

THE CHAIR *The Dean of Wakefield (Very Revd George Nairn-Briggs)* took the Chair at 8.30 p.m.

Welcome to the Young Adult Observers

The Chairman: In their absence, the Archbishop of York welcomed the young adult observers; I see that they are up there now, so shall we just give them a Synod welcome? (*Applause*)

Announcement

The Clerk to the Synod (Mr David Williams): We felt that we needed to answer the point helpfully raised by David Warner in the debate on the agenda. Just for clarification, our present practice with Questions not answered orally is that the answers are posted downstairs on the information board, and also copies are available for reference. If we were to go any further in making available any of the answers in printed form, that would be a matter for the Business Committee, which will reflect on it. I think that I can reassure members that the Business Committee is looking fairly extensively at a whole range of matters to do with Questions, and certainly the availability of answers is on the list.

Private Member's Motion

Reform of the House of Lords

Revd David Houlding (London): I beg to move:

'That this Synod call upon Her Majesty's Government, in the reform of the House of Lords, to ensure that the existing provision for 26 bishops of the Church of England be retained and that representatives of other Christian Churches and other faiths also be added to the composition of a new second chamber in our parliamentary democracy.'

It is, so they say, the best club in town. I suppose that that rather depends on what you are looking for in a club or even perhaps which bishop you may be speaking to.

In this debate, we are only a year late. Former members of Synod will recall how a debate on our response to the Wakeham report on the reform of the House of Lords was shelved last July at the end of the quinquennium, owing to the pressure of other business. However, that delay does not substantially change our purpose tonight, which is, I would suggest, unequivocally to support and endorse the role that the bishops of the Church of England fulfil through their membership of the second chamber of the Houses of Parliament.

The magnificent Pugin edifice of the Palace of Westminster may be an extraordinary

sight to behold, surrounded by so many centuries of tradition, but we must avoid the distraction of getting hung up on images of luxury and privilege, not to mention the wallpaper. For those of us on the outside of Parliament, the House of Lords remains, for the most part, a mystery. It gives a whole new meaning to the concept of the corridors of power for, like the workings of the Synod, as much work is done outside the chamber as on the floor of the House. However, being a member of the upper House of Parliament is a position that carries with it a real sense of responsibility and service.

Bishops cannot be expected to speak on everything, and I suspect that inevitably there is a lot of sitting around; and no doubt in both Houses of Parliament, as in this Synod (dare I say it?) there is a lot of hot air! What matters is that they are there.

Perhaps I might say what this debate is not about. It is not a debate about the overall relationship between Church and State, nor about the position of the monarch as supreme governor, and I hope that members tonight will not be tempted to hijack the debate in this direction, even from within the House of Bishops. Nor even is it about the British Constitution which in one sense remains largely unwritten. Even though a few hereditary peers remain on an elected basis, the principle of representation will, I hope, dispel any lingering confusion in our minds about privilege. The British Constitution is understood to be the Queen in Parliament under God. The Church of England is the national Church in this country. These are the norms by which we should now proceed.

Our bishops have sat in the House of Lords since almost before the time the House was even created, if you see what I mean, together with abbots and priors, probably because they were landowners as well as lords spiritual of the nation. As we all know, the House of Lords is now changing, at last. The present Government have been committed to reforming the House since they first came to power. It is a process which is envisaged to take some time and which will be worked out in various stages. So our motion, although originally tabled before the Wakeham commission was set up, is very apt. This Synod should be discussing at the present time what role the Church of England might play in Parliament as the established Church of this land.

The amendments from both the Bishop of London and the Bishop of Durham update the original wording to take into account that a substantially reformed House of Lords will move to the representative principle rather than the hereditary one. Yet bishops, we should remember, have always sat as of right by virtue of their see. They are not there as representatives of the Church as an institution although of course they do that; none the less they fulfil both a symbolic and a practical role at the heart of Government. That is why there are 26, from the number of ancient sees as it was fixed in 1837, before the creation of the Dioceses of Manchester and Ripon and then others later in the century, right up to the creation of Portsmouth.

