

Presidential Newsletter, June 2017

More than 2 months have passed since the Oslo Conference, and the new Executive Committee has begun its work. Most of us likely have the same nervous feeling I myself have; the positions are new, and behind us stands a strong and very competent tradition. Thanks ever so much to former President Heather, who did a great job in the previous 2 years!

I would like to add a warm word of thanks to all of you who participated in Oslo, who shaped the conference, inspired those who planned it, and increased the competence and inspiration for the future of practical theology in us all. Many of you came from very distant places in flights that lasted for hours or even nights. Others were our direct neighbors visiting us once again.

On behalf of both the Host and the Program Committee: We enjoyed and felt honored that you all came to our city to meet us and our colleagues. It meant a lot to us, and we hope you also enjoyed your time in Oslo. Almost 60% of all participants have now responded to our evaluation form and submitted much data and some very interesting comments. A summary of the evaluation will be published on the IAPT webpage in September. Yet, there are already some obvious main tendencies to be noted: More than 50% thought the keynotes and the paper sessions were good, and between 25% and 30% thought they were very good. Even more considered the poster sessions to have been very good, while the excursions and the morning prayers scored slightly lower.

In addition, many of you also left comments concerning the different topics which show that some of you disliked the fact that not all keynotes seemed to be part of the pure discipline – while others appreciated exactly that. Some thought the idea of having paper sessions with four papers first being presented and then discussed was very inspiring; others of course did not like that venue and reported some rather unpleasant experiences in specific contexts.

Thanks also for the overwhelming positive support for the organization and the catering. As hosts, we are grateful that most people really did like what we offered, even if it was not possible to please everyone all the time. We shall discuss the experiences in the Executive Committee over the coming months, also because they can help us to better facilitate and organize the Brazil 2019 meeting.

One obvious result, however, is that the IAPT membership is clearly not of one opinion or one piety or one school. Rather, there are many voices, many bodies, many schools. The challenge is to pay respect to all and to be an academy that addresses the diversity of positions. I think this is the best academic path to pursue. This is how new knowledge – the true sign of an academy – comes to be developed.

Apart from all the scholarly things that took place in Oslo, the business meeting also represented a major event in the IAPT history. The unanimous support for the proposed changes to the by-laws was a very important step for the future of the Academy. The shift from a process of nominations to normal applications based on a doctorate in practical theology or related fields represents a major shift in policy. At the same time, it also represents the most burning challenge for the Executive Committee. We have already started

our discussions on how to recruit new members, now that the by-laws have been changed and there is no longer a need for nominations.

You can already find such an application form on the website. There applicants will find the necessary requirements needed to become members. If you know someone who would like to become a member, please notify them about this possibility. Nevertheless, the most important thing is to have qualified people become interested in joining the IAPT. The new by-laws pave the way for increasing our membership with a variety of scholarly profiles and contexts. I appreciate any comments and proposals members may have on how best to achieve this. One obvious responsibility to us all is to inform colleagues about the presence and work of the IAPT and the new by-laws, and to recruit them to apply for membership. The basic argument is, of course, that we want to develop the IAPT to be an important space for inspiring academic work, discussions, and encounters with new colleagues in the field. Thus, I invite all members to comment and send proposals on ways to achieve this goal. My best wishes for the upcoming Southern winter and the Northern summer!

The Oslo Conference business meeting also confirmed the location, topics, and dates for the IAPT Conference 2019, which will take place in Sao Leopoldo near to the big city of Porto Alegre in Southern Brazil, from April 4 to April 8, 2019. The topic approved by the Business Meeting was “(De)coloniality and Religious Practices: Liberating Hope.” The Executive Committee will prepare the final version of the title and the conference text during the upcoming months.

This will be the first IAPT conference in Latin America. We are all excited to come and grateful to the organizers, Valburga Schmiedt Streck and Júlio César Adam, both of whom work for the Faculdades EST in Sao Leopoldo and will chair the joint organizing committee. Valburga will be responsible for the host part and Julio for the program part. We wish them all the best and lots of energy to take on this responsibility. We are looking forward to meeting all members, both new and old, in Brazil in April 2019!

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