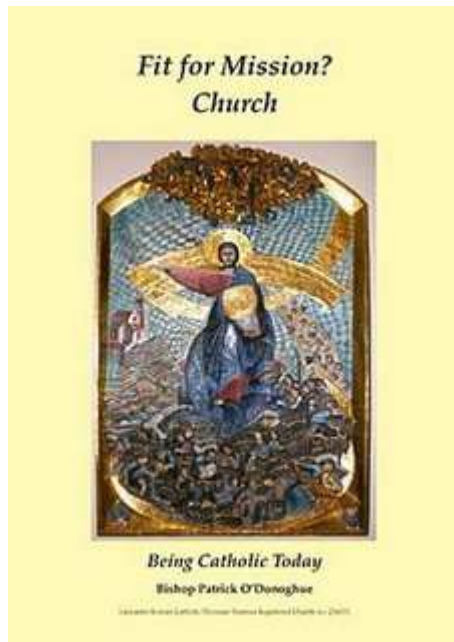


Talk to Oxford Newman Society



Reading your promotion of my talk on your website I know you would like me to talk about the following two questions:

1. **‘What motivated me to write *Fit for Mission? Church*?’**
 2. **How I think the Church should respond to the areas I have highlighted as needing further work?**
- Both are good questions which provide me with plenty of interesting things to talk about. However, would you mind if I slightly rephrase the second question to be **‘How do I**

think you should respond to the areas I have highlighted as needing further work?

- Sometimes when the word ‘Church’ is used we can forget it refers to us, as members of the People of God, as individuals baptised into Christ’s dignity and power as priest, prophet and king.
- It’s easy to assume that the Church is the ‘institution’, and sometimes it is necessary to talk about the institution, but tonight I want to talk about the Church as ‘us’ here in this room, as well as the Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, and the laity.

I’d like to begin answering your questions by reading a familiar extract from Cardinal Newman’s famous homily, *The Second Spring*:

“It is not God’s way that great blessings should descend without the sacrifice of great sufferings. If the truth is to be spread to any wide extent among this people, how can we dream, how can we hope, that trial and trouble shall not accompany its going forth?”

Here, Cardinal Newman touches upon the four motives that inspired me to write *Fit for Mission? Church*, and *Fit for Mission? Schools*. These are more than catchy titles – the material within has caused a stir throughout the country and indeed in many lands.

My four motives are as follows:

1. My desire to celebrate the great blessings we all receive through the Church in countless different ways. And especially through the Church we know with certainty that we have a wonderful destiny – to participate in the life and love of God eternally.
2. To openly and honestly acknowledge as a Bishop the trials and challenges facing us all in the Church in England and Wales, and indeed throughout much of the West.
3. To make clear the need for us all – bishops, clergy, religious and laity – to re-embrace sacrifice as the hallmark of Catholic life, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. This entails the following aspects:
 - Courage in facing sin, opposition and evil in society, government, and the way many of us live as Catholics,
 - Obedience to the Pope and teachings of the Church,
 - A sense of duty to God and neighbour, particularly the poor and marginalised – there's a lot of brokenness in our society.
 - Humility before the truth of Scripture and Tradition.
 - A renewed sense that our lives and spirituality must be rooted in Christ's sacrifice made present in the Mass – after all we glory in the Joy of Cross!
4. My passion is that – as Cardinal Newman puts it – the truth is spread to a wide extent among this people of Great Britain. What is profoundly engaging here is that you and I are involved in the work and mission of Christ.

Let's look more closely at these four motives:

1. The desire to celebrate the great blessings we all receive through the Church.



- Last Sunday we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Blessed Pope John XIII convening the Second Vatican Council. As I wrote in this week's *Catholic Herald*, the documents of Vatican II are the *Magna Carta* of the Holy Spirit for this generation of Catholics.
- Pope John XXIII firmly believed that he called the Council as a direct inspiration of the Lord. I believe that God, in His provident and merciful care of the Church knew the apostasy and suffering, humanity was about to endure in the late 20th and 21st centuries.
- Through the Second Vatican Council He has given us the graces and tools to face the challenges. It's now up to us to fully embrace the 'true' teaching and decisions of the Council, and abandon the 'fictions' foisted on us by some clergy, religious and laity who are disobedient and arrogant in their will-to-power. So, I am calling for an enquiring fidelity to the teaching of the Council.

- For me personally, it has been a great joy to participate in a Church that has left behind the ghetto and the siege mentality, to go out into the world to proclaim the liberating power of Christ's Gospel, witnessed in the renewal of the liturgy, the growing centrality of the Word of God, the development of lay ministry and the pace change in our commitment to social justice. It is my joy to belong to a Church that craves for unity, a unity that Christ prayed for. First, unity between all believers, and then unity between all peoples.

