The Centre for Catholic Studies 10th Anniversary Dinner
in the Great Hall at Durham Castle

Wednesday 18 April 2018

Opening Words
Professor David Cowling, PVC Arts & Humanities

My Lord, ladies and gentleman, I am Professor David Cowling, Pro Vice-Chancellor Arts and Humanities and DU Executive. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Stuart Corbridge, sends his sincere apologies for not being able to host this evening, but he is currently in India.

I give you a very warm welcome to this dinner in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Centre for Catholic Studies and – belatedly – to the conference on ‘Catholic Theology in the Public Academy: Searching the Questions, Sounding the Depths’.

On behalf of the Vice-Chancellor and the University Executive and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities welcome to the Great Hall of Durham Castle, formerly residence of the Prince Bishops of Durham.

First, thanks to our keynote speaker, Lord Brennan, and to donors and sponsors who have supported the CCS in its work over the last 10 years.

In particular with the two endowed posts – the Bede Chair of Catholic Theology and the St Hilda post in Catholic Social Thought and Practice – made possible by generous donations from the Oaklea Sisters of Mercy, the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the Sisters of La Retraite, Porticus, and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and others. It is great to see representatives here at the dinner tonight.

And other research projects and fixed-term posts, including the Centre’s work on Receptive Ecumenism, the Experience of Women in the English Churches, the History of Catholicism, the Social Scientific Study of Catholicism, and Catholicism, Literature, and the Arts, made possible by the generous support of the University of Notre Dame, the Congregation of Jesus, the National Board of Catholic Women, the St Cuthbert’s Society of Ushaw College, the Newman Association, and other partners and individuals. Again it is great to see representatives here tonight.

We could not have done it without you!

Thanks also to the co-sponsors who have made this conference possible, the Conference of Religious for England and Wales, Fairfield University, The Tablet, and The Newman Association.
Also thanks to Paul Murray for his inspirational leadership and vision in setting up the CCS and in working with all the above mentioned groups and individuals to pursue an exciting and – I could contend – unique programme of research, teaching and outreach within the world-leading Department of Theology and Religion.

Uniqueness is perhaps an overused term, not to be used without due caution. In what respects can we deem the CCS to be unique?

- Distinctive in terms of pioneering Catholic theology and Catholic Studies within the context of a pluralist, public university that is secular in nature, although famously funded by the last Prince-Bishop of Durham, Bishop Van Mildert in 1832.

- The study of religion is integral to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and to Durham University as a whole. As Paul Murray says public universities are “laboratory spaces for the critical-constructive study of religious traditions, both in their own distinctiveness and in their mutual cooperation in working to shape the common good.”

- This is not to say that there are not other Centres of Catholic Studies around the world, but typically (especially in the US) based in Catholic Institutions.

  The Durham model has been emulated elsewhere - imitation is the sincerest form of flattery – e.g. Trinity College Dublin, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Otago University, Dunedin, New Zealand, and also at home: the Centre for Anglican Studies.

- The CCS is also distinctive in terms of research projects, especially Receptive Ecumenism led by Paul Murray, partnerships, with the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and Ushaw College, and international partnerships, e.g. Notre Dame.

I hope we can agree, therefore, that the CCS has a bright future ahead of it, recognising the key contribution it has made to the Department of Theology and Religion, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the University and more widely.

One thing the University is committed to is building up the Centre’s core endowment to secure the director’s post and office, and the CCS administrative team, for the future. We appeal to your help in continuing to raise the profile of the Centre, in building further partnerships and in expanding the donor base to enable it to deliver its key mission, as Pope Francis described universities, as ‘a workshop of dialogue and encounter in the service of truth, justice and the defence of human dignity at every level’.

We look forward to the next 10 years and beyond.