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Michael A. Conway

Intercommunion
of One and All
*Theology and
its Future*

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INTRODUCTION: THE UNIVERSITY AS COMMUNITY

The terms ‘theology’ and ‘university’ have a common origin and in that sense belong together.¹ They go back to a beginning that is the foundation of modern third level education and to an academic arena in which theology was the major discipline. To a greater or lesser degree many of our contemporary university disciplines have something of their origin in Theology. The *facultas theologica* (faculty of theology) turns up at the university of Paris in the thirteenth century, and theology as a specific discipline has pretty much survived to the twentieth century (which is quite extraordinary when you consider all that has changed in the interim, notably the renaissance, the reformation, and the enlightenment). It continues to thrive, remarkably well, in some of the world’s leading universities.² Theology was at the heart of the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* (the *community* of masters and scholars) from which we get the modern word ‘university.’³ Really a ‘university’ was, in its original sense, a *community* of teachers and students (a place of learning, teaching, and research). I’ll come back to this idea of *community* on a number of occasions.

- 1 Material from this paper was presented as a *Continuing Professional Development Event* for Theology and Religious Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, at Mount St Anne’s, Portarlington, 19 January 2017, and at the School of Humanities, WIT Waterford, as part of the lecture series *Theology in the Public Square*, 25 April 2018.
- 2 Over time the nomenclature has been modified to reflect a changing cultural environment: at Oxford we now have a ‘Faculty of Theology and Religion’; at Cambridge, a ‘Faculty of Divinity’ (but the small print states: ‘The Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, is an international centre of excellence for study, teaching and research in Theology, Biblical Studies, Religious Studies, and the Philosophy of Religion and Ethics’); at Leuven (since 2011) a ‘Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies’; at Boston a ‘School of Theology,’ etc.
- 3 Etymologically, the word *universitas* is a composition of ‘to turn towards’ and ‘unity,’ and means the whole or a totality (hence, the English words universe and universal). The word ‘community’ retains the idea of unity. The word *universitas* superseded the term *studium generale*.

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Notwithstanding the impressive pedigree of the discipline of theology, it is less clear what might be its future at the academy. There is an enormous transition going on in our European culture vis-à-vis religion, the institutional church, faith, and spirituality. And against this background, it is a very interesting to ask about the future of theology. We are witnessing a considerable change, where as a culture we are gradually putting in place an environment that is marked by a range of religious options, and where there is an explosion of smaller movements that replicate the dynamics of religion and that in some cases take its place. Is theology to survive against this changing background? And how? In particular, how is it to do so in our various academic institutions, all of which have different traditions, expertise, objectives, and *raison d'être*? In Ireland, for example, Waterford is not Maynooth; and Maynooth is not Limerick.

I consider theology in the academy to be very important, not just in terms of churches and religious communities (of which there are now various forms), but in terms of the universal search for meaning and the social fabric of our common humanity. It is a matter of our aspirations and our need to flourish. Theology has things to say that cannot be said elsewhere; it cultivates a landscape that should not be left fallow for the sake of our society, its values, its stability, its ability to engender meaning, and even its destiny. I'd like to reflect on some of this material and make some suggestions that might benefit the place and teaching of theology as an enterprise in the university that contributes not only to life in the academy, but also to life in religious communities, and to life in wider society. I have in mind primarily theologians and students of theology, but I would also hope that what I have to say might be of some help to those, who have an interest in theology, or who are just inquisitive about the discipline.

