

Church thrives when its teaching is followed

Sir, AN Wilson's article in support of Christianity and in praise of his parish priest ("To resurrect the church, try the gospel truth", Sep 14) will find echoes countrywide, including here in Surrey, where our parish church thrives and the work of its vicar and his team is widely appreciated as a source for good. Current ethical debates are not ignored — how could they be? — but more important is the attempt by church members (who once included a fondly remembered relative of Wilson's) to keep things simple and follow as closely as possible the teachings of Jesus and his church.

Keith Havelock
Claygate, Surrey

Sir, I read with interest AN Wilson's piece. Although extolling the power of "the strange and difficult faith" that underpins thriving congregations and insisting that the church is in effect conforming to the liberal "disease" of the world, he fails to articulate what the gospel, as he understands it, actually is. This leaves me rather disappointed given that the seven-word headline promises so much.

The Rev Canon Justin Dodd
Canon missionary designate,
Sheffield Cathedral

Sir, The Church of England today generally offers no challenge, no threat. Some among its leaders are offering to tear up the rulebook in the blind and foolish belief that the empty pews will suddenly be filled with all those who, having been told that there is no judgment to come, will turn up on Sunday. Why should they, when there is so much of better appeal and quality to be found elsewhere? Judgment, we are told, will start with the household of God. Christians are called to be worthy of the kingdom. Is the image of the kingdom of God that some in the church try to offer worthy of anyone's serious attention?

Richard Carter
Reader, Rochester diocese;
Sittingbourne, Kent

Sir, AN Wilson laments the decline of traditional Anglo-Catholic forms of worship and refers to your recent survey in which the majority of Church of England clergy declare themselves in favour of conducting same-sex weddings and in favour of a greater role for women (reports, Aug 30 & 31). This is a false equivalence. Like many Anglo-Catholic churches, my wonderful

parish church of St Mary Newington, southeast London, indulges in all the "bells and smells", while being truly inclusive; my husband and I can be awed by the sacred mysteries of the faith while having our relationship celebrated.

As a society, we can both celebrate the "splendid liturgy of the Western Rite" and embrace God's truth marching on, with emancipation for all of humanity.

Joe Isard-McNulty
London SE17

Sir, What a delight to read AN Wilson's comment article. He described the short sermon he had heard as "awe-inspiring". Here lies the heart of the church's current problems. As highlighted by the recent Times survey of Church of England priests, the church is constantly compromising and trying to please everyone.

The unvarnished message of the Christian gospel is not easy but its acceptance changes lives. Priests and ministers need to stop trying to defend the gospel and instead preach it in all its challenging simplicity.

AJ McKay
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