

A pastoral Pope?

If Robert Mickens is anywhere near the mark with his list of likely candidates to succeed Pope Benedict (“Conclave contenders”, 31 December 2011), the Church faces a bleak future. Only one of the eight cardinals he names has ever worked as a parish priest. Can we assume that the remaining seven have never listened to the story of a single mother or talked personally to a girl with an abortion in her past, sat at the bedside of dying sinners, heard the pleas of a divorced parishioner barred from the sacrament, felt the anger of women who see themselves as scorned by their Church, discovered the desperation of jobless, debt-laden families, observed the dismay of an elderly person when told their church will have to close?

Is it not time that a significant period of hands-on pastoral experience is required as an essential condition for higher ecclesiastical office?

Gerard Loughran

Newcastle upon Tyne

Just-war theory – how tenable?

Tina Beattie (“Unconscionable and unjustifiable”, 31 December 2011) tells us – on what evidence it is not clear – that “only a small minority of Catholics remains robustly committed to defending the just-war doctrine”, and that “no humanitarian can afford to support war today”. Certainly one would hope that no Catholic would support going to war until all other means have been exhausted, but she fails to answer the age-old pacifist dilemma of how to act when that point is reached. Should we ignore the threats and actions of those who would do us or others harm – from Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia in the recent past to future possible threats such as Iran or North Korea whatever the consequences: or are we content for the dirty work to be done by non-Catholics, enabling our hands to be kept clean – hardly a noble position?

William Furness

Glastonbury, Somerset

Tina Beattie may well be right about the shift in church thinking, but the just-war approach still has much to offer. It was never meant to be a means of legitimising war. The only “lawful authority”, in just-war terms, entitled to authorise military action today is the Security Council of the United Nations. The only exception is in a situation of immediate self-defence and only then until the Security Council has taken charge. The charter, signed in 1945, says that before any military action is agreed upon, all non-violent ways of settling disputes must have been explored and found wanting. This is no surprise. After all, the first aim of the United Nations is “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. Unhappily, the Security Council has been turned into an



The United Nations Security Council: the first aim of the UN is ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’. Photo: CNS

instrument for legitimising wars either already active or pre-planned. The Libyan regime-change air war is the latest example of this process.

Bruce Kent

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Pope Benedict XV may have been “a true and courageous prophet of peace who struggled strenuously and bravely, first to avert the drama of war and then to limit its terrible consequences”, but he was singularly unsuccessful in both ambitions. Sadly, the example of Hitler is relevant and in an imperfect world there have to be less than ideal solutions.

It is arguable that, for instance, Franklin Roosevelt’s creation of the United Nations, Jean Monnet’s vision of Franco-German amity, President Kennedy’s Nuclear Test Ban treaty or even 40 years of political/military containment of the USSR, which broke the back of the Soviet economy leading to the dissolution of the USSR and its empire, did more for world peace than the pious exhortations of unworldly religious leaders. Tina Beattie might even consider what would have happened in Libya in 2011 had Nato not intervened. The management of international affairs is a subtle and sophisticated art, which is why we have many politicians but few statesmen. Fine principles are all very well, but as the late Sir Isaiah Berlin commented: “The task of the wise was to undo the mistakes of the good.”

(Professor) John Kentleton

University of Liverpool

The Church in the high street

Abbot Christopher Jamison (31 December 2011) writes on the potential for the Catholic Church setting up shops offering youth employment opportunities. I have long thought that the Catholic Church in the UK has huge potential for much wider encouragement with social enterprise. It has the built assets required, often situated in excellent trading positions for maximum impact – a

nationwide network of buildings – churches and church halls which are often woefully underutilised. How many churches are now occupied only for a few hours one day a week? How many Catholic schools, despite various government initiatives, are in use for only eight hours a day on 192 days a year? It has access to skilled and experienced lay volunteers who could be galvanised into putting Catholic Social Teaching into practice within a structured environment. This is a huge opportunity for making a real difference, as the Church did in the recessions in the last two centuries. This is the way to evangelisation and engaging the young.