THEOLOGY BETWEEN ACADEMY, CHURCH, AND SOCIETY

I'd like to look briefly at the macro-picture of Theology at the academy. There is, firstly, an issue that cannot be avoided; and how you understand this will, to a large extent, determine how you understand theology in an academic environment. The issue is that of the place of theology in a modern university. Should it even have such a place? There is no doubt that for some the answer must be a resounding 'no'. The argument runs along the lines: times have changed and in a (post-) modern, multi-faith and none, democratic society, theology, as a denominational phenomenon, belongs to a relatively private realm, or, at least, should be anchored and financed exclusively from within the religious communities to which it is affiliated, and should, certainly, not be supported by

public funding. Indeed, the principle itself of secularity that is expressed in the separation of church and state precludes any public support for theology per se. There is a good deal of appropriate concern behind this argument, and it needs to be taken seriously and given due consideration. At the other extreme, a simple ‘yes’ may, curiously, be at odds with the task of theology *as a discipline at the university*: this is especially so if it does not respect this particular *Sitz im Leben* and the responsibilities that go with such a placing in terms of an answerability to the wider socio-cultural order. In other words, there are specific responsibilities that go with this ‘yes.’ I think that this issue is very important for those of us who work in the university and are resourced, directly and indirectly, from public funds. This is so because the justification that one has internalized for oneself in terms of working in theology in the academy shape – both consciously and unconsciously – *how* one works in the university.

We are now in a new constellation, where theology is being taught and articulated in a space that is no longer exclusively from within the social body of the Church as its place of production. Even somewhere like Maynooth (where I work) cannot ignore this changed and changing reality; as the profile of students who study theology becomes more heterogeneous, and as the ambient culture evolves, we need to take cognizance of this situation and adjust what we do so as to take such new realities into account. Not to do so would be to inhabit an unreal, mythic space.

The place of theology at the university can only be understood as appropriate, or justified, when there is a grounding framework that bestows on it its legitimacy. This justification is important above all for oneself, where it is a matter of one’s integrity as someone who works as a theologian in the academy. Up until relatively recently in Europe, that grounding was provided spontaneously by the confessional makeup and structuring of society. For the post reformation church the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* (the religion of the ruler is that of the realm), first, connected religious identity isomorphically to geographical place, and secondly, ensured a certain regional homogeneity that, in turn, placed the church at the centre of the social order. It meant that the church was deeply embedded in the ambient culture, and it made perfect sense that there would be an intellectual engagement with theology and a theological education at the university not only to correspond to the important presence of church in the social order, but also to equip students to take their places as priests, pastors, teachers of religion, pastoral workers, etc., in the service of Christian communities. The justification was (and to some degree still is) rooted, if you like, in an active, living, visible Christian reality that permeates the whole

social order. I am generalizing somewhat here and this picture would need to be modified to correspond to the precise situation in various European countries, where there are different historical circumstances and indigenous traditions.

Increasingly, in a multi-faith society, specific churches no longer have a central role to play in terms of the total social order or state structures (or within bodies connected to the state). And in particular, no particular religion or church has the socio-cultural function that was so central in the past. This means that a very powerful justification for having and supporting theology in the academy is disappearing. So if one is to maintain theology in the university one needs to ensure that there is good reason for having it there, beyond pandering to a specific religious group in the culture!

The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann underlines that ‘if the church takes theology seriously, [theology] must ... become a function of the kingdom of God in the world.’⁴ Rather than looking to church or even the social order as the place from which to justify what he calls ‘public theology,’ he looks to the theological category of the kingdom of God and from that perspective grounds the discipline at the academy. Thus, it is a service in a much wider sense than to church alone. This language of the Kingdom of God will sit easily with theology students; but for those for whom it might be somewhat alien, then, I would speak of something like the ‘ultimate well-being of our world.’ For theology itself, it is a matter of being, if you like, outward looking and future directed (which is intrinsic to the eschatological vision of Christianity in any case), and understanding its role in society and culture from the perspective of the realization of that ultimate well-being (something which goes well beyond the immediate and exclusive concerns of a particular Christian church or religious community). Such a theological view is relatively independent of the ideologies and expediencies that normally guide the deliberations, the institutions, and the enactment of legislation in our society and culture. And it is this that is especially important in terms of its voice in the conversations that shape our culture.

Moltmann points out, for example, that there are multiple conditions in our societies that can be marked out as being at odds with kingdom values, and these are addressed often most effectively by resolute Christian minorities, who are committed to working for the kingdom. In this same spirit, in an extraordinary address to the French bishops earlier this year, the French president, Emmanuel

4 Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1999), 252. For a discussion of the kingdom of God in a contemporary setting, see Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 37-54.

