

Theology in Ireland: Changing Contours and Contexts

— Eamonn Conway —

Introduction

It struck many people as strange that a topic such as this, a particularly broad and general one, would be chosen as the keynote address at a major symposium to honour the lives and work of Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner. Yet, as we have seen from the papers specifically exploring aspects of the work of these theological giants, life and work do not separate easily, and theological reflection always takes place in a context. So do conferences. This is a time of profound change for theology in Ireland, change that is driven by a number of factors, some of which we will consider here. It is important for us to step back from the particularity of our theological engagement, look at the shifting landscape, and identify a set of markers by which we can plot the most appropriate course for theological engagement into the future.

I have chosen to explore this topic under the following headings. Following these introductory comments I will consider pragmatism as characteristic of the Irish way of doing theology, and the merits and demerits of this. I will then argue for theology as essentially an *ecclesial* activity and

as an *essential* ecclesial activity. I will then attempt to explore the particular challenges facing theology as third-level education in Ireland undergoes profound change, before concluding with some observations regarding opportunities as well as dangers that we face in the near future.

When I returned from studying theology in Germany in the early 1990s, I remember being struck by the extraordinary richness and variety of the Irish theological landscape. In Germany, even though I lived and worked in a parish while studying, I experienced a certain chasm between the pastoral and the academic, and a carefully ordered hierarchy by which engagement in theology was valued, with the parish community assistant at the lower end of the hierarchy and the university professor at the higher.

We regret the fact that theology in Ireland has not found until recently, with very few exceptions, much hospitality in third-level institutions. However, I believe that this institutional homelessness has contributed to theology here being more open, creative and inclusive. This is something to be cherished. Later in this paper I will be focusing on the issue of theology and the university (meant in the broadest sense of third-level). However, I will not mean or wish to play down the significance of the 'loving reflection on the wisdom carried to us in the community' (James Mackey's definition of theology), which takes place actually *in* believing communities, by believers engaged in the front-line renewal of the Christian community.

1. Reflection v Transformation, and the Issue of Pragmatism

In the early nineties, the Irish Theological Association sponsored some reflection on Irish theology. At that time, John O'Donohue wrote that 'the only carriers of theology in Ireland

have been and still are the clerics', who fed people what they got themselves (Sebastian Moore would add, 'in concentrate!'): 'a theological algebra... ingested from theological tracts at the seminary.'¹ When O'Donohue was writing we still had seminaries in the plural in Ireland, though they had already begun to languish. Now, significantly, even the Dutch Church has more seminarians than Ireland, and all but one of our seminaries have either adapted or died. More if still not many lay people are formally employed in teaching theology here today, and new centres have emerged, such as the Western Theological Institute in Galway, and the Newman Institute in Ballina. And theology, or at least its accreditation, has made significant in-roads into third-level institutions, ironically in the younger universities (Dublin City University, University of Limerick) and the Institutes of Technology, especially in Galway and Waterford.

In the early nineties, theologians in Ireland were concerned with a different set of social problems. Emigration was still running quite high; we could not have even considered that immigration and multi-culturalism would become challenges and opportunities for us. There was concern about the North of Ireland. Poverty and social exclusion were also major issues of concern. Although perhaps they should, these questions do not tend to dominate our discussions today.

One particularly interesting question was raised at that time, one arguably that is still with us, though I think the contours have changed. The question related to what I might call the 'pragmatic' nature of Irish theology: the issue of whether or not theologians viewed their role primarily as a matter of reflection, or as one of transformation. The question was posed as to whether theology 'commits (theologians) to work for a just, participative, sustainable society, or is their task merely to reflect on and analyse

society from a Christian standpoint?² The question was loaded: it expressed an annoyance among some ITA members at the absence of theology from Irish public life and its apparent distance from pressing social concerns. At the same time, in his contribution, Werner Jeanrond expressed the view that Irish theologians suffered from 'a mélange of middle-class guilt' and 'salvific illusion' which affected their ability to engage in 'ethical and self-critical theological thinking'.³ Along similar lines, O'Donohue was suspicious (rightly) that 'relevance questions' often mask prior questions about identity.

