

THE CATHEDRALS OF ENGLAND

Their Economic and Invisible Impact on the Life of the Nation

An Address by Sir Paul Ruddock



Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure — and something of a surprise — to be invited to address you on this subject. I am, I confess, a lapsed Methodist. I spent 33 years in the financial industry but have focused the last 13 years on the arts. Neither of these credentials, on the face of it, qualifies me to speak about the cathedrals of England. And yet, as it turns out, I have spent the better part of the last fifteen years involved in their cause: chairing the First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs Fund; chairing the Cathedrals and Major Churches Sustainability Fund through the dark months of the pandemic; and, going back rather further, helping Bishop Richard Chartres, then Bishop of London, to launch what became the Hundred Church Treasures campaign.

In the course of that work, I have met a good many deans, many fabric officers, and some amazing master masons. I have come to understand, more intimately than I expected to, both the difficulties these buildings face and — more importantly — the extraordinary work they do, often invisibly, in the life of the nation. It is on that work that I want to speak this evening.

Let me begin with an apocryphal story.

Some years ago, on a wet afternoon in late autumn, a man found himself with an hour to kill in a small English city. It does not matter which — partly because the story is true of half a dozen of them. He had come from a meeting and was tired. He went into the cathedral. There were, perhaps, eight other people in the building. He sat down in

a side aisle. He sat for half an hour or so in the half-light, while a verger went about her quiet business at the far end, an elderly man at the back rearranged a stack of leaflets, and somebody — a chorister, I suppose, was practicing.

When he left, he felt better in a way he could not quite articulate. And as he walked across the close to his car, it occurred to him that what he had just received — for nothing, at no charge to him whatsoever — was the use of one of the great buildings of Europe, the discreet hospitality of half a dozen unseen people, and a small fragment of music written, in all probability, by a man who died a few hundred years ago.

That is, in a microcosm, the case I want to make to you today.

It is a curious thing, in a country which has so often been pronounced secular, post-Christian, post-religious — a country in which the Church sadly no longer fills its parish churches on a Sunday morning — that the cathedrals of England have, against every reasonable expectation, never been more visited, more loved, or more needed than they are today.

Last year, some ten million visits were paid to the forty-two Anglican cathedrals of England. That is similar to the British Museum and Tate Modern combined. It is several times the gate at Wembley, Twickenham and Lord's combined. And the great majority of those visits -the great majority- cost the visitor nothing whatsoever. They walked in, off the street, often in cities and county towns where the cathedral remains the tallest, the oldest, and very nearly always the most beautiful building they will ever set foot in.

I want to argue that these incredible buildings — Canterbury and York and Durham and St Paul's but also Bury St Edmunds and Bradford and Truro and Portsmouth — are, taken together, one of the most remarkable cultural, civic and economic assets this country possesses. I want to argue that the work they do — much of it invisible, much of it unfunded, much of it taken entirely for granted — is work without which our

towns and cities, and indeed our national life, would be poorer, lonelier, and a good deal shabbier than they are.

And I suggest that we have allowed ourselves to drift into a peculiarly English habit of underestimation. We assume the cathedrals will always be there. We assume that someone, somewhere, is paying for them. We assume that as long as the Dean keeps the doors open and the choir keeps singing the Magnificat at half past five on a Tuesday evening, all is well.

It is not. I will come, in due course, to explain why it is not. But first, let me suggest to you what we stand to lose.

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There are forty-two Anglican cathedrals in England. The figure wobbles by one or two depending on how you count Westminster Abbey — a Royal Peculiar — and how strict you wish to be about Bury St Edmunds, which became a cathedral only in 1914. But forty-two is the accepted number.

They are extraordinarily varied. The oldest, Canterbury, has stood on its present site, in one form or another, since 597 — the year Augustine arrived from Rome and began the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. The youngest, in real terms, is Liverpool, completed only in 1978. Some are mediaeval masterpieces — Wells, Lincoln, Salisbury, Ely, Durham. Some are Victorian — Truro, that slender Cornish jewel, finished in 1910. Some are converted parish churches: Manchester, Newcastle, Bradford, Blackburn, Bury St Edmunds. Some are post-war, like Coventry, rebuilt as a deliberate, almost defiant act of reconciliation after the Luftwaffe levelled its predecessor in November 1940. And one — Liverpool — is simply the largest in Britain: vast, late-Gothic, the work of Giles Gilbert Scott.

