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Letters to the Editor

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ISTOCK

Triennium Funding, the Synod, and parish churches

From Mr John Brydon

Sir, — While the [Church Commissioners'](#) achieving a net return of 13.3 per cent on their investments in 2021 ([News, 13 May](#)) is very welcome,

less so are their spending plans that were announced after consultation with the [Archbishops' Council](#). These were widely publicised and commended by the two Archbishops. Time will tell whether the funds will be well spent as proposed and reach their various destinations, not least the parishes, especially the rural ones.

In his letter ([20 May](#)), Sam Margrave questioned the process whereby money is allocated and the fact that General Synod, thus far, has not been consulted. Responding ([Letters, 27 May/3 June](#)), the Secretary-General of the Archbishops' Council, William Nye, outlined the processes that had been gone through to arrive at the allocations.

He has, however, missed or chosen not to answer the fundamental point raised in Mr Margrave's original letter: i.e., to date the [General Synod](#) has not been consulted. As a new member joining last November, I have had no opportunity to



comment; nor has there been any discussion in the diocesan synod regarding the proposed spending. While Mr Nye indicates that there will be debate and questions during the July group of sessions, I understand that there is no actual vote, other than on the Archbishops' Council budget. This almost amounts to a *fait accompli*, given what has and will precede a vote. This is a great pity if, as I believe, and perhaps others may share my view, that, in the past, money has not been used as wisely as it should, nor directed to the right places.

Of course, you cannot have nearly 500 Synod members setting a budget; but you could give them the opportunity at an earlier meeting to put forward their thoughts and ideas. The Church Commissioners are, after all, responsible to the General Synod, among others, and I take this to mean not just a part of it.

To quote the Dalai Lama: lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.

JOHN BRYDON

General Synod member

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From Emma Robarts

Sir, — William Nye writes that it is now possible for the spending of the Church Commissioners' funds to be directed by the Triennium Funding Working Group. The First Church Estates Commissioner, Alan Smith, in the back-page interview ([27 May/3 June](#)), said: "Healthy parishes are the lifeblood of the Church of England; so, ensuring that parishes are properly equipped and resourced at a local level is central to what we do in the next triennium."

Considerable resources have been extracted from the parish system since 1976 to fund the current diocesan system. No wonder that so many parishes are struggling to continue their ministry. After the National Institutions Measure of 1998, which gave to the Archbishops' Council control of spending the funds produced by the Church Commissioners, one significant loss was the Commissioners' ability to

make direct grants to benefices.

Direct financial support to parishes would be much more efficient than using dioceses as middle men, for numerous reasons. Hard-pressed small and rural parishes may not have the human resources to apply well in a competitive grant process. Your [leader comment of 11 March](#) (“Jury still out on SDF strategy”) highlighted concerns about grabs for available resources by the powerful and about unfair “tradition bias”. The Government is making energy-bill discounts universal on the basis that it is cheaper not to have the layer of administration required for means-testing; why does the C of E maintain one head office and then replicate it with another 42 administrative offices around the country?

The dioceses are insufficiently accountable and, in some cases, inappropriately pressurising struggling parishes to pay parish share. You reported ([News, 11 February](#)) that the C of E’s paper *Bishops and their Ministry* revealed that 27 out of 42 of its dioceses were operating on deficit budgets (and suggested reducing them in number): how could it be financially responsible to hand failed organisations more large sums to manage?

I note the comments made by Mr Nye, and that the Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 2018 enabled the Church Commissioners to make grants to the Archbishops’ Council. So, I would like to request that the Archbishops’ Council resume the historic practice (of Queen Anne’s Bounty and the Church Commissioners) of supporting parishes directly. This would allow the “healthy parishes” that Mr Smith has promised to prioritise and would be of the greatest practical assistance to benefices seeking to grow their churches.

EMMA ROBARTS

The Old Vicarage

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From Mr Luke March

Sir, — The £3-billion investment by the Church Commissioners to support parish

programmes and to fund more clergy in frontline ministries, including chaplaincies, is welcome news.

As our *The House of Good* report confirmed, church buildings provide massive social support to people and communities throughout the UK in both urban and rural parishes. Thanks to the work of clergy and the support of volunteers, churches are a responsive network of social value and community care which helps to build stronger and more resilient communities.

Keeping church buildings open and in good repair is a costly business, however. Over the next five years, the Church of England has estimated that it faces a repair and maintenance bill for its parish churches of more than £1 billion.

Congregations remain key to raising funds to pay for repairs and maintenance of churches. But in many cases it is impossible for them to raise the money themselves.

The next few years will be make or break for many churches. To make sure as many as possible stay open and benefit our society, a co-ordinated approach to the funding of church buildings involving church leaders, heritage bodies and philanthropic funders is urgently needed.

For our part, in 2021 the [National Churches Trust](#) was able to provide funding of more than £5 million to help 304 church repair and maintenance projects and for the installation of community facilities such as lavatories and serveries. This funding included £3.5 million from the Government's Cultural Recovery Fund.

Investment in church buildings as a vital network of support for those in need is an essential step towards addressing inequality and improving the lives of millions of our fellow citizens.

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Suggestions for reforming English establishment

From Canon Nicholas Jowett

Sir, — The Revd Lucy Winkett ([Comment, 27 May/3 June](#)) rehearses the tired arguments against disestablishment, bringing very little fresh to the table and reminding us only how small has been the Church's real impact on political and social issues.

