

INTRODUCTION TO ‘THE SECOND SPRING’ – SUMMARY

Dr Andrew Nash explained the historical background to Newman’s famous sermon, ‘The Second Spring’. In 1850 there was a wave of anti-Catholic agitation across England in response to the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy for the first time since the Reformation. The new hierarchy met two years later in the chapel of Oscott College for their first synod at which Newman preached ‘The Second Spring’. Newman describes how, while nature renews itself, all human institutions have their time of flourishing and then come to an end. The Catholic Church in England had been destroyed at the Reformation, and everyone assumed it was dead. But now the Church had come miraculously back to life. After the dead years of winter, there was now a Second Spring. Using images from Scripture, Newman speaks lyrically of this re-born Church, but he warns that it may provoke a reaction from the hostile world and that persecution may lie ahead.

Dr Nash went on to ask whether Newman’s vision of a Second Spring for the Church actually came to reality and concluded that it did, with the Church growing in numbers and Catholics coming to play a part in wider society. But sadly this growth came to an end in the mid-twentieth century, and since then there has been continuous decline. Newman predicted and influenced the Second Vatican Council but also said that periods of turmoil often followed Councils. But Dr Nash saw signs of hope in the recent enrichment of Catholic congregations by the arrival of Catholics from other countries where the Church is stronger. He also argued, following Newman expert Ian Ker, that the New Movements of recent decades are a fulfilment Newman’s theology of the Church. He concluded that ‘The Second Spring’ reminds us of the Church’s capacity for renewal.