There is always tension between patient, critical, scholarly theological reflection, and concrete public engagement with both social and ecclesial realities. And despite our tendency towards pragmatism, which some would see as a national characteristic, reflected socio-economically in our greater proximity to Boston than to Berlin, it is significant and regrettable, that we never really developed an indigenous Irish theology of liberation.

Those who are primarily engaged in one or other form of transformative ministry probably still sense the frustration expressed in the nineties about theology failing to take seriously its situatedness. They would probably remind us that 'the family, the parish, the community or the school is what it is all about. If you do not speak out of and into these contexts you are only speaking to yourselves'. In order to survive, but also in order to serve, many former seminaries have developed attractive interdisciplinary programmes that provide people in ministry with the skills to engage with, and be influential in, the new Ireland. Later I argue that the insight, creativity and sheer ingenuity shown by former seminaries give them a critical decisive edge in a new educational context.

However, others here would tend to agree with Jeanrond, and perhaps be even more concerned now than he was a decade ago. This would be because of the increasing reality that theological teaching and research is almost entirely determined by what has to be done in order to attract students so that institutions can survive. And most Irish theologians have to teach in areas outside their interest/specialism in order to have any employment at all.

'Pure' theology, whatever that is, does not sell all that well in Ireland. Pragmatism determines that we offer courses with at least one or preferably all of the terms 'spirituality,' 'pastoral' and 'ministry' in order to attract students. Whereas I suspect the dominant fear in the early nineties was that theology was not sufficiently cognisant of its social responsibilities and sufficiently committed to social transformation, today I suspect a fear many of us share is that, well-grounded, historically conscious, scholarly reflection is under threat. Instead of 'publish or perish' it is a case of 'produce student numbers or perish'.

I have a two-fold concern regarding the nature of this newer kind of 'pragmatism'. Instead of having the merit of the earlier kind which at least was overtly committed to social transformation, this newer kind can be more self-centred, and this in two ways. It can be focused on the self of the institution in order to guarantee its survival, or it can be focused upon the self of the individual, in order to lead to personal fulfilment. In both cases the focus of transformation runs the risk of being self-centred and self-serving. Of course it doesn't have to be, and there are plenty of examples of ways that it is not. In the business world nowadays one speaks of 'win-win' situations, where both society as a whole and companies 'profit' from certain business strategies. Perhaps what is needed here is careful reflection on the part of all the

'stakeholders' on what can be 'win-win' situations for institutions, individual scholars and students, the Church, society and the discipline of theology as a whole. I believe we face a real dilemma here, one which I experience in my own current context which is a state-funded university-college: principles are acceptable insofar as we can afford them.

The dilemma is compounded further by the fact that we are marked, as Timothy Radcliffe has put it, 'by a culture which has lost confidence that study is a worthwhile activity and which doubts that debate can bring us to the truth for which we long'. It would be wrong for us simply to capitulate to this culture. At the same time, our scholarliness should not and need not be at the expense of service. Our Church and our culture need, which is not to say that they necessarily want, theology. They need to hear and see and experience theology in a whole variety of contexts. So, to summarise: one issue for theology in contemporary Ireland is how to negotiate between survival, service and scholarship, engaging with yet challenging the exigencies of contemporary culture.

2. Theology as Essentially an Ecclesial Activity

It is accurate to say that until recently most formal theological instruction took place in seminaries. And some of the criticisms of this kind of theology have to be taken on the chin. Its urgency to instruct rather than explore, its failure to honour and engage the uniqueness of the Irish imagination, its absence from public discourse, support O'Donohue's assertion that Irish theology 'was trapped somewhere in the tottering presbytery of Irish clericalism' for quite some time. Significantly, however, and ironically, those most articulate in unveiling the inadequacies of this kind of theological formation are themselves products of it. Somehow, despite

the shallowness of the soil and at times poor tilling, or maybe too much, seeds were sown and propagated in those seminary seedbeds, seeds that have since yielded significant harvests. Some very gifted people on the staff in these seminaries paid a price for this, often living and working in an oppressive and at times cruel and personally diminishing institutional environment, and they held onto and even communicated an understanding of redeemed humanity despite the odds. Indebtedness to these people should not be forgotten as we hasten on to graze in new and perhaps more exciting and personally fulfilling theological pastures.

