



CTA Conference 2017: Conference Report

The 2017 conference of the Association was held at St Chad's College, Durham in early September. More than 60 delegates gathered and, as always, the conference was an opportunity for listening and reflection, for animated discussion and exchange of views, and for renewing friendships.

In the year of the 500th anniversary of Luther's 95 *Theses*, the theme of Reformation was very much in the front of our minds. The Reformation 'divided Europe's house,' and its effects are still being felt, both inside and outside the churches. While the Church remains wounded by division, ecumenical dialogue has enriched both Catholic and Reformed traditions, especially since Vatican II.

The conference was opened and closed by scholars who brought a Reformed perspective to the discussion: Simeon Zahl with a systematic reflection on the doctrine of justification by faith, and Bridget Nichols addressing the liturgical expressions of Anglican identity. Historical views were provided by Eamon Duffy and Judith Champ. Kevin McDonald shared his experiences as a practitioner in the field of ecumenical dialogue. Tony Carroll offered a comparison of two towering figures, Luther and Loyola; Johannes Hoff reflected on the impact of technology – moveable type and the digital revolution – on the sacramental imagination. Martin Maier brought the question of reform into the present day with a discussion of the impact of Blessed Oscar Romero. A highlight was an opportunity to examine rare books and manuscripts held in Durham University's Palace Green Library, presented and explained by Richard Gameson. The conference was enriched by a lively programme of short papers, including those from international scholars.

We also had a fascinating selection of short papers related to the conference's theme - many of which we look forward to seeing in published form. In future, we hope to secure a means by which those who present short papers can also have their work published in parallel with the proceedings.

The spirit of dialogue and openness in which the conference was held found liturgical expression when we joined the community of Durham Cathedral for

Morning Prayer, and when, thanks to the hospitality of the Cathedral, we celebrated the final Vespers of the conference at the tomb of St Bede the Venerable.

The realities of the contemporary environment for academic theology could not be ignored, and time was given to an open discussion on the future of the study of Catholic theology in Great Britain, held under Chatham House rules to allow members to speak frankly. We live in interesting times, and face an uncertain future, but Catholic theology in Great Britain remains vigorous and of high quality. There were repeated expressions of concern that while we all know the theological landscape is changing, indeed changing rapidly, that we are not giving sufficient time to thinking about what is happening and seeing if there are better ways we can be a resource for the churches and society. One practical suggestion from the floor was that there should be a conversation between all the groups who teach theology under the Catholic banner – third level departments, groups related to the various religious orders, the seminaries – to see if there were ways we could help one another; and that if such a conversation should be held under the aegis of the CTA, there could be no suspicion that these discussions were a 'power grab' by one group or another. Since this suggestion met with widespread support, taking forward this suggestion is going to be one of the major items of the agenda of the CTA committee in the coming months. Already the idea has met with widespread support from the Catholic theological community and there will be a one-day conversation on 24 February 2018 in Luton. If anyone wants further details, they should contact me by email.

The general feeling was that the conference was a success: useful and enjoyable. We look forward to our next conference is Swanwick, near Derby, when the theme of the papers will be **Ministry: who ministers what to whom?**

My last words are those of gratitude to all those who worked behind the scenes to keep the Association going and making sure that the conference ran smoothly. Three names demand mention. First, Jan Lash who has just stepped down, after many dedicated years, from the office of Treasurer: she has worked tirelessly and efficiently as our keep of the purse – and so, in effect, kept us going. Second, to Andy Downie who as secretary has carried much of the administrative burden of the Association and especially the task of keeping all in order at the conference. And third, Geoff Turner who, year by year, looks after our proceedings in *New Blackfriars* and ensures that they come out on time and on the word-count.

Looking ahead I hope to see some of you at the day on the future of Catholic theology in Britain in February and seeing many of you at the conference next September.

Tom O'Loughlin