Three of them — Canterbury, Durham, and the fragmentary remains at Westminster — sit within UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Several of the others would be in any other country.

Between them, they hold buildings whose insurance value runs into the tens of billions, and collections that any major museum would consider the centrepiece of its life: the Mappa Mundi at Hereford; original copies of Magna Carta at Salisbury and Lincoln; the shrine of St Cuthbert at Durham; the tomb of the Black Prince at Canterbury; the world's oldest functioning mechanical clock at Salisbury (1386); the misericords at Worcester, Lincoln and Chester; manuscripts and illuminated books for which scholars travel from all over the world. I have spent a fair part of my life, as some of you know, with mediaeval objects of one kind or another, and I can tell you that no museum in the world, including the museums I have had the honour of serving, can match, in totality, what is held — quietly, and largely free of charge — in our forty-two cathedrals.

And yet — and something that you all understand about them — they are not museums. They are working buildings. They were built to be prayed in, sung in, married in, baptised in, and mourned in; and on almost every single day of the calendar, they are doing precisely those things, very often unnoticed by the visitor wandering past.

They are, simultaneously, among the most visited tourist attractions in England and the largest free, twelve-hour-a-day public spaces in their cities. They are, I think, the only buildings in this country which combine, on the same site and often on the same day, a service of Eucharist, a meeting of the local council, a graduation ceremony, a homeless drop-in, a chamber concert, a bell-ringers' practice, a school carol service, and a quiet visitor sitting alone at the back of the nave, having, perhaps, the most important conversation of their life.

It is this strange, layered character — sacred and civic, ancient and present, free and priceless — that makes the cathedrals so difficult to value, and so easy to overlook. Let us begin, then, with what we can measure.

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In 2021 the Association of English Cathedrals commissioned the consultancy Ecorys to do something which, surprisingly, had not been done properly before: to add up, in pounds and pence, what the forty-two cathedrals contribute to the English economy.

The headline figure was £235 million in direct economic contribution per year. Once one includes indirect and induced effects — the supply chains, the wages spent locally, the multiplier — the figure rises to over £400 million. The cathedrals support around 7,000 full-time equivalent jobs, and a great many more on a part-time, freelance, or volunteer basis. Volunteers alone contribute, conservatively, the equivalent of a further £20 million a year in unpaid labour, which I suspect is a very low estimate of the true worth.

These are not small sums. To put them in context: £400 million a year is comparable to the entire annual budget of Arts Council England's National Portfolio organisations

But the headline figure understates, in my view, the importance of where the money lands. The forty-two cathedrals are not concentrated in London. They are distributed — by historical accident, or, depending on your view of providence, by historical design — across every region of England. They sit in cities and county towns. And in a great many of those places, the cathedral is the single most important driver of inbound tourism.

Consider Lincoln. A city of around a hundred thousand, in a county whose economy has not always thrived. The cathedral, on its hill, is visible from twenty miles off. It

draws around a quarter of a million paying visitors a year, and many more besides. The local tourism board estimates that the cathedral and the castle together support around a fifth of the city's tourism economy. Take the cathedral away — try, for a moment, to imagine Lincoln without it — and you do not have a smaller version of Lincoln. You have a different town, and a poorer one.

Consider Wells. Population: twelve thousand; the smallest city in England. Without its cathedral and the 300,000+ visitors it draws, Wells would be a market town in mid-Somerset of very modest economic significance. With its cathedral, it is a destination of international standing — with hotels, restaurants, B&Bs, a tourism economy in the tens of millions, and, most important of all, a reason for young people to find work locally and to stay.

Consider Durham. The cathedral and castle together draw close to 400,000 visitors a year. UNESCO status. The tourism economy of County Durham — a part of the country which has not had an easy time of it since the closure of the coalfields — is materially underwritten by people who came, in the first instance, to see the cathedral.