All diocesan bishops in principle are eligible, but in practice they take their seats, after

the senior five, in order of the appointment to their see. Unlike any other group they do have to retire, although the benefits of the club are extended to them for life: a restaurant table with a view is surely preferable to a red leather seat with an arm. That, however, is a significant matter for our debate tonight for, with the Wakeham commission's proposed reduction to 16 or possibly even fewer, if the seniority principle were to be retained it would only give them the possibility of a very few years' service. The bishops could find another way of deciding among themselves who should sit, but such limited tenure flies in the face of the report, which states that peers should be selected on the principle that a possible period of anything up to 15 years' service could be offered. As in this Synod, it takes time to settle in, to get the hang of things, to network successfully round those corridors where much of the real work is done. Parliament is the living embodiment of political intrigue; it is not for the faint-hearted.

In stating the number of 26, rather than echoing the strains of tradition for its own sake, my concern is to ensure that a significant number of bishops retain their ancient right in order to do the task that is required of them. Bishops are not professional politicians; they cannot sit all at once, nor should they seek deliberately to scupper a debate. That is to misunderstand their role. They are entirely free to vote as they wish, according to their conscience. However, they need to be there in sufficient numbers if their voice is to be heard.

There is no reason why we should not welcome other denominations, for there will be plenty of members of them there already, nor indeed those drawn from other faith communities. Do not let us confuse our desire to be inclusive and generous in our welcome to others with the precise role of bishops that can only be fulfilled by them. In a sense, bishops in the Lords are an extension of the parochial principle by which the Church functions; we are called to minister to one and all. The Lords is a great theatre and provides a venue for networking and discourse that eases the ministry of the Church in this country. Bishops do not sit in the upper House of Parliament merely to represent the Church but to serve the nation as a whole. From their experience in so many fields they contribute to the legislative processes of the country from their different regions. Together they bring to the House every facet of human life as well as the distinctive features of every part of the land and ensure that moral values and spiritual insights are not overlooked.

It is not that others cannot do this or that this is the sole prerogative of the bishops, but the person of the bishop is a clearly recognized sign of the Church's presence. This point is accentuated by the wearing of convocation robes in the chamber. Dressed up or not (and it would have been dressing down in the sixteenth century), it serves to underline this point in an environment where protocol and tradition are clearly entwined. A bishop does, *par excellence*, represent the wider Church and through it the Christian faith.

In their daily work bishops will be in touch with all walks of life; they will hear the

stories of the countryside, urban estates and respectable suburbia, of Billy Elliot's Easington or Hugh Grant's Notting Hill, from the riots of Burnley to the bohemia of Bloomsbury. The bishops, far from being out of touch with life, are in reality very much alongside the people of this land through the parochial ministry of their priests and congregations. They also have a reflective role in the Lords as well as contributing to the House's legislative role.

There is a real danger of turning the bishops of the established Church into figureheads of a denomination. We want to encourage representation from all walks of life for a really vibrant second chamber in our parliamentary democracy in which, drawing from the traditions of the past and looking for a distinctive contribution for the future, the bishops of this land fulfil a crucial role on the nation's behalf.

The Chairman imposed a speech limit of five minutes.

Dr Edmund Marshall (Wakefield): In the Queen's Speech, which was delivered from the Throne on 20 June, Her Majesty says, 'Following consultation, my Government will introduce legislation to implement the second phase of House of Lords reform.' Together with most commentators I regard the most significant words in that sentence as the first two, namely 'following consultation'. I believe that those words indicate that it is very unlikely that legislation to reform the House of Lords will actually pass through all its stages during the lifetime of this new Parliament for, while the Government appear to be wedded to the recommendations of the Wakeham commission, the two Opposition parties are certainly not, for their differing reasons, and the Government do not have an overall majority in the House of Lords to be able to pass their own legislation automatically through there. So the only way the Government can get their legislation on this topic through Parliament would be by invoking the Parliament Acts and that would be a very drastic step to take on the subject of the composition of the second chamber itself. Of course it would also need the same Bill to be introduced in two successive sessions of Parliament. So the Government would need to attempt to get some legislation through the present House of Lords in the first session (during the next 18 months), and the promised consultation may well take long enough to prevent that from happening.

