily separation had made the spiritual intimacy immensely greater. Just as with her and with my father, so with Tom: physical separation and even death seem to be a secondary incident, which does not effect my feelings and my continued joy for having had them as dear mentors and companions



in my life. In the Orthodox tradition, we remember the departed by singing "Eternal memory" – *Aionia e mneme*. Such is Professor Tom's memory for me.

**MB:** *Thank you, Father George, for your priceless recollections and insights, and for allowing those who have learned from Thomas Torrance to learn further also from you. Here as elsewhere on other occasions, you provide a precious historical witness, which I am sure will prove to be crucial in the future for anyone interested in Torrance's life and thought, most especially as regards the important matter of his relations with the Orthodox Church and Orthodox theology.*