2. To openly and honestly acknowledge as a Bishop the trials and troubles facing us all in the Church in England and Wales.

- Good Pope John's purpose for the Council was to guard and better present the 'precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will'.
- Looking around at the pathetic situation of catechetics in this country, and the extent of ignorance and apostasy among generations of Catholics since the Council, we have to ask ourselves, 'Why has Pope John's vision for the Council not been realised in this country?'
- Finding answers to this question is the driving force behind both *Fit for Mission? Schools* and *Fit for Mission? Church*.
- One conclusion I've come to is that, simply put, I am convinced that we will only experience the full renewal heralded by Vatican II when Catholics – particularly in positions of leadership in schools, seminaries, parishes, and dioceses – no longer place obstacles in the way of the

authentic implementation of the Council but positively engage with it.

- Why for instance, are some Catholic education authorities, even bishops in this country, so fearful of *Fit for Mission Schools*? After all, it only re-iterates the teaching of the Church and it has been widely and publically welcomed by the Vatican and many bishops, clergy and laity around the world?
- In *Fit for Mission? Schools* and *Fit for Mission? Church I* have sought to identify the obstacles that have blocked the true vision and grace of the Council. Let me briefly list what has got in the way and continues to do so:
- **Rejection of the past.** Many Catholics in this country have interpreted the Council as signalling a wholesale rejection of aspects of the Church's identity, out of a desire to be open to modernity. Pope Benedict XVI puts it this way:
- '[This] self-tormenting rejection of the past produced the concept of the zero hour in which everything would begin again...' (Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, p. 372).
- We have seen the diminishment of the Catholic understanding of sin, man's need for redemption, the sacrificial nature of the Mass. Correspondingly, we have witnessed the virtual abandonment of Confession, the marginalisation of devotion to Mary, the intercessions of the saints, and adoration of the Blessed sacrament. I'm glad to tell you, however, that many parishes and communities have adoration. (Cf. Cenacolo – Visit to Saluzzo.)

- **Rejection of the moral authority of Church in favour of the authority of conscience.** A wide-spread caricature of the Council's *Decree on Religious Freedom* has resulted in many Catholics holding that if – in conscience – they disagree with any teaching of the Church then they have the freedom – even the duty – to reject that teaching. For many, the authority of the autonomous conscience has overthrown the authority of Christ given to Peter and the Apostles.
- Catholics have forgotten that a conscience ill-informed about the divine law and natural law has a predisposition to make errors of judgement, due to being easily swayed by passion and self-interest, and weakened by habitual sin.
- As a consequence for some Catholics the objective authority of the Church's doctrine, morality and discipline has been replaced by a subjective, personal judgement of the so called 'pick and mix' generation of Catholics.
- In some circles the infallibility of the Pope has been replaced by the infallibility of individual conscience.
- **Influence of secularism in the Church.** Rejecting much that is essential to Catholic faith and practice, relentlessly criticising the Church's past, placing their own judgement above the authority of the Church, these 'Catholics' advocate, and import into the Church, what the secular world holds up as 'good' as being in keeping with the 'tolerance' and 'compassion' of Jesus – divorce,

contraception, abortion, IVF, homosexual acts/unions, embryonic stem cell research.

- They also attempt to impose a political model of decision-making on the Church, misusing the term '*Sensus fidelium*' to mean the democratic rule of the majority. The unspoken assumption is that the Church develops doctrine like a secular government, through lobbying, protest, and pressure groups.
- This is a travesty of *Lumen Gentium*'s understanding of how the 'sense of faith' operates (LG 12): It always operates under 'the guidance of the sacred teaching authority', and never apart from or contrary to it.
- **Scepticism or at least down playing of the supernatural.** Hand in hand with the infiltration of secularism into the Church, the secular mindset has gained a foothold in the lives of many Catholics, clergy and laity. This is characterised by a certain scepticism or embarrassed reserve about the supernatural dimension of the Faith. Some central aspects have been abandoned as superstitious relics, such as the Church's teaching on Angels and demons, even though they play such an important role in the Gospel.
- The supernatural dimension of Jesus' identity and role has been eclipsed on occasions by an emphasis on His humanity, emphasising His role as a great moral teacher. The trouble with this is that once you downplay the Incarnation, His self-consciousness of being God, the atonement, it's an easy step to portray Jesus as just one

great moral teacher among the other moral teachers of the world religions.