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Macron, highlights and lauds the social engagement of so many Catholics in the name of their faith, particularly among those who are often on the margins of the social order. And he even asks the bishops and French Catholics to continue serving the Republic with what he terms that ‘gift of engagement.’⁵

For his part, Moltmann underlines that, as a university discipline, theology must ‘maintain universal concerns.’⁶ It cannot be a matter of securing and being concerned only with the survival of one’s own particular faith community (which is, of course, an important concern in itself). And here, I see the key insight. If one is to work as a theologian in a publically funded university, then in one’s work one ought to ‘maintain universal concerns.’ The contribution that one makes must be directed at serving all, not just in terms of the academy, but all, too, in terms of wider society. Moltmann claims, for example, that ‘Christian theology of the kingdom of God’ has a place in all the universal sectors of human culture. It is a *public theology* that participates in the *res publica* of society.⁷ And as public theology it is relatively independent of the church, for theology too has political, cultural, economic, and ecological mandates that are parallel to the mandate of the church. He goes as far as saying that to some degree it needs to be institutionally independent of the church as, for example, it is in departments and schools in state run institutions.

Interestingly, David Ford at Cambridge points out that:

The state (or bodies supported by the state) in pluralist countries needs theology for the sake of the health of the religious communities that are such an important part of civil society, and also because of its contributions to the education of all its citizens (whatever their allegiance) and to informed public debate on many issues.⁸

The theological tradition is the custodian of an enormous richness of practice and reflection on human experience from the nadir of personal and social disintegration that originates in unfathomable evil to the zenith of mystic unity with the transcendent. This vast storehouse of human reflection and experience ought not to be dismissed lightly. This very point was brought home to me a

5 Emmanuel Macron, ‘Transcription du discours du Président de la République devant les Evêques de France,’ 9 April 2018, available at <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/transcription-du-discours-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-les-vevques-de-france/> (accessed May 4, 2018).

6 Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society*, 254.

7 *Ibid.*, 252.

8 David F. Ford, *The Future of Christian Theology* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 163.

few years ago, when at a university function I sat beside a natural scientist, who came from Northern Ireland, a region in which religion has played and continues to play a decisive role in the dynamics of the province. It surprised me to learn that this person saw no reason for having religion or theology at the university. Yet, a significant feature of the deeper foundations of the peace process is, undoubtedly, the ecumenical movement that emerged among the Christian churches in the early decades of the twentieth century. And theological research was absolutely crucial to this development. There is often – even in the university – a complete blindness as to the foundational fabric of our social order that can be taken so easily for granted; until, of course, something goes wrong!

There is no present and no future without the past. And there is no escape from the cumulative density of the past that inhabits and shapes the present. The more you scratch the surface of the present, the more you will discover the underground archaeology (that is not so dead!) of the past. This is so, even when it remains unacknowledged, ignored, or even forgotten. There is, undoubtedly, in many quarters a forgetting, and even a repression, of religion and faith in our European culture, both of which can catalyse an abrupt return of what was forgotten or repressed to discommode radically the present. You see this with fundamentalism in various religions. Out of seemingly nowhere in a relatively secular environment, very well educated young people opt for crude, simplistic religious forms that are as reactionary as they are powerful. Wilful social repression – particularly of the religious – sets up the explosive conditions of eruption for the future, and this occurs rarely along healthy lines. Undisciplined, de-institutionalized religious forces are inevitably highly destructive in terms of social cohesion. Pascal remarked that ‘we never do evil so completely and so joyously as when we do it from religious conviction’!⁹ It is not possible for a culture to be without ‘religion’ (and this may take multiple forms; including the ‘religion’ that is the rejection of religion; or the form that attempts to set religion out of play in an agnostic or indifferent gesture).¹⁰ Religion is a formidable force in our culture that is enjoyed, acknowledged, repressed, rejected, lived, combatted, and so on. These various postures vis-à-vis religion are always

9 This is not quite faithful to the original French, which reads: ‘Jamais on ne fait le mal si pleinement et si gaîment que quand on le fait par conscience’ (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed., Louis Lafuma [Paris: Seuil, 1962], No. 813).