Consider Canterbury. A cathedral city in the literal as well as the ecclesiastical sense, where for nine hundred years the streets, the inns, the trades, the very orientation of the place, have been arranged around pilgrims walking up to the shrine. The shrine has been gone for nearly five hundred years, and yet more than a million people a year still come, every year, to that single building. They eat in its restaurants. They sleep in its hotels. They buy books, souvenirs and afternoon teas. They generate, between them, an economy without which Canterbury would not be a city of international renown but, in all probability, a pleasant Kent market town of sixty thousand people about which the rest of the world had nothing in particular to say.

Consider Norwich, where two cathedrals — the Anglican and the Roman Catholic — sit within walking distance of each other, framing the most extensive surviving

mediaeval city centre in northern Europe. Without them, Norwich is a perfectly nice provincial city. With them, it is a destination — and an argument for staying overnight rather than passing through.

I could go on. Salisbury, Ely, Worcester, Hereford, York, Lichfield, Chichester, Gloucester. In every one of these places the cathedral is a serious economic presence. The difference between an English county town with a cathedral and an English county town without one is, in employment terms, very often four figures of jobs.

And here is an important fact. Almost nine in ten English cathedrals charge no entry fee. They have committed themselves, on principle, to keeping the doors open, free of charge, to anyone who walks past — a tourist from Tokyo, a homeless man from down the road, a school party on a Tuesday morning. They support themselves, as best they can, from donations, trust funds, hard-won grants, their cafés, their shops, their concerts, their venue hire.

What this means is that an enormous proportion of the economic value generated by cathedral visiting accrues, not to the cathedral itself, but to the surrounding economy: to the hotelier, the restaurateur, the publican, the taxi driver, the gift shop, the tour guide, the train operator. The Ecorys analysis estimated that for every pound spent on a cathedral visit itself, around four pounds are spent in the surrounding local economy. That ratio — one to four — is unusually high for a cultural attraction. It is what economists call high local capture.

The cathedrals, in other words, are extraordinarily good at generating wealth they do not see themselves.

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Beyond visitor economics, there is a second, quieter economic story — and in some ways a more interesting one — and that is the contribution the cathedrals make as patrons of skill.

Each of these buildings is a Grade I listed structure of formidable complexity. Maintaining them requires a small army of skilled craftspeople: stonemasons, glaziers, lead workers, carpenters, organ-builders, gilders, conservators, archaeologists, surveyors. Many cathedrals operate their own stoneyards — Canterbury's is among the largest in Europe — and several run formal apprenticeship schemes, training the next generation of master craftsmen in trades which are increasingly rare and which, were the cathedrals not to sustain them, might quite genuinely disappear from this country within a generation.

The Cathedrals' Workshop Fellowship, formed by several of the larger cathedrals, offers degree-level qualifications in stonemasonry and related crafts. Its graduates work not only on cathedrals but on parish churches, on country houses, on civic buildings — on the entire historic fabric of the nation. When you walk past a beautifully repointed mediaeval wall on a Cotswold high street, the chances are that the man or woman who repointed it learned the trade because there was a cathedral, somewhere, willing to take them on.

I have stood in the stonemasons' workshops at Lincoln, watching young apprentices chiseling finials which will one day, perhaps in their own lifetime, replace a piece of stonework which last had a chisel taken to it under Edward III. It was perfectly clear that these apprentices had stumbled upon work, which was meaningful, well-trained, and unhurriedly proud, in a country which has not always offered young people those three things at once.

Those apprentices exist because Lincoln Cathedral exists. They are some of the several hundred such people up and down the country whose vocation, livelihood and dignity

are bound up with the survival of these buildings. Multiply Lincoln by forty-two cathedrals, and by the parish churches, country houses and civic buildings their skills will eventually save, and you begin to see what is at stake.

This is heritage skills as economic infrastructure. We do not, I think, sufficiently appreciate that without the demand which cathedrals generate, the supply of these skills in England would simply collapse. There is no other patron in this country with the same combination of need, scale and continuity. The Crown Estate maintains a few palaces. The National Trust maintains a few great houses. But neither has the rolling, century-after-century demand for the highest order of stoneworking, glazing, and timber craftsmanship which the cathedrals have, between them, sustained without interruption since the Middle Ages.

There is, increasingly, a story to tell as well. Several recent cathedral capital projects have been catalysts for the renewal of their surrounding city centres. Manchester's cathedral quarter, Sheffield's Heart of the City, Coventry's reordering ahead of City of Culture in 2021, Blackburn's cathedral quarter — each is an example of cathedrals acting deliberately as anchors of urban regeneration, very often in cities which have struggled to find a vision for themselves in a post-industrial age. The cathedral, simply by being there, and by being beautiful, gives the city centre a centre.

