St Paul's: renewed mission

A crucial question about St Paul's Cathedral in London (“A place to talk”, 5 November) is whether it is a place of mission or maintenance. Churches of mission are involved in the community where they exist. They contribute positively and their absence would severely detract from that community. They live out the teachings of the Church.

Churches of maintenance merely exist in physical form, going through the motions, with a fixation on ritual. They are concerned with sustaining their own fiefdoms financially. The absence of such churches would barely be noticed in the wider community. The events of recent weeks, where the cathedral authorities have virtually turned 360 degrees from seeking legal powers to remove the protesters to embracing the protest and its aims, suggest it has moved from maintenance to rediscover mission. This must be welcome.

However, there is still something profoundly disturbing, when one stands at the doorway of St Paul's listening to the click click of the turnstile as people pay to enter. So maybe the question now should be: would Jesus expect to pay to enter St Paul's?

Paul Donovan
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Cardinal Pell and climate change

It is unfortunate that Cardinal George Pell (“Cautious words in a climate of fear”, 5 November) sees his ministry as including denial of evidence of human-induced climate change as provided by the most reputable contemporary scientists. Australians are per capita world-class CO2 emitters especially through air miles and coal. Presumably the cardinal thinks his trip “really necessary” as if we had no indigenous neo-liberal deniers of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change evidence. Unfortunately we do. Cardinal Pell notwithstanding, the scientists may be right.

(Dr) Edward P. Echlin
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Rarely when I read an article do I want to stand and cheer in downright admiration. Yet that was exactly how I felt after reading the Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney George Pell’s words on climate change. Here was a prominent Catholic more than willing to face up to the climate-change bully boys with measured and powerful words that resonated with me and I am sure with many others who have always harboured severe doubts about the climate change “movement”.

He reminded me so much of another cardinal who dared challenge convention. Cardinal Newman would have been proud of him: I can offer no greater compliment.

Alexander McKay
Edinburgh

For any reader confused or seduced by Cardinal Pell’s arguments, the Royal Society last year published a helpful objective guide. “Climate Change: a summary of the science” highlights the areas where the science is well established, those where there is still some debate, and those where substantial uncertainties remain. The overwhelming weight of disinterested science points to human activity as the cause of warming over the last half century. In these circumstances, the best application of the “medieval virtue of prudence” is to note the evidence, and exercise caution in managing the risks.

Mary Colwell (“Cardinal, put down your sword”, 5 November) is also right, however, to shift the emphasis on to wider environmental concerns. Has the cardinal failed to notice the degraded coral reefs, or collapsed fisheries, the drastic losses of biodiversity – let alone the ugly wars sparked by our oil dependence? So far as we know, we may already have passed the peak of the more easily available oil. It is in any case inefficient (and ungrateful) to burn up every year a gift of geological time that accreted over millions of years. So, even leaving aside the question of climate change, we have no choice but to switch to renewables. That switch is only to our advantage: every action we take towards reducing CO2 brings other benefits along the way. Clean technologies offer fresh air, healthier cities, the opportunity to be more resilient and self-sufficient in energy or food, besides vast scope for employment in the emerging “circular” economic models that will nurture natural capital. It is a puzzle to know why Cardinal Pell only fears the costs, and doubts the rewards which are staring us in the face.

John Merivale
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Help for paedophile offenders

Terry Philpot (“Wider circle”, 5 November) made me wonder if there were any clerical circles of support and accountability in Great Britain to help ex-offenders avoid committing further paedophile offences. And would they have the support of the hierarchy and religious superiors as well as the Catholic community at large? It is a question I have asked myself often in the light of the clerical abuse scandal; can we be there as Church for those priests and Religious who have abused children? Is conversion of life under grace really possible? Do we really believe in the “transformation of persons”, as Rowan Williams describes “the heart of forgiveness”? Is there any significant help not only from contemporary psychology but also from prayer and loving community where redemption is always possible? Or do we deep down believe that nothing can be done for them within the church structures that would be effective and that their condition is intractable and nothing less than a fast-tracking out of priesthood is the answer? I wonder if we really could breathe more easily believing that they are no longer our liability even though some of them might have been with us in formation from as young as 11.

(Fr) John Michael Hanvey
Blackburn, Lancashire

Mission of Catholic schools

Referring to Fr Ashley Beck’s suggestion that actual conversions might be one pertinent way of assessing the “mission and evangelisation” of Catholic schools (Letters, 22 October), John Harris asks, “Would Fr Beck apply this criterion to all missionary work, I wonder?” (Letters, 5 November). While I cannot speak for my colleague – and fellow convert – Fr Beck, that strikes me, at least, as being a not at all unreasonable suggestion.

Stephen Bullivant
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Translation errors

Canon Alan Griffiths (Letters, 5 November) was not the only one who, upon first reading the new English version of the Prayer after Communion for the First Sunday of Advent, thought that it meant the “passing things” among which we “walk” can teach us to “love the things of heaven”.