10 The sociologist, Peter Berger, erstwhile supporter of ‘secularisation theory,’ now remarks that ‘the world today ... is as furiously religious as it ever was’ (see Peter L. Berger, ‘The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,’ in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999], 2).

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active in the undergrowth of the socio-cultural canopy. Clearly, it is important that there be a serious academic engagement with this very powerful 'force' for the sake of society; and theology is one very important critical voice that contributes significantly to such an engagement.

There is, however, a danger for theology in that it may be tempted to become an exclusively academic pursuit that is remote from the life of Christian communities and other religious groups in society. When theology ceases to maintain its links to the reality of a living faith, it becomes an arid, lifeless discourse that neither meets and opens minds (as it should in the academy) nor stirs hearts (as it might in the Christian community). If theology does not remain connected to living Christian faith, it loses its life, its source of energy, and to some degree its very *raison d'être*. This means, further, that an important feature of theology at the academy is that of being connected to, and enabling, religious communities to take their place in the flourishing of civil society, and so continue to contribute (as they so often do) to the common good. Theology can act as a sort of buffer zone, where language is honed appropriately to allow communication across what can be quite acrimonious boundaries. Theology – itself nourished by faith communities – ought to be a rich support to these same communities, coming to their assistance with ideas, with possibilities for practice and ministry that will enable them to flourish in a healthy way in a rapidly changing culture. This particular role of Theology is an expression of the universal dimension of the Church, the *catholic*, in the etymological sense, and as such is one of the most significant places, where this dimension can be brought clearly into the light of day. This mediatory role is a very important part of the work of theology: building bridges between the past and present, between church and culture, between tradition and innovation, between one faith and another, between present needs and ultimate destiny, and so on. And this, of course, demands that the theologian develop an ability to be able to see and understand issues from various and multiple perspectives. This now brings me to another important dimension to theology in the academy; namely, the vital importance of conversation with colleagues in the wider academic community.

THEOLOGY IN THE COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

In terms of the community of learning that is the university (in that original sense), on the one hand, theology needs to be in conversation with other disciplines, and, on the other hand, other disciplines benefit from the complementarity of theology. In this regard, Charles David cautions that:

‘theology can never be successfully expelled from the concert of the sciences. When it is excluded the other sciences try to play its part as well as their own – with results that vary from the clumsy to the ludicrous.’¹¹

In terms of the future of Theology, specifically in the academy, the discipline needs to be connected into the coherent fabric of the university as a total enterprise, and as a community. And to this end the discipline itself cannot function in isolation from other disciplines and so must adjust to the changing dynamics of the academy. In place of the contemporary term ‘interdisciplinarity,’ Newman speaks more eloquently of the ‘intercommunion of one and all.’¹² The only way of achieving some surety for the discipline and its future is by being in movement with the university as a common enterprise, as intercommunion, and as a community.

Theology that is orientated to the future (and that will survive in a largely secular academy) will need to be creative, and it cannot be so independently of the wider university matrix. It must be self-consciously open to interdisciplinary work, seeking to connect in a serious and real way with other loci of human self-understanding.¹³ This, in itself, cannot be done in any prescribed (or controlled) fashion. It depends on the character of an institution, its strengths, its personnel, its research profiles, individual research interests, etc. It should be noted that right across the campus of many universities one can see a growing interest in research in many subject areas that have a direct link with questions traditionally handled by theology (and these disciplines include psychology, education, geography, literature, music, cultural studies, and even in physics and mathematics, etc.): this is something to which it is worth being attentive, and which has the potential of fostering new and exciting areas of research.¹⁴

Theology benefits significantly from being in conversation with other voices in the academy in terms of its own conceptualizations and methodologies, where it can learn from and adopt appropriately a range of skills, modes of research, and even language to further its own endeavour, and, *very importantly*, to ensure that it remains

11 Charles David, ‘Theology and its Present Task,’ in John Coulson, ed., *Theology and the University* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1964), 107-32, at p. 114.