The fact that theology in Ireland in the past was undertaken mainly by priests and in seminary contexts does not mean that it was necessarily undertaken as an ecclesial activity or that it served the *ecclesia* well. It certainly was possible to undertake theology in the seminary and be engaged in scholarly reflection that was so removed from the life of the Church that, while it was not *sentire contra ecclesiam*, (a thinking/feeling *against* the Church), it was hard to justify it as a genuine and valuable *sentire cum ecclesia* (a thinking/feeling *with* the Church).

Nonetheless, the migration of theology from church-controlled seminary contexts to institutions with merely formal ecclesiastical control such as university integrated denominational Colleges of Education and the Liberal Arts where I work, or to Institutes of Technology, where no formal control is possible except the control one can exercise over individual lecturers, raises questions about whether we understand or wish to understand theology as essentially an ecclesial activity. This is an important question, and one that is particularly difficult to address because it relates to questions of authority, power, control, trust, freedom, and even employment and livelihood.

We will return to the issue of the universities. First, I want to explore further the question of theology as an ecclesial activity. I believe that theology is essentially and inherently an ecclesial activity. While theology is responsible to and must correlate with the three publics of which David Tracy spoke, the Church, the academy and society, it does so as a particular representation of and manifestation of a wisdom which is embodied in and resides in a believing community. Anything else is really a form of philosophical or sociological study, valuable and interesting in itself, but distinct. I want to quote Mackey's definition of theology, to which I referred earlier, in full:

a loving reflection on the wisdom carried to him/her in the community, in its life and literature, its liturgy, its developing structures and its mission; using in this task the God-given gifts of the imagination and intelligence: the critical power of being able to distinguish the better embodiments of wisdom and the worse; the visionary power to envisage, however dimly, what would be better still; and such clarity and cogency of expression as would make this life-work a true core-summation of the religious tradition for a particular time and place.

There are understandable reasons as to why some theologians would find this understanding of theology a challenge they would prefer to pass on. Occasionally, critical powers to discern and point out the better embodiments of wisdom and the worse have been greeted with suspicion and even hostility, and some theologians are simply 'tired' of been merely 'consulted' if not entirely ignored when it comes to urgently needed reforms regarding liturgy and the structures

and mission of the Church. It is particularly annoying when reforms are governed by pragmatic considerations alone, and experts in all sorts of other areas are consulted (at great expense), while a theological opinion is not sought after. It is a sad reality that nowadays one finds that the academy and society in Ireland take theologians more seriously than Church authorities.⁴

There are other reasons as to why theologians might wish to shed the ecclesial mantle. For example:

- they do not wish 'to sink with the institutional ship';
- they may believe a distancing from the magisterium to be necessary if theology is to find acceptance within the university;
- they may find certain doctrinal positions relating to 'hot potatoes' such as mandatory celibacy, ordination of women, homosexuality etc., untenable, and do not want to be a part of defending them or even exploring them;
- they still fear the control that the magisterium might be able to or attempt to exercise;
- they may be actually convinced of the validity of a Religious Studies methodology along the lines developed by Ninian Smart, and of its appropriateness in the contemporary Irish cultural context.

Nevertheless, I would argue that:

- Theology is essentially an ecclesial activity. It is, as Mackey says, 'a loving reflection' on the wisdom that resides in a believing community. People in love see things differently. I know it is said that 'love is blind.' At the same time, love opens up horizons and possibilities to which the dispassionate and disengaged are oblivious. I think we can only do theology if we are in love with the tradition, faithful to it, and in some sense humbly subject to it. This

may mean at times being critical of certain positions, but always in a spirit of humility and of service. If we are genuinely in love with the tradition, we can say, with St John of the Cross, 'where you do not find love, put in love, and you will draw love out'.

