

## **Glasgow Newman Circle Commentary** **on Draft Document for Leeds Assembly**

This sequence of notes presents a synthesis of the views of those members who responded to/discussed the Draft Document as circulated in May of this year.

1. There was significant concern that, despite recognition of issues worthy of address, the title chosen was of a disturbingly negative character.
2. Fundamental to any discussion is a recognition of the history of the Association – the reasons for its emergence in the 1940's and the objective(s) it set itself.

Within the Association's guide "Towards Better Practice" and in the Memorandum and Articles of Association it is clearly stated - "To further the mission to the world of the Christian religion *with particular reference to the Roman Catholic Church* (my italics) and in the light and life and work of the Blessed John Henry Newman, by promoting greater understanding of the Christian faith and the application of its principles to the contemporary world".

It is our view that this objective remains as valid as ever. It should not be abandoned and ought not to be diluted by other activities which, however worthy, may be better pursued by other relevant groups.

3. From a local perspective, if we have 35 + members and sustain regular attendances at meetings in excess of 30 (with figures approaching 90 for some selected speakers) we consider that, as long as members subscribe and attend, the Newman Association should continue and is "worth saving".
4. **Observations on specific sections of the Draft Document.**

**a) Introduction** – The identification of reliance on a small number of committed activists in Circles is little different from the experience of many, if not most sizeable national organisations of long-standing.

### **b) Aims and Objectives**

i) Survival. See 3 above.

ii) Role in Parishes

Although individual circles may have a base in a parish, the Association is, by virtue of its constitution and objective not a parish organisation.

iii) Evangelisation

Evangelisation is a task for the whole Church and all its members. The role of the Association is in the development of understanding the faith, a core requirement for effective evangelisation.

iv) Relationship between Circles and Council

If there is a significant problem here, the details should have been specified and circulated for prior discussion.

v) Opportunities for networking etc.

This seems a reasonable area for discussion.

### **c) Circle Matters**

Programme decision making. The primary requirement must be to meet the constitutional objective of promoting the understanding of the faith. This can be interpreted fairly widely, but must also take into account audience appeal, speaker quality and availability and consequent costs.

Attracting new members. This will generally be by suggestion/invitation. However, the best opportunities for such recruitment are likely to relate to larger audiences and, therefore, speakers of higher quality and/or higher public profile.

Contentious issues and membership. Increase in membership is not an end in itself. The primary constitutional objective is paramount. This may mean that contentious issues will be addressed but it would be a betrayal of purpose to seek out such issues simply to gain an audience or membership.

#### Circles Ecumenical?

Ecumenism is not a specific objective of the Association. The actions of individual members in this respect will, however, be driven by improved understanding of ecumenical principles and ideals. Ecumenism will nevertheless be promoted through relevant quality presentations from speakers of other denominations and religions (or even none). Moreover, in efforts to promote the Catholic viewpoint on specific moral issues, it is appropriate to try to understand why others have a differing view point so that the case for orthodoxy can be better presented.

#### **d) Financial Affairs**

These are legitimate questions, but each is possibly better dealt with by canvassing the views of the whole membership in one or more questionnaires.

The current system for financial allocation to circles is probably appropriate in principle although precise ideal balances may be open to debate. There should moreover, be clear confirmation, in an adequately disseminated document, of the willingness of the centre/Council to underwrite the excess costs of quality presentations from high profile speakers for special events.

#### **e) Bigger Picture etc.**

Targetting the young should not be a primary concern although it is a legitimate topic for further discussion -this issue transcends the Newman's problems to involve the whole church and other "traditional" institutions.

Evangelisation has already been addressed (4 b.iii)

Campaigning for what?

Stay as a Catholic organisation? If it doesn't, it betrays its purpose.

Close down? To what specific end? What new interdenominational Association is envisaged? A clearly defined objective would be required and can you guarantee retention of existing membership?

#### **Postscript**

In recognising the stimuli for the Draft document it is clear that many of the problems faced by the Association are a product of change in the social, educational and clerical environment and, for the most part such changes were and will remain outwith the direct control of the organisation. It remains, however a matter of some regret that in some ecclesiastical circles, the Association is viewed with, at best, suspicion leading to a breakdown of co-operation. It should be clear that if the Association abides by its primary objective it is fully loyal to the Church and its hierarchy. Nonetheless, in fulfilling its objective it may have to confront "difficult" issues. In this context, the support of, and true dialogue with senior clergy would be of enormous benefit to both the Association and the mission of the Church.