

GLOBAL THEOLOGY CONFERENCE CONCLUDING REFLECTION
Deirdre Brower Latz, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, UK

The GTC 2018 was notable for me for several reasons. From its inception and communication it was intentionally and obviously in multiple languages. Framing the conference for the global church had been considered carefully, and the spread of people presenting and responding was thoughtful, so each region had representation in various ways. The papers, although varied in their approaches, demanded constant thought. Participants had given their time to read and wrestle and sought to interrogate them in ways that got to the problems they experienced in reading them. During the conference, cultural expressions of response emerged – asking questions through story, the desire to be heard/give a view, and on-the-ground issues – as key ways of interpreting our theology. Our floundering attempts to manage our responses (particularly to different modes of asking questions) were interesting. Although there are issues that unite us, still others emerged that ensured we are/were always aware of our rich diversity.

From memory, it felt as if there was much greater self-awareness and confidence in voices from each continent in shaping theology and in the leadership offered than in previous conferences. It was also clear that there is substantial disagreement even in regions described as monolithic ('South America', 'Africa', 'North America', 'Eurasia') regarding key issues: these are often disagreements of practical engagement based on theological frameworks that have been communicated over time. The Latin/Brazilian Church expressed some clear difference in relation to the issue of our rapprochement (or not) to Roman Catholicism, for example. The African continent had many views relating to apartheid – from its significance as a seminal issue for the church to those who expressed the desire for it to be 'over.' These differences are fascinating. However, central to the room was a growing awareness that our theology impacts the world around us for the sake of transformation, including in arenas of justice

and righteousness. The integrity of the church in relation to the wider communities we participate in and our own practice and expression of justice emerged in more than one conversation.

There was a small percentage of women present – many of those selected were not necessarily practising theologians as academicians but were hybridised in their/our roles (chaplains, district leaders, field educational coordinators, adjuncts, bi-vocational, Generals, GMC workers, as well as Principals). It was also interesting that the majority of North American participants were white. I wonder what these indicators express of our church and its formation on the ground and our gaps.

From the perspective of a practical theologian, I thought it was a powerful expression of the significance of the way theology profoundly shapes our practice. I was intrigued by comments in the plenary that called for more biblical exegesis, since I believed each paper was rooted in a perspective on the bible that was grounding the conversation. It was good – I thought – that the papers were less in silos and more integrative of biblical-theological-historical-practical approaches, some more so than others. I certainly believed that a biblical emphasis came through in responses to questions raised from the floor. However, I agree that the idea of the Kingdom of God and various aspects of Jesus' life and ministry, speaking and modelling could have taken us further in the development of our Christological understanding.

Throughout people swiftly moved towards missiology/ecclesiology and the practical implications of the papers. Participants felt a freedom to critically engage in ways that were liberating for us in terms of our own experience of the church – and upon our return to our own places we can reflect further on the learning and our own expressions of Christology.

There were two or three themes that I know we (the church, we NTC) will consider more. The idea of discipleship and corporate discipleship; the framing of our contexts as the primary place of theological reflection; the significance of good theology as a critical feature of the church and our

practice. It was clear some of the historically ‘dealt with’ matters of Christ as human-and-divine are still causing consternation and in some settings our articulation is unclear: grounding in deep theology matters. Our stance in terms of the resurrection and eschatology bear greater conversation. The difference between contextualisation and assimilation or syncretism needs to be considered more fully – and the parameters of global/local. On the whole, I became more convinced than ever that in our global family theological conversation really matters. I left asking how the richness of this experience could be disseminated or experienced at much more local or district levels.