- If we do not consider theology as an ecclesial activity, it is hard to see how we can hold in creative and critical tension the dual responsibility of theology to be both reflective and transformative. There is great emphasis today on knowledge. We speak of the knowledge economy, and we aspire to being a knowledge society. However, knowledge of itself is not transformative. Only faith, hope and love transform. Religious Studies may increase our knowledge, but only theology, I would argue, increases our faith, hope and love. An increase in faith, hope and love are needed by all three of theology's constituencies: the Church, the academy and society. Information is not enough, what is needed is transformation.

There are more pragmatic reasons as to why we should continue to view theology as an ecclesial activity:

- The reality is that many of the institutions that offer theology programmes and employment opportunities are Church sponsored. It is simply appropriate that theology is undertaken as an ecclesial activity in these contexts.
- Most of those who wish to study theology in Ireland may have deep faith questions as well as troubled and troubling experiences of Church. But, for the most part, they wish to engage in theology as an ecclesial activity.
- Most of our graduates, if they find employment, will find employment in Church-related institutions and be

expected to undertake theological reflection as an ecclesial activity.

Of course, we run the risk of narrowness and inwardness if we do not also speak of theology as essentially ecumenical at the same time as speaking of it as essentially ecclesial. I cannot develop this here, but I think it is important that we explore the new ecumenical and inter-faith challenges and responsibilities in multicultural Ireland. If we do not, we will not be serving our students well.

Finally, as we honour Rahner and Lonergan, it is appropriate to remind ourselves that neither of them could have conceived of theology as anything other than ecclesial. Both of their lives are testimony to a certain kind of theological being-in-love. In *Insight*, Lonergan urged us to 'convert' from self-satisfaction to value as the criterion of our decision-making and action. This could be said to apply in particular to our decision as to whether or not we wish to view theology as an ecclesial activity.

When considering the future of theology, Rahner acknowledged that it would have to be far more pluralist, but he also urged that 'it would discover in a fresh and more living way that ecclesiological element which is proper to it and which belongs permanently to its nature'.⁵ He argued that as theology rightly takes seriously the individual's own faith and sense of truth, it is all the more important that this individual sense of faith and truth is related to community, society and Church as socially constituted. Otherwise, 'it will never achieve its due fullness ... allowed to wander alone in the isolated sphere of private opinion.'

3. Theology as an Essential Ecclesial Activity

Theologians need no convincing that theology is an *essential* ecclesial activity. However, at least some Church authorities

might need theology more than they appear to want it. We have seen many failed pastoral initiatives in Ireland, and in my view this is because of insufficient theological reflection. These initiatives have shown signs of being born of a 'pastoral panic', and have often taken the form of programmes imported from other cultural contexts without sufficient reflection upon or recognition of the uniqueness of our own socio-cultural and ecclesial context.

A satisfactory spirit of collaboration between bishops and theologians does not yet exist in Ireland. Yet I know that quietly, many bishops and religious superiors fund lay students to pursue theological studies, and have been doing so for years. It would be good to see more being done to create jobs in theology for these people once they graduate. It would also be good to see bishops encouraging and facilitating their personnel in engaging in continuing theological renewal; indeed it would be great to see bishops engaging in it themselves. It would also be a step forward if there was more consultation and discussion between bishops and theologians, especially before pastoral letters are issued or pastoral policies put in place.

Finally, I think that quiet, patient 'backroom' scholarly theological reflection needs to be supported more, and this in very practical ways, in terms of resources, sabbaticals etc. Vincent Twomey, in his recent book, *The End of Irish Catholicism?*, laments the fact that scholarly research and publication tends to take second place to teaching and administration.⁶ The fact is there is no ideal context for doing theology, and wherever we find ourselves, we will be struggling to make time and give value to research and reflection. Some of us by personality will be more disposed to it than others, but we will all find it easier to engage in lonely and solitary scholarship if it is supported by and valued by the *ecclesia*.

Symbolic rewards have a place for theologians. It is easy to censure a theologian who is perceived to have erred. It would also be nice to honour and encourage those who are viewed to have made a significant contribution to theological scholarship.

