

Asinus Muses

Great news for the environment

The new planet-friendly spirit, celebrated a few months ago in this column, now seems to be on an unstoppable roll. Redemption through carbon neutrality is becoming a universal faith. OK maybe there is a bit too much 'neutraler than thou' sentiment around. But new carbon saving ideas appear daily and this is surely great news for the environment. Asinus finds it hard to know where to start in reporting on some of the latest examples.

Vatican re-roofed

Well, if in doubt, start at the top. And what could be superior to the Pope's roof? Yes, you are right – only the sun and then heaven. The Vatican has announced that it is to replace the crumbling roof of its Paul VI auditorium (designed by the famous Italian architect Pier Luigi Nervi) with a huge photo-voltaic panel, which will supposedly directly generate (divine?) light and heat. Other roofs of the principality will be similarly replaced in the future. So I suppose the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel roof (painted by that other Italian architect) may become no more than the B-side of a solar power generator. Great news for the environment, however.

Devil rocks against climate change

His present Holiness recently dared to criticise His previous Holiness for hobnobbing with rock musicians in mass concerts, especially the one when Bob Dylan sang as the late pontiff dozed off beside his old fossil-fuel powered popemobile. So one can only guess at Benedict VI's opinion of the eight huge 'Live Earth' rock concerts organised by Al Gore in July, staged from Wembley to Shanghai with a massive use of fossil-fuel energy and featuring, among others, Madonna – not, I suspect, a

Vatican favourite. Nonetheless these concerts pose the question of whether Satan and the papacy might make a tactical alliance to save the planet. That would not only score maximum points in the world unholy alliance tournament but would be great news for the environment. Wouldn't it?

The plastic plane

The 787 Dreamliner (more sexily named than the popemobile, you must agree) will fly in worldly terms much higher than the Pope's roof. Its construction of plastic and carbon fibre will make it lighter than other planes so that it can run on only 80 percent of the fuel per mile; this will make air travel much cheaper, attracting millions of new passengers. Oh, what has happened to this argument? Didn't Boeing claim at the glittering launch, that the Dreamliner's fuel economy was more great news for the environment? There must be a step Asinus didn't understand.

Christmas dinner

Having started at the top, I now arrive at the bottom. Sorry to mention Christmas, but it is acquiring ever greater significance for energy saving and climate change. All that over-indulgence, of course, is very very bad for CO₂ production, but the spirit of Christmas to come may be suffused with energy saving, and all thanks to turkey dung. The state of Minnesota, which produces nearly 50 million turkeys a year (which are nearly all killed in the weeks before Thanksgiving and Christmas), also, as a result, finds itself with nearly 10 million tons of turkey manure a year, which, previously sold at low prices as fertilizer, is now sold very profitably to a state-subsidised power station (the first in the world to run on this fuel). So Minnesotans, at least, can cook their turkeys with power generated by their own (so far just the turkeys') lifetime

excretions. It is not a fossil fuel so it must be more great news for the environment. Readers of this column could come up with their own suggestions of what we can burn to produce alternative energy (there must, for instance, be tens of millions of regularly defecating household pets in the UK, as well as an already operating system of classified recycled rubbish collection; all we need to do is to add tabby-coloured bins).

For your loved ones

The two important things about Christmas are eating and presents. And here is a super new idea to save shopping and mailing bulky items. Why not, give your 'loved one' a carbon offset certificate as suggested by the many carbon offset firms which have exploded on the internet in the months since carbon neutrality became the rage. Think of the rapturous look on your child's face as the little tot opens the envelope to find a certificate for 2 tons of carbon offset. Of course, it will cause a lot of trouble at first among the kids ('Mummy, it's not fair. Why didn't I get a carbon offset voucher?' 'I'm more carbon neutral than you, so there!'). But it must be great news for the environment.

Tireless Eurocrats go tieless

The EU Commission is ingeniously to decrease the air conditioning in its buildings, but to allow male workers to show up without ties, thus saving energy and allowing the tieless Eurocrats to be no hotter than before. Women are assumed to be already sufficiently covered (i.e. uncovered) under existing dress regulations. As for the men, why stop at ties? Jackets could be dispensed with and long trousers dropped during the summer, while woolly sweaters and down jackets could be normal winter office wear. More great news for the environment? Asinus leaves this one for you to decide.

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