

## from the president's desk



Photo: Antonia Reeve

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

It is the 6th of July as I write this, and I am heading eastward, back to Scotland, having attended the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and spent six days at Princeton. The speed of assumption of office after appointment means that as yet I do not have a visa. After a year of semi-separation from my wife, Morag, while as moderator of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly I worked out of Edinburgh and she retained her position in Aberdeen, we are returning to Scotland to sell our house, to buy one in Edinburgh for our children, and to spend a little time together before the visa arrives.

Attendance at the General Assembly in Richmond and initial days meeting colleagues in Princeton have eased the transition. I hadn't been in Princeton since 1959. That year as a family, we spent four months on campus. My father, Thomas F. Torrance, was working on the typescript that subsequently became his book *Theological Science*. We spent a memorable and immensely happy four months on campus, living in Tennant Hall. I was ten years old and entranced, as children are, by the fireflies.

To return as president is entirely unexpected and seems almost miraculous. It is a position I did not seek, but which, once approached and sifted, I believed to be God's calling to me. My background is that I come to Princeton from having been the dean of the Faculty of Arts in a full-spectrum university. But as a former moderator of the General Assembly, I am also someone completely committed to upholding the perspective of the church. When I was approached by the Search Committee, inevitably, and in many ways reluctantly, I asked myself where was my life going, and what had God sought to prepare me for.

God willing, I will commit the rest of my working life to the Seminary. The learning curve for anyone coming to Princeton would be steep, but I believe that Aberdeen gave me as much preparation academically and administratively as any prior institution could. I am learning the complexities of American Presbyterianism. While eager to contribute, I am loath to be immediately typecast. A number of closely related arguments claim the attention of Christians today. My hope is that coming from outside I may bring a slightly different perspective to them.

I believe the world changed after 9/11. I believe it took us a decade to absorb the assassination of President Kennedy; 9/11 will take longer and will remain as a dreadful kind of turning point. How to respond to this in a way that is constructive, healing, and wise is one of our challenges. I believe that, at this juncture, Princeton Theological Seminary, the heir now to the faithful stewardship of a remarkable series of presidents and trustees, has a pivotal role. This role is not to be a bulwark for anything, but to be a place that is committed, but not defensive; inspiring, while recognizing that we are agents, not victims, at a time of change. As a faith-based community, we have a capacity to be both passionate and hospitable, a capacity that the divinity schools may lack. It is this belief that has brought me here.

The world has changed fundamentally in other ways, too. The Reformation would not have taken place without the printing press and the translation of Bible into the vernacular. The phenomenon of the internet is a revolution the scale of which we are only beginning to glimpse. It has potential for great harm, as we now know. Its capacity to broadcast lends itself to the display of intimidating and theatrical acts of violence. Dreadful though this is, it is attention-seeking behavior and points to a deeper hunger. Let us listen.

The internet has many capacities for good. It will change the way we learn, write, refer, teach, and communicate. Reformed people better than most are attuned to the nature of the real, but spiritual, presence of Christ that we encounter at communion. A virtual but real communion with the worldwide church will both contextualize our local divisions, and enable us to share the unsurpassed library and scholarly resources that the Seminary possesses. This is part of the hope that brought me here.

Faithfully yours,

Iain R. Torrance

### Memories Revived

This afternoon after watching the emotional dedication of the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., I decided to clear off my desk. Almost tossing the spring 2004 issue of *inSpire* into the wastebasket, I noticed the subtitle on the cover. I settled down in my recliner and spent the afternoon reading this issue from “kiver to kiver!”—“Celebrating our Fifth President, Thomas W. Gillespie!”

What memories returned to mind! I entered Princeton Theological Seminary the fall of 1954 and graduated a member of the Class of 1957. That fall I was ordained in the Synod of Texas. Fourteen years later I demitted the ministry. Why? Reasons too deep to enumerate and too complicated to elaborate lead me to refrain from answering. However, I dropped out of the church for about 20 years. Then I decided to no longer be a renegade. I rejoined the Presbyterian Church as a member. Later I became an elder and served a number of terms in various churches in Texas.

Now, retired in Clifton, Texas, I am an active member in the small First Presbyterian Church.

This issue, so full of letters and great articles, rekindled my interest in the Seminary's purpose and program.

With appreciation, I am,

*Norm Taylor ('57B)*

*Clifton, Texas*

### Gratitude for Gillespie Tribute

May I begin by congratulating you on the excellence of your most recent issue of *inSpire* [spring 2004], celebrating President Gillespie. Most of us despaired about whether Dr. McCord could compare with Dr. Mackay, and he exceeded him. Then we wondered if Dr. Gillespie could rise to the level of McCord, and he has gone on beyond him from strength to strength, taking the Seminary to greater new heights than we could have hoped. The idea, content, layout, and aesthetics of the issue are simply superb. Thank you.

*Jay Harold Ellens ('65M)*

*Farmington, Michigan*

### A Very Special Year

I was drawn to the short article, “A Victorian Splendor—Faculty House on Tour,” on page eight of the spring 2003 issue of *inSpire*. Back in September of 1969 I got a call from Jim Andrews asking if I might wish to take up an opportunity, at no cost, to move in with an elderly couple, the Greenbaums, living next to the Seminary campus at 104 Mercer Street. They wanted a student to live with them for the academic year as Edward Greenbaum was in failing health and the presence of someone else in the home would give them an added sense of security.

I took Andrews up on the offer and experienced a most fascinating year. Edward Greenbaum had had an illustrious legal career as a senior partner in a New York City law firm. He had served as a trustee of The Institute for Advanced Studies and had been a close friend of Albert Einstein, who had lived at 112 Mercer Street. There were many visits from well-known and famous personalities.

It was on the recommendation of George Kennan, former secretary of state and another good friend, that the State Department had asked Mr. Greenbaum to handle the legal matters related to the journey of Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, from Geneva to the United States. While she had her own home in Princeton, where the Greenbaums had encouraged her to settle, she had been a regular visitor to 104 Mercer.

The Greenbaums were a wonderful couple with whom I struck up a warm and lasting friendship. While Edward Greenbaum died the following summer, the arrangement had proved so satisfactory that Dorothea Greenbaum continued to take in Seminary students for years afterward. It was under Dr. McCord's stewardship that Mrs. Greenbaum agreed that 104 Mercer be sold to the Seminary upon her death.

*Cameron Bigelow ('69B, '70M)*

*Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada*

### Learning from Ed Dowey

I have special memories of Edward A. Dowey, recalled by Charles West's essay in the winter 2004 issue of *inSpire*. It was my privilege to be acquainted with Dr. Dowey before I became a student at Princeton Theological Seminary.

At Princeton, I experienced him as a scholar, but also as a teacher. I learned much from him outside the classroom. It was informative how he expressed concerns *with* others and not just about others. After my ordination, I served with him on the then Candidates Committee of my presbytery. It was a continuing education experience as he shared guidance for future ministers. It was good to know Ed Dowey.

*Bernadine Grant McRipley ('82B, '86m)*

*Levittown, Pennsylvania*

#### Please write—we love to hear from you!

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Letters may be edited for length or clarity, and should include the writer's name, address, and telephone number.