4. Theology and the University

a) *Working without state funding*

One of the key issues facing many of the places where theology is currently being taught in Ireland today is how to survive without any form of state support and funding. The cost of delivering education programmes in Ireland has increased enormously over the last number of years; at the same time, investments and endowments, upon which many private colleges depend, are declining in value, or their use for new and emerging needs is legally constrained. Whereas in the past, institutes could be run and courses could be delivered by priests/religious who did not expect or demand proper remuneration, today this is no longer the case, for a number of reasons:

- priests/religious and/or the orders/congregations/dioceses to which they belong have an expectation of and need of proper remuneration.
- suitably qualified priests/religious no longer exist in sufficient numbers to staff these places.
- in any case, expertise now lies with lay people, themselves often graduates of these institutes/programmes.
- an inequitable situation has developed whereby the kind of theology being enunciated speaks of a model of collaboration between clergy and laity, while in practice governance of these institutions remains with priests/religious.

- being employed on a part-time basis only limits possibilities regarding research and publication, supervision of postgraduates etc.
- without significant funding it is impossible to develop proper theological resources, fund research projects, provide for sabbaticals, etc.

Where theology is part of a state-funded institution for the most part it managed to get in by the backdoor. In reality, there are only a handful of lecturing posts in theology in Ireland that are properly remunerated. This is a major stumbling block for the development of the discipline of theology into the future. It means that many lay people will not be able to make a career in theology, and it would seem that there will *only* be lay people! Is this likely to change? Do we believe that in the future, new departments of theology will be developed at universities and/or existing institutes will be incorporated in to universities? I would be less than confident, at least with regard to the immediate future. Our understanding of education is changing profoundly. Distinctions such as formal/informal, fulltime/part-time and so on, are breaking down. In addition, the demographics would indicate that Ireland will probably need fewer full-time places at third level in the future. This will mean fewer full-time academic staff, and fewer still, it would seem, in Arts and the Humanities.

b) Earlier Efforts to Integrate Theology into the University

An important conference took place in University College Cork in 1995. Organised by Pdraig Corkery and Fiachra Long, it had as its goal the establishment of a theology department at UCC. The papers and their subsequent publication provide an important historical record of the efforts in this country to get theology established within the

university, and of the perceived social and ecclesial fall-out from its absence.⁷ The papers also catalogue missed opportunities by both university and ecclesiastical authorities. The issue of academic freedom was thrashed out and the merits and appropriateness of theology as opposed to Religious Studies was discussed. In this regard Seán Freyne's reflection on the Trinity College experience is particularly valuable.⁸ John A. Murphy's contribution to the debate was also quite remarkable: he saw no place for theology in the university: 'I see theology *per se* as really sophisticated speculation about the unknowable ... apologetics in disguise'.⁹ Murphy took the view that, as there are opportunities for worship on campus, chaplaincy services, references to religion in disciplines such as sociology, history and so on, there is little justification for theology. I remember thinking when I read this at the time that such ignorance of the true nature of theology in an eminent scholar such as John A. Murphy was itself justification for the discipline's inclusion in the university.

Today, the arguments about methodology, theology versus Religious Studies, academic freedom, and so on, are of relatively less importance. A whole new and far more pragmatic set of questions now have to be dealt with, and these pertain to the changing nature of formal education as a whole and in particular to the future of the university.

c) *The University: a Changing Landscape*

Most of us are aware of the crisis that is facing the Humanities in Ireland, and how changes are taking place in university that threaten to undermine if not fatally damage the place of Humanities and Liberal Arts departments in Irish universities. This crisis impinges in particular on theology as a discipline. It impacts on departments already established and it adversely affects the chances of new departments and schools

becoming established. As I said, most of our departments have got in by the backdoor, and we have never really managed to move too far away from it.

To get a sense of the direction that state-funded higher education is going in Ireland, one has only to consider recent newspaper articles by present and former members of the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities as well as by Higher Education Authority personnel. The following are some of the key points:

Third level institutions are criticised for what is called 'mission drift'. This means, for example, that Institutes of Technology should not aspire to develop Humanities faculties; similarly Colleges of Education should confine themselves to teacher training.