Some time ago, a senior officer at one of the regional development agencies — before they were abolished — said of his city's cathedral: “It is the only cultural asset we have which we do not have to argue for.” He meant that every other piece of cultural infrastructure in his city — the theatre, the gallery, the orchestra, the football club — required, every year, a difficult political conversation about whether it deserved support. The cathedral did not. It was simply assumed to be valuable. It had earned, over a thousand years, the privilege of being above the fray.

That is a remarkable form of civic capital, and it is one of the things, I think, that we underestimate most when we count up what cathedrals do. But to see it more clearly, we must turn from the visible and the measurable to the invisible.

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There is a phrase used in the trade — not by the cathedrals themselves, but by social policy researchers: cathedrals, they say, are “civic anchors.” It captures something which, on reflection, is rather extraordinary: that in 2026, in a society which has very few institutions left commanding anything like cross-class, cross-generational, cross-confessional trust, the cathedrals do.

Almost every English cathedral hosts, over the course of a year, the major civic events of its diocese. Remembrance Sunday. The judges' service at the start of the legal term. The High Sheriff's installation. The graduation ceremonies of two or three local universities. The installation of mayors and lord-lieutenants. The annual service for the police, the fire brigade, the ambulance service. School carol services. Memorial services for the great and the good of the city. The freedom-of-the-city ceremonies. The thanksgiving service when a soldier comes home from war, and the service of mourning when he does not.

In total, the forty-two cathedrals host, between them, more than seven thousand such events a year — more than fifteen events per cathedral per month, on top of the daily round of worship. Some are religious, some civic, some educational, some simply communal. The cathedral acts, in each case, as a neutral, dignified, beautiful and capacious place where the community can come together to mark something — joy, or sorrow, or transition.

I want to dwell on this for a moment, because I think it is one of the most important things the cathedrals do, and one of the easiest to take entirely for granted.

When the late Queen died in September 2022, every English cathedral rang its bells, opened a book of condolence, hosted services of remembrance. Hundreds of thousands of people went, in those ten days, to their nearest cathedral. A great many of them were people who would not, in the ordinary course of things, have entered a church. They went because they did not know where else to go. They went because they wanted to be in a building large enough to hold the feeling, old enough to dignify it, and quiet enough to let them think.

When the pandemic came — and it was, for the cathedrals as for the rest of the country, a wretched time — they opened books of remembrance, lit candles, kept vigils, when public health rules permitted. When the King was crowned in 2023, the cathedrals hosted services of celebration in every county. When floods devastated parts of the West Midlands and Yorkshire, cathedrals opened as gathering points and, in some cases, as warm hubs for people without electricity at home.

This work has no line items on a balance sheet. It is paid for by the cathedrals themselves; or rather, it is given by them, freely. And it is, I would argue, the deepest economic contribution of all — because there is no substitute for it. There is no commercial venue large enough, dignified enough, and trusted enough to do the job. There is no civic building of the same character. The cathedrals are doing public work, civic work, that nothing else in the country can do, and they are doing it, almost entirely, at their own expense.

Add to this the everyday social mission. Almost every cathedral runs, or hosts, programmes for the homeless, the lonely, the recently bereaved, refugees and asylum seekers, the long-term unemployed. They run debt advice clinics, dementia cafés, schools' programmes, holiday clubs, food banks. Liverpool's Micah Project. Sheffield's Archer Project. The list is long and very largely unsung.

These are not, in the main, theological projects. They are practical ones, undertaken in the conviction — a conviction which reaches back to the earliest days of the Christian church, but which today is held quite as warmly by people of no faith — that a great building in the centre of a city carries with it a duty of care to the city around it.

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There is a second invisible contribution that I cannot pass over, because it is one of the great glories of English civilisation, and one which, were the cathedrals to falter, would simply cease to exist in this country.

I mean, of course, the choral tradition.