12 John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Pickering, 1881), 457-58. The idea of ‘interdisciplinarity’ (a rebarbative neologism) gained traction during the 1970’s in order to deal with the issue of how disparate knowledge areas could be unified so as to overcome the disciplinary fragmentation that marred research and scholarship. Clearly, it has methodological, theoretical, and institutional implications. See also Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 134.

13 See Pope Francis, *Veritatis gaudium*, nos. 4-5.

14 See Michael A Conway, ‘Theology going Somewhere and Nowhere,’ *The Furrow* 67 (2015): 375-86.

interconnected with other disciplines (in communion, in Newman's sense). Of particular note in our present cultural setting are the literary, visual, and performance arts. Drama, the visual arts, and dance now 'speak' in our spectacular culture in ways that are often much more powerful than the sermonising word.

Interdisciplinary work and mutual engagement on projects can be thought of in levels of proximity. A first level of interaction and dialogue is clearly the one from within a school or a faculty that has both theology and religious studies. As a discipline religious studies serves to describe, analyse, and illuminate religious phenomena in ways that are relatively independent of the perspective of theology. This is extremely important in terms of understanding the human configuration of the religious; and, it could be argued that the development of religious studies is the most significant factor in terms of the changing profile of religion and faith in our culture. As people better understand the place, the power, and, indeed, the potential of religion in terms of the socio-cultural order, they are re-negotiating its place in the body politic.¹⁵ It is not theology, but religious studies, that has facilitated this.

One might then go further and observe that not just religious studies, but other disciplines have an equally important role to play in terms of the changing profile of faith and religion in our culture. I'm thinking of philosophy as an obvious and traditional instance of this, but now also cultural studies, psychology, and the social sciences, whose optics, achievements, and instruments of analysis are providing us with material that needs at the very least to be brought into conversation with theology. And the academic institution is, of course, the ideal forum in which to have these conversations. It is clearly another reason for underlining the importance of working as a community in the academy. Without such symbiotic relationships, theology might easily end up dying a slow intellectual death in the university setting, disconnected from the other disciplines, and ceasing to contribute in a meaningful way to common human self-understanding.

I would like to add here that there is an ethos to and integrity about interdisciplinary work that is not really acknowledged or discussed. There are attitudes, principles of respect, modes of engagement that need to be part of the so-called skill-set that the theologian brings to the academy. In terms of working in an interdisciplinary spirit we search for the truth in harmony and in dialogue with others. The other is always the harbinger of truth. What's required is being attentive to the integrity of intellectual

¹⁵ See William A. Barbieri Jr., ed., *At the Limits of the Secular: Reflection on Faith and Public Life* (Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans) 2014; also Macron, 'Discours du Président.'

and practical exploration, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the discipline of theology in all its complexity.

I think that it is important to underline that fundamentally we do not argue with others; that is not what is theology. We do not aim to produce a definitive or a triumphalist argument that would, so to speak, ‘trump’ all other arguments. Despite what some might think (and argue) Christianity is not an argument among others! The truth does not always emerge and is not always achieved through argument; in fact, it is oftentimes wisest in terms of the search for truth to retreat from an agonistic battlefield. This is extremely important because sometimes what you find is Christian truth being framed in the terms of an ideology and a battle of competing beliefs. There can be no Christian ideology.¹⁶ Arguing is directed for the most part at defeating the other as opposed to facilitating the emergence of truth for the other. The redemptive path does not go down the road of ideology. There is a form of intellectual aggression that is utterly counter to the redemptive dynamic of Christianity. There is a redeeming of the intellect that is not to be equated with the argumentative determinations of human reason (which, incidentally, the medieval tradition of theology could honour with a distinction between cognition and intellection). Good theological discussion and conversation is not about winning arguments; it is about facilitating the emergence of truth. And if truth does not emerge for the other, then it has not emerged! The entire dynamic of trying to counter the other in an argumentative discourse is itself most often an expression of the desire for power-over-the-other, mirrored in St. Augustine’s *libido dominandi* (desire to dominate), or Spinoza’s *conatus essendi* (drive of being), or even Nietzsche’s *Wille zur Macht* (will-to-power). This desire may, indeed, be a constituent component of the human person and even of the search for truth, but it is precisely what Christianity puts out of play in the equally fundamental dynamic of *kenosis*. One empties oneself so that the truth has a place to emerge. This is the key to our interdisciplinary work at the university.

