

Clergy are enjoined to maintain a habit of reading books, in particular, novels. Sounds like a cushy part of the job but one that usually falls off the bottom of my list of priorities. Nonetheless, recently I read Dan Brown's latest, *Inferno* (which got a real slating by the pompous brigade - especially from The Observer - which seems always to miss the point: it is a story).

Romping around various cultural cities, the hero dodges capture by forces about whom the reader is kept guessing whether or not they are good or bad. All this [spoiler alert] in order to stop the lunatic (or is he?) scientist culling the world's population. *Inferno* is a bit of escapism (yes, a pun), but it made me mindful again about what happens when we can no longer maintain ourselves with the resources available.

Talking to many of my colleagues up and down the diocese, it seems we have the same problem with our church buildings. There is not enough money to maintain them; there are not enough people to maintain them; there is not enough enthusiasm to reinvent them as centres of community. (Indeed, a significant number of them are simply in the wrong place anyway.) What to do?

People see church buildings as part of their architectural heritage, yet do not want to pay for the pleasure of them as part of the scenery. In any case, churches are not uniformly ancient. Every age has reused these buildings for the needs and tastes of their day - that is, until after WW2, in particular the Planning Act of 1968, which has had the same disproportionate Kafkaesque effect on common sense that political correctness has had on our language, thus hamstringing our efforts.

If you think I'm vexed with this problem, you're right! Nonetheless, Christianity has very little to do with the maintenance of plant, so perhaps the sooner our current "ancient monuments" are culled by the natural process of resources running out (financial and people), the better; then we'll have no distraction from the mission: to bring Jesus' good news of life in its fulness to the people of God.

I'm glad many of you have said to me in conversation, "I don't need to be in a church to say my prayers or live a good life..." because when there isn't one there for you not to be in, you'll not miss it.

It may be that we don't want our churches to join those many spots on the OS maps that say "remains of church" (you see, they've not been here forever - or will be), so we need to do something about it. Many people doing their little bit will make a difference - expecting the few who currently struggle to do it for everyone else, will not.

Rant over.