The Church of England could bring a new, creative impetus to the question, in these ways. First, it could agree a policy of calling for radical, democratic reform of a Second Chamber, with a majority of elected places.

Second, it could demand that *all* Christian denominations and faiths of any presence in this country be represented in the Upper House as part of the non-elected members.

Third, it could itself offer a range of lay and clerical experts in various fields to be its representatives in the House, thus freeing its bishops from their anachronistic burden there.

Fourth, it could make establishment actually work by instituting regular communication pathways from parish and diocesan level to its representatives in the Second Chamber, so that they could truly speak from the whole country.

In this way, the Church could get off the back foot and end a situation in which it appears to be clutching unjustifiable privileges and waiting defensively for a government to come along and decide to reform its historic status out of existence.

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Disparities in the treatment of asylum-seekers

From Liz Jones

Sir, — I have just returned from a short trip to unauthorised camps in Calais and Dunkirk, working with a charitable organisation to support the hundreds of asylum-seekers living there.

This is my second visit, and the first since Calais also became the temporary home of [refugees](#) from [Ukraine](#). These refugees were staying in the same hostel as my small team. I had taken with me donations from my church for both groups, which were urgently needed: thousands of teabags for those in the camps who have no running water, and rely on food and drink distributions from volunteers, and new towels for Ukrainians arriving in [France](#) with few possessions.

While I have deepest sympathy for the plight of the Ukrainian people, I could not help but be appalled by the difference in response to people who have the same shared experience of fleeing war-torn countries.

One group have a roof over their heads and three free meals a day. The other group are living in abject squalor. Along with their cup of tea, they are handed a pen to write the phone number of an emergency legal service on their arm for when they arrive in the UK, have their phone confiscated, and are issued with a letter saying that they will be deported to Rwanda.

This plan does indeed put “a stain on the reputation of our country” ([News, 20 May](#)).

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Signs of the times at Jubilee thanksgiving

From Mr Garry Humphreys

Sir, — How revealing — and telling — was the television coverage of the [Jubilee](#) service at [St Paul's](#): in the many shots of the congregation, the great and the good were clearly ill at ease. Unfamiliarity with the hymns and signs of incomprehension — perhaps even boredom — were apparent, with conversation during the anthems,

as if it were background music.

There were exceptions, of course; but the general impression was that the traditions with which those of us of a certain age were brought up, and which are deeply rooted in our psyche, are now alien to a significant segment of our society.

GARRY HUMPHREYS

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Calvin Robinson and the Church of England

From Mr Alan Bartley

Sir, — I was disappointed at Andrew Brown's comments ([Press, 27 May/3 June](#)) on Calvin Robinson's being forced to seek ordination other than in the Church of England. Given that those opposed to women priests and bishops were denied a Third Province, it is to be expected that those opposed to these find themselves in awkward compromises when wishing to continue to offer themselves for ministry in the Church of England when having to submit to women in authority.

Given the Church of England's sifting of its potential ordinands, that his ordination was derailed towards the end of his college training for incidental political and not ministerial vocational reasons, a moment's reflection would have answered Mr Brown's other speculation.

If anything, Mr Robinson was reversing the present trend. Rather than seek a church pulpit to preach secular politics, Mr Robinson is using his GBNews connections to communicate the historic Christian gospel, especially with his GBNews seasonal hour slots "What is the meaning of Christmas/Easter?"

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The current Poet Laureate on the meaning of life

From Mr Richard Willmott

Sir, — I was puzzled by Simon Armitage's assertion that life was "meaningless", quoted in Canon Mark Oakley's instructive and enjoyable article on the Queen's Poets Laureate ([Faith, 27 May/3 June](#)).

It would be highly presumptuous to attribute values, let alone beliefs, to our excellent Laureate, but I found it hard to believe that the creator of the superb translation of *Pearl* could think that life is meaningless. Armitage's translation is that rare thing for a verse translation, a poem that is as technically accomplished, beautiful, and moving as the original.

The powerful and deeply felt examination of a father's bereavement and his struggle to find consolation in his faith is the anonymous poet's, but the way in which our Poet Laureate makes it his own suggests, at the least, a search for meaning.

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Christian climate activism should be considerate

From Ann Wills

Sir, — I read your article "Christian climate activists are missionaries, bishops told" ([Online news, 31 May](#)). I think, however, that we need to ensure that protests are done in a Christian way.

For instance, a group (Insulate Britain) badly disrupted some 18,000 drivers on the M25 motorway a few months ago. The people who were stuck in traffic jams for many hours — caused by this group's actions — would have missed important hospital and other appointments, and ambulances wouldn't have been able to reach seriously injured people or those about to give birth. Also, imagine being stuck in a car for many hours with no lavatories available — what an embarrassing nightmare!

I have been an environmentalist for almost all my adult life, and am a long-term

member of the local Friends of the Earth, but I cannot agree with disruptive groups who cause such mayhem. They harm the reputation of genuine environmentalists, who are trying to reduce the pollution that causes ill-health. The authorities tell us that one in two people will now get cancer during their lifetime; so something is clearly wrong with our environment. But, when protesting, we must always keep in mind Jesus's love for people.

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