Institutions are best seen as businesses. They should have 'business incubator units'. They are to see themselves as servants of enterprise and there should be much more co-operation between private industry and the university. The enterprise sector and private industry should have an increased role in the governing bodies of colleges. Over time, state control and state funding will be cut back.

The best way to achieve the desired transformation is through 'incentives'; by creating a competitive environment for funding, by tying salaries and research grants to performance indicators; and by the introduction of university league tables.

Where Arts and Humanities faculties exist, they will be valued insofar as they serve the enterprise agenda by producing graduates with a useful skills base.

These articles have been so uniform in content, and so frequent throughout 2004, that one can only assume that they are part of a deliberate campaign to direct public

opinion along the lines expressed in the recent (16/9/04) 'Review of National Policies for Education: Review of Higher Education in Ireland' conducted by the OECD. The intention is that in the future, Irish education will resemble Los Angeles more than Leuven, the University of Texas more than that of Tübingen. Therefore it is worth paying some attention to what American intellectuals are saying about the changing landscape of American universities. Frank Rhodes, President Emeritus of Cornell University, can bring our reflections here one step further:

The centuries old monopoly on education enjoyed by the universities is over, a casualty to new means of learning (information technology [IT] and the Internet) and new providers (especially corporate vendors and for-profit vendors). The universities once controlled access to knowledge, represented by both their vast libraries and the professional skills and expertise of their faculties. They controlled accreditation, graduation, and certification, and they controlled the place, time, style and substance of learning. No more. The traditional pattern of learning – by college-age students enrolled on a full-time basis in a residential, rigidly sequential program – is already being replaced by on-demand, anytime, and often on-line learning from an increasingly competitive 'knowledge business'. Skills are acquired as needed for changing careers and changing job demands by cost-conscious knowledge shoppers of every age.¹⁰

Rhodes cites Peter Drucker:

Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won't survive. It's as large a

change as when we first got the printed book... Already, we are beginning to deliver more lectures and classes off-campus via satellite or two-way video at a fraction of the cost. The college won't survive as a residential institution. Today's buildings are hopelessly unsuited and totally unneeded... I consider the American research university of the last 40 years to be a failure. The great educational needs of tomorrow are not in the research side but on the learning side.¹¹

To many of us, this represents a glimpse of the apocalypse, and perhaps academics, who think methodically and over decades, are least suited to read what is happening. Nonetheless, it is clear that universities will only survive by adapting considerably, and their chances of survival will be proportionate to their ability to deliver just-in-time knowledge, skills on demand, and cost-effective learning which at the same time is clearly understood to contribute to the economy, though lip-service may continue to be paid to the idea of universities contributing to society. At the same time we have not even begun to register the impact of technology both on what we understand as knowledge and how and where people will access it.¹²

d) An Attempt at Evaluation

Where does this leave theology, and efforts to get theology into the university? I think that our theology departments and institutes have one distinctive advantage: we are used to having to struggle to survive. However, I think we could lose our 'competitive advantage' so to speak, by over-focusing on how we get into the university or state educational system, a system itself undergoing profound change. I am struck by the fact that state funded universities are going to find themselves

in very similar situations to those in which private colleges currently find themselves. At the same time, private colleges that would succeed in integrating into these universities are likely to find themselves with the same problems that they have now, but with much less autonomy. Perhaps their situation will even be worse: resources, for example, valuable property, will have been 'colonised'.

In the light of all of this, the question of how theology can get into the university might be dated, and even conservative. Instead, we need to ask:

- Can universities in the future provide the kind of context required for the study of a discipline such as theology? What unique opportunities present themselves for the teaching of theology on university campuses? Are there inevitable compromises?
- What steps do we need to take to ensure that critically enquiring young people will want to take theology programmes, and how do these need to be packaged in order to facilitate access?
- How can colleges which are part of the mission of the Church best position themselves? How can the ecclesial mission of such colleges to the Irish education system be best articulated at this time? What steps need to be taken, what resources need to be garnered, to make this happen?
- Will the normalisation of life-long learning mean that more people will be interested in pursuing theology, and how can we facilitate them?
- What are the new intellectual landscapes for interaction with the emerging culture? How do we ensure that theology is present in these new contexts?

