

Letters emails

❖ Your weekly comment and opinions forum

Letters should include a genuine postal or email address, phone number and the style or title of the writer. Email: letters@catholic Herald.co.uk
Due to space constraints, please keep correspondence below 250 words, longer letters may be published online



Britain's disgrace

SIR – Those not regretting the Dresden fire-storming in 1945 (Notebook, February 13) need only ask themselves why blameless innocent children deserved to be burned to ash.

While military targets are legitimate, the deliberate bombing of non-combatants is contrary to the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war. Yet, despite available military targets, “Bomber” Harris diverted most of Britain’s bombers to do so, even illegally using phosphorus. Dresden sheltered 600,000 refugees swelling the population to 1.2 million. Such a departure from the laws of war had grave strategic, as well as humanitarian, consequences.

Captain Stephen Roskill RN, official Royal Navy historian, reckoned we nearly lost the Battle of the Atlantic, and Field Marshal Lord Slim feared permanent loss in Burma, both for lack of long-range bombers diverted to bomb civilians.

Professor Lord Blackett, scientific adviser to the Admiralty, said that this actually lengthened the war by as much as six months. The post-war Allied Strategic Bombing Survey proved Blackett largely correct. German war production was at its height during the period of Allied carpet-bombing.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was right to regret the Dresden bombing. It was a national disgrace.

Yours faithfully,
James Bogle
London EC4

A medieval model

SIR – We read daily of church closures because of the priest shortages. In my view, such strategies seem insensitive as they effectively state that the laity don’t count, only the presence of a priest in a parish.

But do parishes need resident priests? Surely the Eucharist is the source and summit of parish life, not a resident priest. Of

COMMENT OF THE WEEK

Why Catholic schools still distrust Ofsted

SIR – Sir Michael Wilshaw’s article on “faith schools” (Feature, February 13) attempts to reassure Catholics, but does not. The deep anxieties of many about the Ofsted interpretation of the law on “fundamental British values” are well founded. Confusing respect for persons with respect for cultures, he demands “a clear demonstration of open-mindedness and tolerance towards other cultures and beliefs”. All individuals without exception deserve respect as children of God. But that does not mean we have to respect everything they believe or do. That would be to accept our society as it stands and not act “as followers of Christ, [who] work with him to renew the face of the earth”, as the English and Welsh bishops urge us to do in their general election letter. It is also a recipe for the most stifling social conformity.

The statutory instrument enacting “fundamental British values” states it clearly: “mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”. Persons are to be respected, not their beliefs. Yet inspectors are told to trump this for “the complex, diverse society in which we now live”, so as to interrogate pupils on family structures and views on sexuality. Such ideological conformity is submission disguised as value. What matters is to learn about a virtuous way to value and respect persons. Authentic Christian formation actually gave rise originally to the values of liberty, grounded in our history of the struggles for religious freedom. It is all rooted in the view of each person as a child of God, with inalienable rights. *Dieu et mon droit*: a fully Christian concept. Our history teaches us more. *Nemo iudex in sua causa* is a maxim originally grounded in Magna Carta, that no one is a judge in their own cause. Yet Sir Michael sits in judgment on the conduct of his own inspectors before the House of Commons Education Committee. Surely this constitutes a conflict of interest. Natural law is the patrimony of parents so above all others they have the right to demand: where is the independent assessment of what Ofsted does? Who inspects the inspectors?

Yours faithfully,
Edmund Adamus
Director for Marriage & Family Life, Westminster diocese, London SW1
Edmund Matyjaszek
Principal, Priory School, Isle of Wight

course it would be preferable to have resident priests, but it is not the priest which gives the parish its *raison d’être*.

After having had the misfortune to live in two parishes which have closed, I recall well the profound sense of anger, betrayal and grief which led to loss of faith in some people. Others went to the nearer Anglican Church and many older people stopped attending due to accessibility issues. Indeed, I am convinced there are few better ways of destroying faith than closing churches.

Perhaps we could consider the

medieval parish clerk system whereby members of the laity were appointed to maintain the church, housing the Blessed Sacrament, which is the real heart of the community. Clearly it may be complex, but if we are faithful to the Gospel then we should look for constructive and dynamic alternatives to despair and decline.

Yours faithfully,
A Molloy
Manchester

SIR – I was appalled to read (Home news, February 27) that

Archbishop Cushley is closing two thirds of the parishes in the east of Scotland. Does he not realise the consequent loss of Catholic adherents? For most will feel very angry and isolated. It highlights a loss of spiritual and holistic thinking.

Yours faithfully,
Tom Baxter
Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire

Vanishing people

SIR – Joseph Seferta’s letter (February 27) makes one significant omission. Yes, the Islamic birth rate is high, but he doesn’t mention that the Christian or western European birthrate is very low. The whole of western Europe has accepted the contraceptive and abortion mentality, and the indigenous populations from Norway to Greece are failing to replace themselves. Only immigration has temporarily saved them from a demographic meltdown.

Two of the most nominally Catholic countries in the world, Spain and Italy, have two of the lowest birth rates in the world. Western Europe is reaping what it has sown, as our Lord warned.

Yours faithfully,
Robert Ian Williams
By email

Preaching like Jesus

SIR – Archbishop Arthur Roche urges preachers not to bore their flocks (Home news, February 20). Here at St Paul’s church, Haywards Heath, Fr Vladimir has the unusual ability to preach very good sermons by means of very simple stories. It reminds me how Jesus talked to the people in parables so that they understood the message He wished to convey. Fr Vladimir’s sermons are far from boring and he often makes the congregation laugh with his humour.

Yours faithfully,
Anita de Lacey
Burgess Hill, West Sussex