(Dr) Martin Price

Dinas Powys, Vale of Glamorgan

In the footsteps of Mary

Gratitude is due to Abigail Frymann for all the information she has given on the Israeli tourist office’s “Mary Trail” (“Checkpoints and churches”, 26 November 2011). But the tourist office’s appropriate point of beginning would surely be the Church of St Anne, in Jerusalem, between St Stephen’s Gate (or the Lions’ Gate) and the beginning of the Via Dolorosa. The fine Crusader church is built on the site traditionally associated with the house of Joachim and Anna, and so the place where Mary was conceived immaculate. This shrine has been entrusted to the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) since the time of their founder, Cardinal Lavignerie. In the grounds lie the remains of the probatic pool where Jesus cured the paralytic. This is not connected with Mary, but is well worth a visit.

(Archbishop) Michael L. Fitzgerald

Embassy of the Holy See, Cairo, Egypt

The heart’s a wonder

So Romanticism is alive and well at *The Tablet*. Having noted dutifully the themes in Archbishop Nichols’ *Tablet* lecture (“Formation of the human heart”, 29 October 2011), I nevertheless succumbed to a growing curiosity arising from his attribution of amazing qualities to the human heart. The archbishop, along with Pope Benedict, seems convinced that it can be “formed”, “nurtured”, “tutored” and “transformed”. It can also be “fashioned into a listening heart”, and can even talk – which explains how “heart speaks unto heart”. Accordingly, this conversational ability enables the human heart “to enter into a profound communication with God’s heart” and even “God opens his heart to us”.

We should not be surprised, therefore, that the archbishop also believes it can actually see – “may we keep the eyes of our heart upon this little baby” (Christmas message, 17/24 December 2011).

Talking, listening, learning, seeing – truly a remarkable organ. The truth is, of course, that since Harvey in the seventeenth century we know that the heart is a pump. It is not

the seat of the emotions. It is ironic that the “positivism” of science and reason are disparaged in the lecture. It may well be true that we cannot conduct religious conversations without using metaphor, but surely there is an obligation to do so prudently? Archbishop Nichols argues that “the fashioning of a listening heart is a crucial part of our desire to engage with society”. Maybe we should also avoid obscurantism.

Paul Burgess
Manchester

Not the language of the barbecue

I propose a competition to find the worst translation of a prayer in the New Missal over the Christmas period. The 23 December Prayer Over the Gifts might take some beating: “May this oblation, by which divine worship in its fullness has been inaugurated for us, be our perfect reconciliation with you, O Lord, that we may celebrate with minds made pure the Nativity of our Redeemer.”

There is no doubt that this is not the language of the barbecue so despised by Cardinal Pell for our liturgy, but then I wonder what language it is at all. Herewith the proposed translation of the 1998 Missal.

“Lord God, let the sacrifice you have given as the full expression of the Church’s worship establish us firmly in your peace, that we may celebrate with untroubled hearts the coming birth of our Saviour.” No “barbie language” this, just simple and elegant English!

(The Rev. Dr) Sean E. Hall
Washington, Tyne and Wear

How appropriate that as we celebrate Charles Dickens at 200 the Church should take us back to Dickensian language in the current translation of the Mass and embody some of Dickens’ characters. Is there not something of Miss Havisham in her living in the past decked out in the language of dusty, lacy cottas or perhaps of Uriah Heep in this new way of talking to God?

(Sr) Gillian Price

St Elizabeth’s Convent, Much Hadham, Hertfordshire

Editions of the new Missal

Following your report (News from Britain and Ireland, 3 December 2011) on the failure of the Catholic Truth Society (CTS) to meet the demand for the new Missal, Fr Beattie (Letters, 10 December 2011) asks whether the CTS, given its monopoly over the Missal, is contravening EU competition law. In its publication “Competing fairly”, the UK’s Office of Fair Trading does indeed list, inter alia, charging excessively high prices and limiting production as indicative of the abuse of a dominant position to restrict competition in a market. Perhaps of more concern to

English-speaking Catholics is the use of a dominant position apparently to restrict redemption. No longer do we say that the Holy Blood was “shed ... for all” but instead “poured out ... for many” while salvation remains “for us men”.