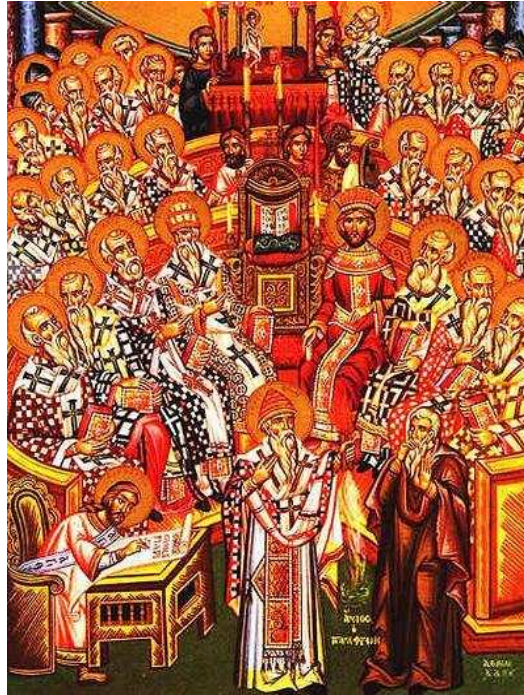
- Where we find this secular humanism, we see essential doctrines of the Church downplayed or ignored, explaining the ease with which teaching the Trinity, the Real Presence, the Immaculate Conception, the sacrificial nature of the Mass are dropped. These bedrocks of the faith are either ignored or passed over quickly as unintelligible, irrelevant to our young people.
- **Humanity becomes the measure of everything.** For all the above reasons, many Catholics are not able to get beyond the human in their understanding and practice of the Faith. We have the community Mass, whose sole function is to build up the sense of community solidarity. We have clergy and laity criticising the Church as if she were only a human institution, not one that originates in the divine will, we have theologians arguing that Jesus' claims to divinity are only the product of second century Christians, we have Christianity reduced to an agency for the social betterment of mankind.

3. To make clear the need for us all – bishops, clergy, religious and laity – to re-embrace sacrifice as the hallmark of Catholic life.

- I am convinced that the remedy for all these trials and troubles in the Church in England and Wales is for each one of us to embrace sacrifice as the hallmark of our lives in the world and in the church, the hallmark of our

spirituality. In Christ, we come to resurrection, new life, through the Cross.

- I want to propose to all of you here tonight the following acts of sacrifice to counter the trials and troubles I have just outlined to you.
- **Embrace the Tradition of the Church.** To counter the rejection of the past, I want you to sacrifice the modern compulsion for novelty and fashion through embracing the Tradition of the Church, which is nothing more than the source of God's revelation, along with Scripture.
- I want you to re-discover the joys and beauty of personal prayer, as well as family and community prayer. Also, to re-discover liturgical prayer, to counter an undue focus on our own human activity. So often the sacred is swamped by the volume of words, noise and activity!
- I want you to re-discover the devotions of the Church, such as praying the rosary, the Stations of the Cross, Benediction. I want you to embrace the discipline of praying the daily Office of the Church; the practice of regular confession. The Holy Father goes every week, so why not us also. I want you to know the four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Council inside out, start with the wonderful Constitution on revelation, *Dei Verbum*.



- **Embrace a self-critical conscience:** To counter the rejection of the authority of the Church, I want you to sacrifice the notion that ‘if it feels OK, and it doesn’t seemingly harm anyone else, it’s morally right to do’.
- I want you to re-discover the ancient Catholic attitude of a self-critical conscience that includes suspicion about the obsessions and cravings of human nature. Notice I say, ‘obsessions and cravings’. Of course, there are good and natural human desires, like the desire for trust and commitment in sexual love that can only come through life-long commitment in marriage that is open to life.
- But so much that is held up nowadays as harmless and ‘good’ is really unbalanced and distorted, such as pornography, lap dancing, homosexuality, so called ‘comfort’ sex between friends. Obsession and craving are at the heart of this unbalanced and dehumanising behaviour.
- **Embrace obedience to the teachings of the Church.** To counter the infiltration of secular ideas such as relativism,

utilitarianism, and hedonism into the Church, sacrifice the automatic assumption that your ideas about doctrine and morals must be right, and the Church's 2,000 years reflection on God's revelation must be wrong.

- I want you to take a leap of faith, based on trust in the person of Jesus Christ, and start from the assumption that the Church has good reasons for teaching the doctrines and morals that she teaches. Search out those reasons, make the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church the most thumbed and creased books in your libraries. Go, read the Fathers of the Church and St Thomas Aquinas' *Summaes*, with a good guide. Go, study the books and homilies of Pope Benedict XVI, and other good Catholic literature.



