

# Dermot Lane

Dermot A. Lane is widely recognized as one of the foremost theologians in Ireland with a distinguished international profile. Born in 1941, Lane was educated in Clongowes Wood College and studied in TCD, UCD, and Holy Cross College, Clonliffe. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Catholic archdiocese of Dublin in 1967. He earned a doctorate in theology in Rome in 1970.

In 1970 he was appointed Lecturer in Theology to Mater Dei Institute and in 1972 became Prefect of Studies in Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, while continuing to work in MDI. He served as Director of Studies in MDI from 1982 to 1992 and as President from 1995 to 2013. Over a 43 year period he has championed historic changes in the ways teachers of religious education, chaplains (both lay and ordained) for schools and hospitals, lay parish pastoral workers and Catholic permanent deacons (including married men) are educated. Presently Dermot Lane serves as Parish Priest in Balally, Dublin.

Lane has researched and published extensively in theology. His best known work, *The Reality of Jesus: an Essay in Christology* (1975) has served as a textbook for almost 40 years having sold over 100,000 copies. He was an editor of the prestigious *New Dictionary of Theology* (1987), a standard reference work in the US and in Ireland.

Lane's commitment to rigorous theological investigation is grounded in the vision of the Second Vatican Council. He has consistently emphasized the importance of dialogue; dialogue between experience and religion, between theism and atheism, between the sacred and the secular. He has made pivotal contributions in the areas of creation, hope and liberation theology, the Eucharist and social justice, feminism (before it was fashionable), and a Trinitarian understanding the person of Jesus. Throughout he has highlighted the value of theology as an academic discipline, best positioned in the University openly engaging with other disciplines and fields of knowledge. While Lane comes from a Roman Catholic theological tradition he has always interpreted this in an ecumenical and interfaith manner and in a mutual engagement with secular and scientific world-views.

In recent years he has repeatedly drawn attention to the truths to be found in other faiths and highlighted the relevance of *Nostra Aetate* – the document of the Council on world faiths. He has a gift for inviting his students and readers to see the things that theologically they have taken for granted from a completely new perspective. In so doing he opens new perspectives on creation and revelation and creates new opportunities for inter-religious dialogue, not as a contradiction of the classical order but as historically complementary to it.

Lane's long standing engagement with inter-religious dialogue is captured in one of his most recent books- *Stepping Stones to other Religions: A Christian Theology of Inter-religious Dialogue* (2011), a text which has already received many favourable reviews and a significant number of citations in the literature. One of his current initiatives is that of promoting Catholic-Muslim dialogue, an encounter he regards as urgent in the presently divisive and contested political, social and cultural environment. This has led to the appointment of the first academic post in a Catholic college in Ireland of a Lecturer in Islamic Studies and the hosting by

MDI in 2013 of an international conference on 'A Common Word between Us and You' – the outreach from leading Muslim scholars issued following the events of 9/11 to promote scholarly engagement and mutual understanding on the theological issues that separate Muslims, Christians and Jews. Lane has resolutely moved Catholic theology out from the relative safety of the seminary and into the contested public square with all the risks that this entails.

Although theology is Lane's primary discipline, he has made a defining contribution in the applied field of religious education. As an educationalist, he has championed a learner-centred rather than a 'doctrinal'-centred approach. His contribution, in the 1990s, to the establishment of the State syllabuses for Religious Education at second level is widely recognized. We take for granted the key elements of the approach that he championed – an approach by which RE provides a resource which draws on the religious and secular heritage and world-views of humankind, which explores the nature of faith and reason, the relationship between citizenship and identity, and which is open to all. At primary level, Lane made several written responses to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism which substantially contributed to the conceptual framework of the final report. Equally important is his work on the nature of an inclusive yet distinctive Catholic school.

One of Lane's most significant achievements, as President of Mater Dei Institute, was negotiating an *Agreement for Institutional Linkage with DCU* in 1999 and renegotiating a deepening of this agreement in 2006/7. He was also personally involved in drawing up a strategic plan for MDI (2003), in relocating the institute under the Higher Education Authority and in initiating a quality review of the Institute by both the European Universities' Association and the Irish Universities' Quality Board. In his final years as President, with the other Institutional leaders, Lane agreed the foundations for the present DCU Incorporation process which, it is anticipated, will conclude with the full integration of Mater Dei, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and the Church of Ireland College of Education into DCU. Once again this reflects Lane's commitment to theology in the secular university and to the education of teachers of religious education in dialogue with other academic disciplines.

Lane served as a member of the DCU Governing Authority from 1999 until 2013. Another of his key legacies was his contribution to the establishment, along with others, of the DCU Institute for Ethics.

It is appropriate that today DCU bestows its highest honour on Dermot A. Lane – for his contribution to higher education in Ireland, for his work in re-positioning Catholic theology through dialogue with other disciplines, worldview and pressing social, cultural and political dilemmas both nationally and internationally, and for shaping the paradigm for the teaching of religion in our schools. Dermot Lane is a scholar, teacher and leader embedded in the concrete realities and complexities of our particular time. His vision and life's work have transformed lives and societies.