Every weekday evening in England, in some forty cathedrals and a number of major collegiate chapels, choral evensong is sung. It is sung by professional men — lay clerks, or vicars choral — and by boys and, increasingly, girls — choristers — who have been trained, almost from the moment they arrived at primary school, to read music at sight, to sing in eight parts, and to hold a Tudor polyphonic line under a fan vault built by men who lived seven hundred years before they were born.

There are, at any given moment, around a thousand choristers in active service in the cathedrals of England. They are, essentially all of them, on full or near-full music scholarships at choir schools, an arrangement underwritten partly by the cathedral, partly by trusts, and partly by parents who can afford to pay. The training they receive is, by common consent of music educators in this country and abroad, the finest musical education available to a child anywhere in the world. Cambridge and Oxford choral scholars, the chamber choirs of London, the great solo voices of the Royal Opera House — a remarkable proportion of them began their working lives as cathedral choristers. I might add, with perhaps a small disclosure of partiality, that my own school,

King Edward's in Birmingham, has provided many of the choristers of St Philip's Cathedral since its founding in 1715.

This is, in raw economic terms, a music industry feeder system. But it is much more than that. It is one of the few remaining institutions in this country which gives a serious musical education, free or nearly free, to children whose parents could not otherwise afford it. Choristerships are means-blind. The choirs of King's, Cambridge, Westminster Abbey, Salisbury, Wells, of Lincoln, are full, every year, of children whose families could not possibly have afforded thirty thousand pounds a year in school fees. The cathedral makes it possible.

The repertoire they sing is itself an extraordinary cultural inheritance. The Anglican choral tradition is one of the few unbroken artistic traditions of any kind that survives, in living, breathing form, from the late mediaeval period to the present. Tallis, Byrd, Gibbons, Purcell, Stanford, Parry, Howells, Britten, Tavener, James MacMillan, Judith Weir — composer after composer has written for these specific choirs, in these specific buildings, with these specific acoustics in mind. To lose the choirs would be to lose the only context in which much of this music can properly be performed at all.

The celebrated conductor, Leonard Bernstein, once put it well. “The thing about Evensong,” he said, “is that you cannot pay to see it. You cannot get a better ticket. You cannot upgrade. The Archbishop of Canterbury cannot get a better seat than the schoolboy in a hoodie sitting in the nave. It is the most aristocratic performance in the world, and the most democratic, all at once.” He was right.

There are countless stories of children from modest backgrounds who, on the strength of musical talent alone, have become choristers. Their musical education, valued against its private-sector equivalent, is worth a fortune. They receive it because, eight hundred years ago, somebody had built a cathedral there, and because, eight hundred years later,

the Dean and Chapter still believed that the choir mattered, and because trust funds and patrons and the cathedral's own modest budget were, between them, paying for it.

That is the kind of social mobility that no amount of policy paper-shuffling has ever quite managed to engineer. It happens, very quietly, in those forty-two buildings, every term, every year.

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There is a third invisible contribution which I cannot pass over, and it is one that goes to the heart of what these buildings have been doing for a thousand years.

The cathedrals are, among everything else, the keepers of memory.

Each cathedral has a library; many of those libraries are of international scholarly importance. Hereford holds the chained library — over two hundred mediaeval manuscripts, many produced before the invention of moveable type. York Minster has the largest cathedral library in England. Salisbury holds eighteenth-century letters relating to the building's restoration; Wells holds diocesan records of half a millennium; Canterbury holds documents which are essential to anyone studying the conversion of England, the Norman Conquest, the murder of Becket, the Reformation, and the relationship of the English crown to the Roman church across fourteen hundred years.

Each cathedral has an archive, often kept in conditions of careful conservation, recording the lives of the men and women who built, maintained, served, and worshipped in the building. These are not abstract records. They are how we know the names of the masons who worked on Lincoln in the 1230s. They are how we know what Salisbury paid for lead in 1402. They are how we know the parish of birth of the chorister who sang at the funeral of Henry V. They are, in every meaningful sense, the documentary memory of provincial England, kept by an institution which has never

had a budget large enough to keep them properly, and yet has somehow contrived to keep them anyway.

Each cathedral, in addition, holds in its very fabric the memorials of the dead — the brasses of mediaeval knights and merchants, the marble of Georgian admirals, the regimental colours of soldiers killed at Waterloo and the Somme, the rolls of honour of two world wars, the more recent additions for Iraq and Afghanistan. To walk along the aisles of any English cathedral is, in effect, to walk past several hundred years of national biography in compressed form. There is, I think, no other type of building in the country in which the dead and the living share so much space, on such equal terms.