On the Roman Missal, Third Edition website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the official “commentary” on this prayer presumes, as grammatical usage would indicate, that the antecedent of “them” in the fifth line is “passing things” in the previous line, and not “myries” in the first line. The commentator than weaves an entire spirituality from that erroneous translation: “As we prepare to return to our daily lives, our journey is described as a walk among passing things. Even passing things, however, are useful for divine instruction by which we learn to distinguish between passing things and what endures. Once we have learned to distinguish between them, we learn to love the things of
heaven and to hold fast to what endures ... The prayer does not say that we reject passing things nor does it describe things of this world in a negative light. Rather, the eucharistic bread and wine we share, these are the enduring things of heaven, the body and blood of Christ.

The Prayer over the Offerings for this same Sunday contains another "glaring howler," as Griffiths referred to the Prayer after Communion. The Latin text parallels our temporal offering with God's gift of eternal redemption: "quod nostrae devotioni concedis effici temporali, tuae nobis fiat praemium redemptionis aeternae."

The Vatican instruction on liturgical translations (Liturgiam Authenticam) instructs translators to preserve these parallels. Such a translation would read: "as the fruit of our temporal offering grant us the reward of your eternal redemption." But the new English translation says: "may what you grant us to celebrate devoutly here below, gain for us the prize of eternal redemption." The infelicitous, indeed slightly colloquial "here below" hardly parallels "eternal". And one should note that God has disappeared from the last line: "your eternal redemption" in Latin.

As Canon Griffiths said of the Prayer after Communion: "This prayer comes right at the beginning of the liturgical cycle. What a way to start." I would add: how many more "glaring howlers" does this translation contain?

Chris Grady
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I was on the phone last night to my son, a teacher, who told me that he had been to Mass last weekend - only an occasional activity, I'm afraid. He said, "What on earth have they done to the Mass?" Of course we know what they have done. For myself, I remain quietly angry about its practices in Peru but started from my own agonising experience as a teenager 60 years ago in Hampstead, London. There, I was invited to join the organisation but to keep that secret from my ailing parents: had I done so, I would have sharply increased the unhappiness of their marriage already under very considerable strain.

Hugh O'Shaughnessy
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Flying fish

Notebook (5 November) carried another item about the intrusiveness of Westminster Archdiocese over abstaining from meat on Fridays. Those of us who are golden oldies and who can remember the pre-Vatican II days when the second commandment of the Church was observed also know that travellers were dispensed from abstaining.

Not only that, but the British Airways flight from Tel Aviv to London will not be over England and Wales when a meal will be served - the remit of the English and Welsh hierarchy only starts at Dover. The British Airways passengers are exempt from abstaining in two grounds - travelling and being outside the remit of the English and Welsh hierarchy until they cross the English Channel.

During the Second World War, those who worked in London, Liverpool and York would happily cross the Rivers Thames, Mersey and Ouse on a Friday carrying their meat sandwiches for lunch to eat them in the neighbouring diocese where the remit of the diocese in which they worked did not apply. Do the countries over which the British Airways flight from Tel Aviv to London will fly still observe the second commandment of the Church? For this reason, Archbishop Nicholls when he was attending the meeting of the European hierarchies in Albania could have eaten meat in Albania without causing a contettemp.

It is interesting that in the catechesis on the revision of Friday abstinence, the English and Welsh hierarchy has mentioned nothing about the above two exceptions. Do they no longer apply? If so, should the golden oldies be reminded? (Fr) Gordon Beattie OSB
Parbold, Lancashire

Crucial caveat

I agree with the overarching thought of William Keegan, ("Capitalists at bay", 29 October), that the untrammeled greed of a significant number of key players in the international banking and economic sectors is an important contributing factor to the present financial woes of the millions of hardworking employed, the unemployed and the under-employed.

Keegan cites the concern of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace about the global influence of utilitarian thinking, namely, the principle of Bentham, “the greatest good for the greatest number", but Keegan omits the caveat of Bentham, “minus pain”. Herein, is the sin of the greedy bankers and economists.

(Fr) Stephen Giles MHM
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For more of your correspondence, go to the new Letters Extra section of The Tablet's expanded website: www.thetablet.co.uk

Winter and the geese circle the fields in hunching skeins, Everything asleep and buried, secret, Waiting for some silent voice to waken them once more.

There among the trees, low above the ground, The sun struggles to break through, Pale as a daffodil, frail and failing.

To keep believing is not easy, even in December With the child's clutter of star and donkey, gift and manger. The dark comes back, the long dark Searching lost through the fields. The night Starless and empty, just rivers full of gibberish, The morning hopeless, a grey sky low over a grey earth.

So was it just a story written long ago Lost in the telling? Yet why then did they carry it With such fire, dying to lions and the torment Of wheels and spikes? Why if all of it Was nothing more than stories? Will not Christ return?

Two thousand years have come and gone Yet will it happen on some late November night, A light among the trees when all the fields are flooded;

Something to go and seek and find Alone, that happens just to those Who leave everything they have behind? Kenneth Steven "Believing" Etensong (SPCK, 2011)

“A friend”, says the Wise Man, “is the medicine of life.” Excellent, indeed, is that saying. For medicine is not powerful or more efficacious for our wounds in all our temporal needs than the possession of a friend who meets every misfortune joyfully, so that, as the Apostle says, shoulder to shoulder, they bear one another's burdens. Aelred of Rievaulx The Assurance of Hope (Continuum, 2006)