It could be that emerging higher education strategies in Ireland will eventually be recognised as defective, and in the meantime we should proceed – albeit with caution – to

develop theology departments in Irish universities. At the same time we should try to anticipate what the educational landscape in Ireland will look like further down the road and position ourselves accordingly.

4. Conclusion

Theology in Ireland has been characterised by institutional homelessness. It has been homeless with regard to universities, where, with a few exceptions, it has barely managed to squat inside the door. Theology and theologians have also experienced a certain kind of homelessness with regard to the institutional Church, with the exception of seminaries in which theology became overly domesticated. I would suggest that this experience of homelessness has had the effect, until now, of keeping those involved in pastoral ministry as well as academic theologians closer together, and that the disorder and discomfort experienced by Irish theologians has not been all negative for the Church's mission.

At the same time, the situation cannot and will not go on as it has been. So as new and very welcome opportunities open up here for more structured employment of theologians in university and ecclesial settings, I would like to end by sounding what may seem like an odd note of caution. It has to do with the danger of careerism.

We can see this already in the university context. In a world in which knowledge is increasingly regarded as a commodity, students focus on what will get them a job, and staff can be tempted to focus merely on what will get them a better one. We have seen the shift away from seeing one's work as a vocation in a number of professions: teaching and nursing spring to mind. Clergy and pastoral workers are not exempt from the danger of careerism either. Significantly, Paul Zulehner has noted the emergence of a new kind of priest, conservative theologically, but very up to date in terms

of his rights and responsibilities as well as his working hours. For this type of priest, particularly common among more recent recruits, *Berufung* (vocation) is less part of his identity than *Beruf* (profession).¹³ This can be true of lay pastoral workers as well.

Evolving 'professionalism' and narrow careerism are to some extent an understandable reaction to experiences of exploitation in the past. However, they might also have something to do with doubts about identity and a loss of confidence in the inherent value and preciousness of our work. It is increasingly a rare privilege to be able to work at something that one enjoys and in which one believes. A fascinating study of young people, who live lives in which social engagement and voluntary commitment play a significant part, showed that religion and spirituality are key motivating factors in promoting service.¹⁴ The ripple effect of those of us who are pastors and theologians collapsing into professionalism and narrow careerism would be felt in many other walks of life, aside from the counter-witness it would be to our work.

The memoriam card for Karl Rahner ends with the following:

He loved the Church and his order, and he spent his life's energy in the service of the Church without allowing himself to become discouraged. What remains in the memory of those who knew him is his personal modesty, a preferential option for ordinary and poor people as well as for young people, a deep and honest faith, and a steadfast engagement in the pursuit of truth and justice.

In a collection such as this, that honours two men whose life and work were so gracefully and efficaciously a unity, we can

do no better than to entrust our future to their inspiration and protection.

Notes

- 1 John O'Donohue, 'Theology in Ireland Today', *The Furrow*, (Dec 1991), p. 694.
- 2 ITA Statement, 'The Context of Theology In Ireland Today', *The Furrow*, (Dec 1991), p. 731.
- 3 Werner Jeanrond, 'The Agenda for Theology in Ireland Today III', *The Furrow*, (Dec 1991), p. 707.
- 4 See D. Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?* Dublin: Veritas, 2003, p. 161.
- 5 'The Future of Theology,' *TI* 11, p. 145.
- 6 D. Vincent Twomey, *The End of Irish Catholicism?* Dublin: Veritas, 2003, p. 159.
- 7 Padraig Corkery and Fiachra Long, eds., *Theology in the University*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1997.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 35-48.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 10 Frank H. T. Rhodes, *The Role of the American University. The Creation of the Future*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001, p. xii.
- 11 Cited in Rhodes, *The Role of the American University*, p. xiii
- 12 See Michael Breen, Eamonn Conway and Barry McMillan, *Technology and Transcendence*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2003.
- 13 Paul Zulehner and Anna Hennersperger, 'Sie gehen und werden nicht matt.' *Priester in heutigen Kultur*, Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2001, p. 31.
- 14 Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl Keen, James Keen and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.