And there is the question of what these buildings teach. Most English cathedrals work intensively with schools. Last year, I believe that more than three hundred thousand schoolchildren took part in formal educational programmes hosted by cathedrals — programmes covering history, religious studies, music, art, architecture, citizenship. For many of those children, the cathedral is the first historic building they are ever asked seriously to look at. It is, very often, the first time they encounter the idea that a building can be more than a shelter — that it can be a story, a community, a witness to history.

I would venture that, for a child growing up in this country, two hours spent in Durham or Lincoln, properly guided, is an education in the long arc of these islands which no textbook, and no screen, can rival. I know it was for me when as a young boy my parents took me to Exeter, Ely, St. Magnus' in Kirkwall or St Davids. The cathedrals are not, of course, paid for this work. They do it because they believe in it.

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Let me turn, finally, to one last invisible contribution — and one which seems to me to grow more important, not less, with every passing year of the strange and fractured age in which we are living.

The cathedrals are, very simply, places of sanctuary.

There is a phenomenon, well known to everyone who works in a cathedral, which the staff sometimes call the “noontday visitor.” It is the man or woman who walks in, alone, in the middle of the day, and sits at the back, often in tears. They may stay for ten minutes; they may stay for two hours. They will, very often, light a candle. They will, very often, leave without speaking to anybody.

Cathedral staff and volunteers learn, very quickly, that one of the most important things they can do is to leave these visitors alone — to allow the building to do the work the building does. Sometimes they will offer a cup of tea. Sometimes they will ask, quietly, if the person would like to speak to a chaplain. But most of the time they simply allow the cathedral to be what it has always been: a place where, in the middle of an ordinary day, a person carrying something they cannot articulate to friends, or family, or therapist, may set it down for a while in front of something larger than themselves.

In an age of rising loneliness — and the official figures show that loneliness is rising, particularly among young men and the very elderly; in an age of declining mental health among the young; in an age in which our public spaces are increasingly commercialised, our parish churches increasingly closed, our high streets increasingly indistinguishable — the simple availability of a vast, beautiful, free, undemanding space, open during daylight hours every day, attended by people who will not pester or proselytise but who will, if asked, listen — this is not, I think, a small thing. It is, I would suggest, one of the most important public health resources this country possesses, even if it appears on no government spreadsheet.

I am not making, here, a religious argument. I am making a humanist one. Whatever you believe — and I am well aware that the proportion of regularly worshipping Anglicans in this country is significantly lower than when I was a boy — the cathedrals

are doing the work of sanctuary, and they are doing it for a population most of which does not, technically, belong to them.

That is, in its way, a kind of generosity unusual in any institution, religious or otherwise.

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I should not, having made the case for these buildings, leave you with the impression that all is well. As you will all know perfectly well, it is not.

The forty-two cathedrals of England have, with very few exceptions, no endowment to speak of. They are not like the Oxbridge colleges. They are not like the great American cathedrals of the East Coast — St John the Divine in New York, Washington National Cathedral — which have been funded for a century or more by oil money, railroad money, and the steady habits of American philanthropy. From my own experience as both a chair of a National Museum and my experience on other cultural boards, I know that most English cathedrals run, year on year, on a knife's edge — meeting their costs from a combination of gift aid, trust grants, hard-won legacies, the takings of the café and the shop, venue hire, and the donations of their visitors.

As we all know, the buildings themselves are extraordinary. They are also extraordinarily expensive to maintain. A single major capital project — re-leading a roof, regilding a vault, conserving a Romanesque doorway, replacing the bellows on a 1734 organ — can cost millions. The cumulative maintenance backlog across the forty-two cathedrals is estimated by the Association of English Cathedrals at well over a hundred million pounds and rising.