I would suggest, in fact, that there is no other place in our culture that is so conflicted (and in that sense, deeply wounded) as the academy, when it comes to the subject of religion, faith, and spirituality. There are many reasons that might explain this; but, for today, I am drawing your attention to the kind of dynamics that might facilitate the fruitful, harmonious, constructive interdisciplinary work in the academy. Interaction, dialogue, discussion, conversation; all of these facilitate the emergence of

¹⁶ Pope Francis often draws attention to various manifestations of this danger (see, for example, *Evangelii gaudium*, nos. 34-45; *Gaudete et exsultate*, nos. 37-46, *Veritatis gaudium*, no. 3).

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truth, and lead to its fruition in the time of the other (not in the time of the self). Having a capacity to respond to these dynamics and a generosity of spirit is essential for theology if it is to remain as an academic discipline on our university campuses.

MEETING THE STUDENT BEYOND MYTH

Arguably students are at the heart of the university; and students of theology have changed considerably over the last two decades in terms of cultural backgrounds, religious commitments, and learning expectations. To have a future, theology at the university must meet students in their cultural reality. This is a whole new challenge for the teacher of theology. We now encounter students, who come from a variety of backgrounds, have different religious affiliation, and arrive with varying academic ability. As a theologian in the academy, one is positioned between the particularity of the student and the universality of kingdom values in answerability to wider society, and, indeed, ultimately, to one's own faith commitment. And this is a whole new challenge in terms of teaching theology. You open up an exploration of Christian faith in what is really a tangential relationship to the living, practicing Christian community. I use the term tangential both as a descriptor of many of our students in their relationships to the Christian community and in order to interrupt a principle of identity that might compromise academic freedom (what the Germans designate as *Lehr und Lern-Freiheit*).

Looking to the future, this will mean proportioning the classroom experience more and more to the real questions and needs of students. This raises the further issue of relevance, which is a difficult one in terms of academic programmes. The classroom is a learning environment and, therefore, to some degree, must challenge the student and go beyond their expectations of what the experience might be. However, there will need to be real conversations with students and alumni about programmes, etc., so as to ensure that the environment remains a stimulating one for students. This is why 'student feedback' is so important in terms of the on-going development of modules, courses, and programmes. What is desirable is a middle path between, on the one hand, everything being determined *apriori* and from on high (so to speak) and, on the other, everything being determined in a *laissez faire* fashion, ahistorically and in complete ignorance of the discipline of theology. It is a matter of achieving a symbiosis of teacher and student that leads to an appropriate determination of the material to be studied in terms of theology (and the terrain, of course, is vast).

As far as interaction with students goes, we are leaving behind

a hierarchical university structure and heading in the direction of working together on a common project. In a way we are being challenged to re-discover the *community* aspect of the original idea of a university. In earlier decades there was an emotional ‘psychic gap’ (this apposite term is from Tom Inglis) between professors and students (as there was between parents and children, priests and laity, etc.).¹⁷ The relationship was hierarchically structured, formal, with clear boundaries as regards to what could be said, who did the saying, and, indeed, how and where one might even meet to speak. The social order that lay behind these dynamics has radically changed in the last decades; and this now has an impact on teaching and on our interaction with students. (I regularly get emails from undergraduate students written sometimes at three or four in the morning that begin: Hi Michael). In general, there is an emerging demand to relate to students as equals. *In the classroom-space students now increasingly expect to be co-creators of the classroom experience.* This is what energizes them; it is the very antithesis of bending to an expectation of repetition and replication of someone else’s experience (least of all, that of the teacher). In the mythic form of the classroom students are treated as voyeurs or even consumers; this, however, does the contemporary student little service and what is missing is a creative encounter, free exchange, and real engagement.

