‘Catholic Theology in the Public Academy: Searching the Questions, Sounding the Depths’
Centre for Catholic Studies 10th Anniversary Celebratory Conference
Wednesday 18th – Friday 20th April 2018

Opening Words
The Right Reverend Séamus Cunningham, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

Thank you Paul. It’s a privilege to be with you for these days of celebration.

As Bishop, and as President of the Centre for Catholic Studies Advisory Board, I really appreciate the contribution which the CCS makes at many levels. The commitment of all the staff and students to outreach and to working in close relationship with Catholic communities, locally, nationally, and internationally has always impressed me. As we all know Durham is a first-rate University, and the presence of the CCS only adds to this.

In these challenging times I think the Holy Spirit is always inviting us and empowering us to be creative and visionary. Therefore, as Bishop of the Catholic Diocese, I believe it is right that we celebrate in thanksgiving what the CCS has achieved during the past ten years. I also believe that it is right that we look forward in hope to what the CCS can achieve in the future.

During those years I have witnessed both the growth and recognition of the CCS. We are all very fortunate in these northern lands to be heirs to a very rich shared Christian heritage. The great northern saints like St Aidan and St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne; St Hilda of Hartlepool and Whitby; St Benedict Biscop and St Bede of Jarrow - provided this region with great centres of Christian learning.

From these came Durham Cathedral, out of which some of the oldest colleges of Oxford University were founded. The more recent establishment of the English College of Douai at Ushaw in the 19th century adds to this picture of unique growth in our regional Christian heritage. Together with the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham, the CCS I think continues this great tradition of Christian learning. In particular the CCS offers a place of Catholic formation, which I know is both greatly valued and respected.

On the occasion of this anniversary I wish to share with you a letter which I recently received from His Excellency Archbishop Joseph Adams, Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, conveying a blessing on behalf of Pope Francis.

(read letter…)
I would like to add that I am delighted to have worked in such close partnership with the CCS. I am confident that it will continue to be a tremendous resource for Catholic theological scholarship and formation - regionally, nationally and internationally.

My prayer is that it will receive the assistance it needs in order to have long term presence. For those who are able, I strongly encourage you to support the next crucial phase of its development and growth.

In this Easter season, may the blessing of the risen Lord and the peace of the Spirit be with us all.

AMEN.