There is, at present, no sustained government support of the kind which exists in France, where the cathedrals are state-owned and state-maintained, or in Germany, where the church tax pays for fabric. The First World War Centenary Cathedral Repairs

Fund, which I had the privilege of chairing, provided around forty million pounds between 2014 and 2018, and did, I think it is fair to say, an enormous amount of good. The independent review by ERS concluded that ‘those areas covered by the grant aided projects had been very largely changed from needing urgent repairs to needing routine maintenance only. And this was allocated within a very short space of time and minimum bureaucracy. But it was a one-off, and it is now spent. The Listed Places of Worship grant scheme, which simply rebated the VAT on repairs, has now been shut down by this government with no replacement structure announced. Every cathedral chapter I know is bracing for harder times.

The pandemic, of course, was devastating. Visitor income collapsed. Several cathedrals were forced to make redundancies, including, painfully, in their music departments. We came within a hair's breadth of losing some of the country's finest cathedral choirs. The recovery is real but partial. Visitor numbers have returned to around ninety per cent of pre-pandemic levels, but cost inflation — heating, insurance, salaries, conservation — has run well ahead of income.

I do not paint this picture in order to depress you. I paint it because I want to be honest. We have inherited something quite extraordinary. We are not, at present, paying the full cost of keeping it.

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What, then, is to be done? I want to suggest three things.

First, those with means must be encouraged to give. The cathedrals depend, more than almost any other class of cultural institution in this country, on private philanthropy. They are not like museums, with central government grant-in-aid; they are not like universities, with student fees and research income. They depend, in the end, on people deciding that these buildings matter — and acting on that conviction, with their

chequebooks. Those who know me will know that I have spent a great deal of my life arguing that we in Britain have been, for a generation now, embarrassingly behind the Americans in the habits of major individual giving. The cathedrals are, in my view, exactly the sort of cause which ought to summon the British equivalent of that American instinct: the instinct that you do not leave the great inheritance of your civilisation to chance, or to the Treasury, or to the next generation. You take responsibility for it now.

Second, we must make the public case. The case I have tried to make this evening — that the cathedrals are an extraordinary economic, civic, social, educational and human resource — is not yet properly understood by the political class or by the wider public. It needs to be made, again and again, in language that does not require the listener to be a believer, a churchgoer, or even, particularly, an Anglican. The cathedrals belong to the country. They were, in many cases, built by the public purse of their day. They have been kept, century after century, by the labour of innumerable hands. And the case for their continued flourishing is a national case, not a sectarian one.

Third, we must continue to argue for proportionate public support. This need not be a great deal of money, by Treasury standards. A modest, multi-year fund — on the scale of the WW1 centenary repair fund, or somewhat larger — directed at fabric repairs and at sustaining the choirs, would, I believe, secure the cathedrals for another generation. I saw at first hand the impact that £40 million from the centenary fund had: not only in saving the immediate fabric, but in preventing far costlier repairs that would have been required, perhaps a decade hence, had urgent needs gone unmet. Pound for pound, it would be one of the best returns on investment any government can make.

The cathedrals' impact goes far beyond stone and glass; it goes far beyond the spiritual. They are living institutions, providing employment and skills, anchoring communities, and fostering learning and training for future generations. They are stewards of our

history and heritage; they nurture wellbeing and cultural literacy. And their ripple effect radiates outward — into direct economic activity, employment, skills development, heritage preservation, and social and cultural enrichment.

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I want to end where I began.

The Anglican cathedrals in England are extraordinary buildings, distributed across England, doing extraordinary work that no one else can do. They are economic engines in places that often have few. They are training grounds for crafts that would otherwise die. They are concert halls, pulpits, schoolrooms, libraries, archives, war memorials, civic squares, quiet corners. They are, when nothing else is, a place to go.

We have inherited them. None of us alive paid for them; none of us alive built them. The question, in our generation, is whether we will leave them in a state at least as good as that in which we found them.

I think we will. I look at the people I know who care about these buildings — the deans, the chapters, the volunteers, the architects, the masons, the choristers, the friends, the donors, the visitors — and I do not believe that a country whose cathedrals are loved by such people is in any imminent danger of letting them go.

But love is not enough. Love must, at some point, take out its chequebook. Love must lobby the government. Love must serve on the fabric committee. Love must, when the bucket is passed at the back of the nave, put something in it.

The cathedrals of England have stood, in some cases, for fourteen centuries. They have survived the Dissolution, the Reformation, the English civil war, fire, plague, the Blitz, neglect, and architectural fashion. May they survive for many more centuries.

That is what we are here to defend.

Thank you.