(Dr) Frederick Wheeler
Stockport, Greater Manchester

Too high a price

It was with dismay that I read that Opus Dei theologian Mgr Fernando Ocariz, negotiating with the dissident Society of St Pius X (SSPX), intimated that Rome is open to new interpretations of the Second Vatican Council (Church in the World, 10 December 2011). When does reform of the reform become outright refutation of the reform? Those eminent Council Fathers who struggled to usher in a new era of renewal against strong curial intransigence must surely be turning in their graves. It seems inconceivable that a relatively small group, one not known for past submission to the Magisterium, could wield such disproportionate influence in order that the Church might be able to portray an image of dubious unity. Past statements of the SSPX would indicate that any new-found compatibility must be seriously open to question. If the price we have to pay for such putative “unity” is a disavowal of what the council laboured so assiduously to enact, then that price is far too excessive.

(Fr) Bernard Moylan
Watsons Bay, New South Wales, Australia

Sistine online

Laura Gascoigne (31 December 2011) writes very interestingly on Michelangelo’s illustrations of Genesis 1-9 on the Sistine ceiling, telling us, too, where to stand to see them. But on the web you can move excellent images of the entire chapel around your screen simply by going to www.vatican.va/various/cappelle/sistina_vr

(Professor) David Luscombe
University of Sheffield

The prophecies of Malachy

Following Robert Mickens’ article on “Conclave contenders” (31 December 2011), it might be of interest that, according to the twelfth-century Irish mystic Bishop Malachy, (or a sixteenth-century forger!), the next Pope is to be the last and is “Peter the Roman”. The “tags” of Malachy have been remarkably accurate: “*De Labore Solis*” for John Paul II and “*De Medietate Lunae*” (“of the half-moon”) for his Pope-for- a-month predecessor. The present Pope is “*De Gloria Olivae*” – less obvious!

(The Revd Canon) Frank Pickard
Northampton

Water shortage

Peter Kemmis Betty’s letter (31 December 2011) regarding “personal preparatory rites” at the Offertory reminded me of the story of the young altar boy who forgot to fill the cruet with water before Mass. At the appropriate time he moved forward and said to the priest: “I’m sorry Father, but there’s no water to wash away your iniquities.”

Neil Tully
Flint, Flintshire



The living Spirit

We think of prayer as something we do for God whereas prayer is essentially a gift. Prayer is intimacy with God and it is God who offers this intimacy. We respond. There is only one Christian prayer and that is Jesus, the New and Eternal Covenant, the union in person of God and man. All Christian prayer is essentially through him, with him and in him. That we should pray is as much a command of the Lord as that we must love our neighbour. Further, our prayer must be “in my name”. “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name ... (John 16:23-24). The implications of this simple command are immeasurably profound. If we ponder it carefully, we shall see that it must eliminate any claim to a spiritual competence of our own and, consequently, remove the burden of anxiety we feel at our helplessness and incompetence – a “burden” that is not the Lord’s. The God revealed in Jesus is like a loving mother who, seeing her little one struggling to climb the stairs to reach her, runs down and lifts up the child to her heart ...

Sr Ruth Burrows OCD

Love Unknown
(Burns & Oates, an imprint of Continuum, 2011)

Who does not feel the need for a “star” to guide him on his earthly journey? Individuals and nations both feel the need. To satisfy the universal yearning for salvation, the Lord himself chose a people to be the guiding star for “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). With the Incarnation of his Son, God then expanded his choice to every people, no matter what their race or culture.

Pope John Paul II
Homily on the Epiphany, 2002

And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:16-17

Tomorrow is the Solemnity of the Epiphany and Monday is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

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