- And if you hear any Catholic say or teach something that goes against the teaching and discipline of the Church, as safe-guarded by the Pope, politely, but firmly, challenge them, be they a lay catechist, teacher, deacon, priest or even a bishop.

- **Embrace the total Catholic world view.** To counter the modern embarrassment about the supernatural and the sacred, sacrifice the comfort of silence and conformity, sacrifice the safety of mental reservation and secular ‘commonsense, and accept the fullness of God’s word in revelation which speaks of a reality beyond sense-data.
- I want you to take seriously the Church’s teaching – based on revelation – that you have a totally unique, immortal soul directly created by God, that when you die you will experience purgatory, and heaven, or hell. I want you to take seriously – because Jesus did – the reality of angels and demons, but do it lightly, not in an obsessive way. I want you to pray to the saints and pray for the souls in purgatory. I want you to deepen your adoration and love of Jesus really, truly and substantially present in the Blessed Sacrament.
- Why is it important to take the supernatural seriously? Because we are like amphibians, made of body and soul and meant to live both in the material world and in the spiritual world. If you ignore either world, you miss the whole point of human existence.
- To deepen your appreciation and experience of the supernatural, go on retreat, go on pilgrimage to holy sites in this country and around the world, and you will gradually become more attuned to this dimension of reality. Experience God among the hills and lakes, in the forests and fields – nature too, can help to lead us to God.
- **Embrace the divinity and humanity of Jesus.** To counter making humanity the measure of everything, sacrifice the attitude that your limited experience of being

human is the rule against which to measure everything. There is only one human being who knows and shows what it means to be truly human, and that person is Jesus Christ, both God and man.

- I want you to reject that wrong-headed view that dominates academic theology and New Testament studies that Jesus did not know himself to be divine, the incarnate Son of God. I want you to read Pope Benedict's book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, and the work of scholars that are rejecting that the New Testament claims about the divinity of Christ are 'holy fictions' created by second generation Christians. Nothing can be so destructive of faith than this unfounded and speculative heresy.
- Pray and study the Scriptures, study good Catholic commentaries and literature, go to Mass regularly, study the account of Jesus in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and Jesus will grow clearer and more present in your life.

4. A passion that – as Cardinal Newman puts it – the truth is spread to a wide extent among this people of Great Britain.

Finally, I would like to read you another quote, because it touches on a dimension of Christian life that is very dear to my heart, and the heart of my documents – our call to mission.

'That we preach Jesus without preaching, not by words but by our example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do, the evident fullness of love our hearts bear to You, Lord'.

These wise words of Cardinal Newman remind me of similar words spoken by that great missionary of the 20th century, Blessed Charles de Foucauld,

‘That we learn that it is possible to do good to men without using words, without preaching, without fuss, but by silence, devotion, poverty, humility and obscurity’.

It is a sad truth that many people are so alienated from the Church, the language of the Bible, and their need for salvation, that they are either indifferent or violently allergic to Christianity. Also, it is heart-breaking to admit that the behaviour of some Catholics, such as paedophile priests and the failure of some in authority in the Church, has damaged the credibility of the Church.

I am convinced that in order to evangelise this generation we must follow the advice of Newman and de Foucauld and concentrate our missionary efforts on showing the unconditional love of Christ for suffering humanity through practical acts of justice and peace. In particular, we must act in solidarity with the poor and all those on the margins of society, migrants, drug addicts, alcoholics, men and women in the sex industry, those suffering mental illness.

We must do this without any ulterior motives, such as seeking converts. We must only undertake this work to show them the love of Jesus Christ.

It is only when or if they ask us why we do this work, that we can gently begin to talk to them about Jesus, and only at the

pace that they want. If they reject Jesus, but accept His practical love through our actions, we must be content with that.

I want to address my final words to the students who are here tonight – when you have completed your studies and entered upon your chosen professions, be it medicine, politics, law, science, education, business, or whatever, I encourage you to continue witnessing to the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church, prayer and the regular celebration of Mass.

There is an urgent need for professional bodies to truly hear the ethical teaching of the Church, such as business ethics based on our social teaching or medical ethics based on natural law. All of you will have the opportunity to shape the future moral ethos of our country; I encourage you to seize that opportunity whenever it presents itself, with the grace of God.

Let's finish by listening to the Word of God, the source of our hope for a holier Church, a fairer society, a better world:

'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.' (*John 20: 30-31*).

May all of us be so changed by God's revelation, in word and deed, in Scripture and Tradition, that we daily have a deeper faith in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. And so believing may we enjoy an immeasurably rich life as Catholics living in His name. Amen.

+Patrick O'Donoghue, Bishop of Lancaster