All of this involves new forms of communication and learning, with different expectations and goals. For teachers, this requires learning new skills in terms of relating to students, in terms of what can be said and done: how, when, and where. At the very least, you need to be aware of these changing dynamics. We are in the middle of a Copernican revolution in the classroom, and I have no doubt that it has not come to an end! I suspect that many of us teachers (particularly in the humanities) are perplexed by the changing profile of students, who are presenting at the academy, and by new demands in terms of classroom dynamics. In our own inability to adjust to the changing situation, we could easily succumb to facilitating a kind of decay that is really a matter of trying to protect our own vulnerability in the face of what is a new situation. That is one reason, why time spent in discussion, staff days, etc., can be very helpful in encouraging new practices and different responses to this emerging environment.

NEW BEGINNINGS

History tells us that the most difficult resource to mobilize is that of beginnings. It demands courage, creativity, and, to a degree, even certain recklessness in being able to discern, recognize, and realize

17 Tom Inglis, *Love* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 55.

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new possibilities. It is to nurture a capacity in oneself to open up the horizon and energize others to the contingency and novelty of life (which is always present and at work).

This is extremely important for young people and for those who are searching, who increasingly discover their own identity in being active participants in the creative construction of their own lives. Indeed, D.W. Winnecott observes that ‘it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.’¹⁸ I take this quite literally: the past does not engender selfhood; the most that it can do is provide a foundational space of discovery, and proffer a number of helpful tools for the task. The academy has a very important role to play in enabling others in the journey to selfhood (and this is independent of age); and theology, I believe, has a unique place in this adventure. More than most disciplines, it tunes into the place of meaning for the contemporary self. In theology, one strives to remain close to an origin for the student, and, perhaps, even for oneself.

Being *present*, not in denying the past, but in actively moving beyond it, is always to be at a beginning. In the end, we facilitate a future that is not our own, and that is ‘holy’ in the sense that we ought not trespass on it or violate its independence. And with that in mind, I’d like to finish with a poem entitled ‘Somewhere Holy’ by Ramna Safeer.¹⁹ She is a university student: so this is from someone who, you might say, shares in the site that is the classroom. In a way, I imagine her standing for all students: she could be with you in that privileged space that is the classroom, where your paths might cross, and where she, at least, is looking in the direction of possibility.

Somewhere Holy by *Ramna Safeer*

This is not finish.
This is full-bodied, big-boned beginning.
This is kiss me, I’m mine.
This is hold me up to 12 o’clock sun.
This is see the light push through my fingers,
see my skin become the red of my inside.
This is follow me down to the black roads,
chalk my name onto the pavement, car-sized.
This is read me out, letter by heavy letter.
This is hold me under your tongue,

18 Donald Woods Winnecott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54.

19 <http://inkywings.tumblr.com/post/149078182643/this-is-not-finish-this-is-full-bodied> (accessed May 5, 2018).

stick me to the roof of your mouth,
spill me from your lips like thick,
lumbering, molasses tittle of tome.
This is call me tomorrow,
and the next day, and the next.
This is I may be home, or I may have
somewhere holier to be.

Quiet Revolution. It may seem odd to speak of revolution and the papacy in the same breath, yet many commentators have been moved to do so by the words and actions of Pope Francis. North American theologian Richard Gaillardetz has spoken of a ‘Copernican revolution’ in terms of a Second Vatican Council rediscovery of a theology of the local Church. Irish ecclesiologist Gerard Mannion speaks of an ‘ecclesiological revolution’, which, in privileging the model of Church as People of God, appears ‘to be manifesting itself as another ecclesial instance of going “back to the future”’

– GERRY O’HANLON, SJ, *The Quiet Revolution of Pope Francis* (Dublin: Messenger Publications) p.44.