My time in Durham was one of the great formative experiences of my life. I owe a huge personal debt to the CCS. I came just as Paul Murray was developing the Centre for Catholic Studies and had the idea of bringing Catholic scholars to Durham on sabbatical. Could the chaplaincy help? Well, it seemed to me that the chaplaincy was there, yes, primarily to provide pastoral care to the staff and students of the university, but also enrich the Catholic life of the university. Through the Richardson and St Cuthbert’s fellowships I got to share the community life of the chaplaincy with some wonderful scholars who were also wonderful human beings: Denis Edwards, Paul Lakeland, David Burrell, Geraldine Smyth, Myriam Wijlens. It has been a great blessing to my life that I can now count all of these as friends. And so it was the CCS and Durham that put me on the trajectory that I am on now, working for the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. And there I try to share some of the treasures of our own cultural heritage. Just this morning we were talking about the borders of the Roman Empire and Giulia Gilmore and I were sharing the story of the Roman soldier writing home to ask for woollen socks to be sent to his fort at Vindolanda. My colleagues were incredulous: they couldn’t believe there was ever a time when a self-respecting Roman would wear socks with sandals.

Sharing treasures is a good theme. The exchange of gifts is a key ecumenical theme, given particular currency by Pope John Paul II in his great encyclical, Ut unum sint. And it is the idea which lies at the root of Paul Murray’s very important idea of Receptive Ecumenism. I know that here I don’t need to say any more about Receptive Ecumenism, because we have all heard it many, many times!

The sharing of treasures is something which is beautifully illustrated by one of my favourite stories. The office of readings for the feast of St Bede narrates the saint’s death. He spends his last days continuing to dictate lessons, and then, when it is clear that he is coming to his death he said to his scribe, “I have a few precious things in my cell: some pepper, some napkins, and some incense. Run quickly and call the priests of the monastery to me, so that I can give to them the few little gifts that God gave me.” And he dishes these out with a kind word to each. But that simple homely story seems to me to be emblematic of the life of Bede. At a time when much of Christian culture and memory was being lost, he safeguarded and he distributed. Bede collected knowledge and the wisdom of the ages as a precious thing to be delighted in, like the treasures in his box. Physically he amassed a great library. He collected knowledge of all kinds: historical knowledge, scriptural interpretation, scientific and mathematical knowledge. But Bede collected his treasures to be shared, to be distributed, and of course there are so many stories, so many saints, about whom we would know nothing but for Bede. He made sure precious things were not lost and he shared these treasures.

For us as a Catholic community living here, we are acutely aware, I think, of the huge cultural achievement of Ushaw College: a cultural achievement stone and print (at least principally in these, though we might want to add a few other materials like fine silk, silver plate, painted canvas, vellum etc. James Kelly could give more details). It is a treasure house, in the style of Bede, build, collected, to safeguard and to distribute. It is a place associated with so many

After Dinner Address

given by Rev Anthony Currer
great collectors and great teachers like John Lingard, Joseph Gillow, and Lawrence McReavy, to name but a few. The closure of Ushaw as a seminary was a body-blow to the Catholic community of this diocese. It is something analogous to a pit closing in the centre of a village. We could find ourselves living in the shadow of this past, its empty, spectral presence haunting us, reminding us of a more glorious past.

Thank God that hasn’t been the case, and Ushaw is not just a bad news story for Catholics. It is a cultural achievement which is being integrated into a new reality. In a way we can see what has happened to Ushaw as part of another change in the story of the Catholic Community. At the time of the council the great theologians of the Church were all priests. Today the best Catholic theology is not in seminaries, but in Secular Universities. I think that is part of the story of the CCS and it is fitting that Ushaw is part of the CCS.

The CCS has brought a much richer presence of Catholic theology to an already very strong, and traditionally strongly Anglican Department of Theology and Religion. That enrichment is something to be celebrated and applauded. However, the problem with this move from clerical to lay theology is that lay theologians do not have the same structural means of feeding their research into the life of the Church. In the chaplaincy we were able to do that in a small way: students and parishioners were able to engage with the scholars who came, who celebrated mass, preached, gave RCIA sessions, seminars and lectures. We regularly hosted seminars which attracted Catholics from across the diocese and neighbouring dioceses.

But the dilemma remains: the CCS, Paul’s vision, is for a centre which is integrated into the life of the Church and serves the Church and this takes time and relationship building.

When we celebrated one anniversary of the Centre I remember cracking some gag. I think I quoted Tony Blair saying that he would only think his work was complete when the Labour Party had learnt to love Peter Mandelson. I said that in a similar way, my job would only be done when the Diocese of H&N had learnt to love the CCS. I remember that Marcus Pound was really distressed by this story, asking me, “Is that really bad? Do we rate as lowly as Manderson?”

Well the news is good. Things have changed. I can now say that the standing of the CCS in the diocese is immeasurably higher than the relative popularity of Peter Mandelson in the Labour Party.

In truth, and joking aside, great advances have been made. And most of the work took place after I left Durham. I should pay tribute to the work of Fr Ben Earl, and particularly the current chaplain, my great friend Fr Andy Downie. I know it is due to the great hard work of all who have held posts in the Centre. However, I want to pay tribute to the work and generosity of the current holder of the Bede Chair, Prof Karen Kilby, and the Hild Chair, Dr Anna Rowlands. In the tradition of Bede and of Durham they are treasure-keepers. Their work beautifully exemplifies the collecting and safeguarding Catholic wisdom from down the centuries. And the generous way in which they involve themselves in formation through parishes and diocesan events enables this treasure to be given again to the Catholic faithful of the diocese.