

The Danger to St. Paul's Cathedral, London

The dome of St. Paul's has been officially declared to be a "dangerous structure" (says the *London Catholic Times*). The piers and arches that support it have long been showing signs of being overweighted by the evidence of ominous cracks and stones forced out of true alignment. Efforts have been for some time in progress to strengthen them by forcing liquid concrete into the rubble work of their interior, but experts are now suggesting that this is not effective, and that complete reconstruction of the piers may be necessary. The weight they carry is about 40,000 tons, including the dome itself, the cylindrical structure from which it rises and the lantern on its summit. To many the sectional diagrams of the dome, published in the *Times* and other papers, must have come as a revelation, for few realise that Wren's stately dome is, strictly speaking, an architectural sham. The true dome developed from the arch, and is a self-supporting circular vault. Wren's dome, as we see it towering over London, is a dome-shaped shell supported by a huge cone of brickwork rising from the circular base of its sub-structure, with a domed ceiling concealing this device as seen from within the cathedral. All the other famous domes of the world, from the Roman Pantheon of classic days to St. Peter's and the Cathedral of Florence, are true domes, and several of them (including the three we have named) have a wider span than that of St. Paul's. One may wonder why it was that Wren, with these examples before him, designed the complicated structure of St. Paul's dome—all the more because a true dome could have been designed that would have brought a less crushing weight upon the piers.

Built for the Mass.

It is an interesting fact that it was not upon Wren's original design that the new St. Paul's was built after the fire of 1666. In one of his letters, written while he was engaged in his immense task of the rebuilding of central London, he remarked that it had been complained that many of the parish churches he designed to replace those destroyed by the Great Fire were smaller than their predecessors. He wrote that he had deliberately reduced their size and with good reason. Catholic churches, he argued, were built for the Mass, and it was sufficient even for a large congregation to be present at its celebration, but in Protestant churches the most important point was that the preacher should be seen and easily heard by all. So he made his parish churches halls of moderate size and simple ground plan. Obviously this famous builder of Protestant churches had never heard of the "continuity" fable, and fully realised that the altar was the centre of Catholic worship, while the reading desk and the pulpit were the essentials of the new church service. When he set about designing the new St. Paul's his first proposal was the building of a great dome-crowned hall, where a large congregation could assemble on State occasions. This was rejected by the King, and he substituted a design for a building on the general lines of a Catholic cathedral with some features—such as places for side altars and chapels—that were useless in a Protestant church. Tradition says that it was the Catholic Duke of York, afterwards James II, whose influence decided the change of plans, his action being inspired by the hope of St. Paul's being one day restored to Catholic worship.

Wren's Dome

(From the *London Tablet* for January 17.)

Rightly exercising its function as primate of the British press and gratefully remembering that its own life has been lived under the shadow of Wren's mighty pile, the *Times* newspaper has opened a fund for repairing the piers and dome of St. Paul's Cathedral. At the moment of our going to press, this fund already amounts to over £80,000, and it is still growing. After the first spate of gifts has abated, the fund will be swollen over and over again by affluents of generosity from beyond the seas, and we may take it that the success of the appeal is assured. As Englishmen, as Londoners, and as admirers of Wren's genius, we thank the *Times* and we rejoice over the generosity of the public.

Whenever it is possible to do so, Catholics eagerly associate themselves with national and imperial movements. The Great War found us ready, and the blood of our sons was poured out as freely as any. In all charitable enterprises which are soundly conceived and justly administered we take our part; and if ever the part thus taken seems to the Protestant public to be smaller than

our numbers demand, it is because our nuns and other workers are already covering much of the same ground, with a thoroughness which moves non-Catholics to wonder. Sometimes, however, it comes about that we cannot join with the majority of our fellow-countrymen in a public effort, simply because principles which we regard as sacred are involved.

The restoration of St. Paul's Cathedral is a case in point. Several readers of the *Tablet* have asked whether they may properly contribute their guineas or their shillings to the *Times* fund, on the ground that St. Paul's is not merely a Protestant place of worship, with a Dean who minimises and even denies some of the major Christian doctrines, but is also one of London's chief architectural glories, and a masterpiece of aesthetic importance to the whole civilised world. In our opinion, Catholics are not justified in sending money to this work. That they should, as public-spirited citizens, contribute their fair share towards preserving the monuments of the past and towards enriching our towns and villages with new

works of art, we freely admit. But surely Catholics are doing this all the time; and they will not be shirking their civic duty by standing outside the movement for restoring St. Paul's. Critics who may be disposed to challenge our argument should do us the justice of recalling what Catholics have accomplished since the abrogation of the penal laws. Mostly from the pence of very poor people, assisted by the pounds of old Catholic nobles and gentlefolk who had been nearly bled to death by fines and confiscations on account of their religion, the Catholics of the nineteenth century gave England hundreds of stately buildings. After putting aside the far too many gaudy statues from inferior shops, the sacred vessels and stained-glass windows designed by commercialists, and the meretricious altars in which some of our people have delighted, there remains a noble bulk of dignified and fine work which has helped to set our country in the forefront of the decorative arts. Our Pugins have had worthy successors; and the tradition goes on, under the enlightened patronage of our bishops and with the self-sacrificing aid of our people. In comparison with what Catholics have done, the wealthy Nonconformist bodies make but a poor show.

There is, however, another ground on which Catholics could, without shabbiness, claim exemption from the *Times* appeal. The Church of England enjoys the use of many stately cathedrals and thousands of massive parish churches built before the Reformation by Catholic hands, with Catholic money, for the exercise of the Catholic religion in communion with the Holy and Apostolic See of Rome. With admiration we grant that the Anglicans of to-day are most generous in adding to the number of these buildings, and that they have often shown better taste than our own in furnishing and adorning them. But they have had to build hardly any cathedrals. Liverpool, with its Catholic architect, is the only Anglican cathedral on a grand scale built since the Reformation, with the exception of St. Paul's, which stands on an old Catholic site and is partly constructed of materials from Old St. Paul's, a vast and famous Catholic temple. Seeing that we are having to build, at the cost of painful and heavy sacrifices, our cathedrals and parish churches and abbeys and convents and school houses all over again, we are not—if the expressive word may be pardoned—"filking" anybody by leaving Anglicans and Nonconformists to repair Wren's Dome. Moreover, we are doing our bit towards the architectural splendor of the metropolis of the British Empire by building Westminster Cathedral and by enriching it with marbles and mosaics which already rank among the sights of London and are visited by hundreds of thousands of travellers every year. The city has Wren's Dome, Westminster has Bentley's Campanile; and we must not be called mean if we look after the Campanile and let non-Catholics look after the Dome. In any event, we should have to refuse to take a hand in repairing an auditorium for schismatical gatherings. But, in view of all we have done and are doing in other ways, it cannot fairly be said that we are making a theological excuse for unpatriotic meanness.

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