

The Newman Association - Is it Worth Saving?

Notes from Edinburgh Circle discussion 9th. September 2015

Circle Matters. Members wish the Association to continue.

Some key characteristics of the Edinburgh Circle.

For many it has been important in our ongoing religious formation and commitment dating from the exciting time in the late sixties, seventies and early eighties after Vatican II. We owed much then to the support of our chaplain Marcus Lefebure.

The Newman was and is a forum both to listen to and express unfettered free-ranging views from Catholics and Christians deeply committed to the exploration and development of their faith. The atmosphere within the Newman is different from typical gatherings found in the Church in Scotland. – a forum where one can speak out without fear or retribution (until recently!).

Our image: on the whole, older & intellectual, our age reflecting the generation influenced by Vatican II, which was, largely, ignored in Scotland. The majority of the circle's membership is drawn from those who attend the Dominican Catholic Chaplaincy. A significant number of Newman members were not raised in the Scottish Catholic Church.

Over the past decade, one or two doughty members who have carried on providing many stimulating and interesting meetings have kept the Edinburgh Newman in existence, but the Circle hasn't attracted enough new members to maintain a viable organization i.e. providing a committee and spreading the workload.

The controversy in 2014 with the Archbishop, the CDF and the ban on Tina Beattie coming to speak at future meetings has been a shocking and challenging experience for Edinburgh members. Interestingly, the membership has just about doubled in the wake of this difficulty.

The present Chair and Secretary of the Circle offered to stand for office to make certain that the Newman in Edinburgh would survive and, hopefully, thrive in these succeeding years. We both shared an appreciation of the Newman and its importance as a lay organization that is unique in the Catholic Church. The Circle now has a full committee, a complete change of office bearers and a printed programme for the coming year. After a two-year stint in office we intend to stand down. Hopefully, there will be other younger members willing to continue the task.

Although the Archbishop is one of our speakers for the coming term, we are aware that the issue is not yet resolved and we hope to work our way to a resolution when he has met us.

The programme is constructed to be of topical interest and relevance to members and to attract new audiences.

Contentious issues should be aired and faced in honest discussion. However this position does not meet with universal support among clergy or laity here. There is some suspicion of the Newman. The Circle was described recently by a senior member of the diocesan clergy as "that bunch of Edinburgh liberals". Do other circles face the same problem?

As a Circle we have always been ecumenical and members feel quite strongly that Christians should be admitted to full membership. However the Circle agreed it was important that the Newman is seen as an organization of Catholic Laity that is integral to the Catholic Church. We could think of no other lay organization which duplicates the role of the Association. However it was pointed out that there could be constitutional issues if full members cannot be Office bearers. We could and should pursue closer ecumenical links.

We recognized that we need better publicity and personal contacts in the parishes to let people know of our meetings because we need to increase numbers coming along and an increase in membership.

We could see the sense in taking a more active role in the parishes along the lines of adult formation as indeed we could consider contacts with schools but we would need more members and much more energy than we currently possess as a circle. Some of us were involved in such an initiative in the late seventies which went wrong and added to suspicion about the Newman Circle.

It was observed that as a circle we have no chaplain and we do not pray or have Mass together.

Suggestion of more internal meetings, even a luncheon club where we could discuss over a meal.

Campaigning role not discussed - though there could be a role here on behalf of an intelligent laity faced with excessive clericalism.

Evangelisation? We're not sure about this. We see our role as Newman members to provide opportunities for people to grow in faith and understanding. Rather than being missionaries we provide witness to Christ by the example of our lives and actions.

Role of HQ and contact with other Circles.

- Subscription money essential for viability of Circle at its current size.
- Could HQ be more of a resource? Eg. Framework for an annual programme or posters. What do other Circles do? Can we share examples /ideas in some kind of forum (online?)
- Payment and arrangements for speakers?
- Admission charges for members/non-members?
- Can Circle Secs please be notified of new members as they join?