So the question which faces the Church tonight is not so much how we will react to this new legislation but what is our stance in the consultation process. What should be our negotiating stance? We have a very great Christian duty to defend the advantages which the mover of the resolution has just described and which the present position affords the Church. We have a great opportunity, privilege and responsibility, by having the 26 ex-officio seats in the House of Lords, to put the Christian viewpoint on issues affecting the whole life of the nation, and that is a position which we should do everything possible to defend and not give up at all.

So really the perfect situation would be as set out in this resolution, but in the consultation process we may not be allowed to maintain that position. We have

therefore to look at our fall-back stances. What would be acceptable to us? There are two principles which should govern our attitude in this respect. First, if the Government say that we must reduce the number of bishops below 26, we should insist that any such reduction should automatically go to the other Christian Churches in this country. The Wakeham commission itself suggested that the number of bishops be reduced to 16 and that the difference of 10 should go to the other Churches, but I believe that if we are forced to give up any of our seats we should insist that those seats go to the other Churches.

What is more, if the Government are not prepared to give seats to the other denominations, we should be prepared to make way in order to help them to do so. Because of that we would be able to ensure that the established presence of the Christian tradition at the heart of the life of our nation would be retained, through the expression of the representations from the Church as a whole.

The Bishop of Woolwich (Rt Revd Colin Buchanan): I refer to the report of the Business Committee and the recent history of that committee in relation to this topic. In February last year the committee promised us a debate on the Constitution in July. In July we had tabled a debate on the Wakeham report. In October, there was not even a mention of it; it had all gone. Pete Broadbent said, in reply to my remarks in the debate on the agenda, that I was quite right: it ought to come. What we have now is a Private Member's Motion on a very narrow topic, and the Business Committee is sort of saying to us – and I want to hear from the committee – that this will provide for the debate on Wakeham. I do not think that it will at all. It may be contributory to a debate on Wakeham but it is a very narrow question that we are being asked to handle tonight. If, with the establishment persons that I see around me, and hear sometimes – and the House of Bishops may yet contribute as establishment people – if we are serious about our being embedded in the life of the nation, surely what we have to ask is not 'How can 26 bishops be preserved in aspic in the House of Lords?' but 'What is the best form of second chamber in the reform of parliamentary democracy?' Simply to handle this question alone leaves me saying, 'Well, I don't really mind whether the deckchairs are up or down on the *Titanic*.'

I would love, therefore, to hear from the Business Committee before I know how to vote. I put down an amendment at four o'clock and was told that it was too late: I wanted to send it back to the Business Committee.

Those things said, if we are not able today to comment in general on a second chamber I want the following things in relation to the motion to be noted. I find it quite comic to talk about a second chamber in our parliamentary democracy; there is nothing democratic about the House of Lords at all. It might have been better to leave that word out of the motion. A second chamber to do something in relation to the democratic one might have been better.

Second, we have a mystique about the word 'representation'. Other denominations

and other faiths can have representatives but bishops are not exactly representatives; they are mystical individual figures who are given special wisdom but they are not representative of us! (It actually means that everyone else will be represented except us but that is by the way.)

My third point is on the number 26. If you read the Wakeham report you will see that the commission says that 16 is our fair number on *its* basis (although we are not allowed to look at its basis), except that its figure of the proportion of the nation is 25 million Anglicans. This is one of those amazing figures that come up at intervals; it is in the total figures for the Anglican Communion. It only goes down when we have to pay the World Council of Churches' fees. It is nowhere in the other statistics. However, if 25 million are worth 16 bishops, how many do you think we have to have to be worth 26?

I notice that the mover of the motion in his circular says that Wakeham also allows that it might not be bishops who would be there on our behalf, but his motion does actually talk about 26 bishops, and we do not seem to have that option.

My last point is that the appointment of bishops was changed 26 years ago (or whenever it was) when the Crown Appointments Commission was set up on the basis that the Prime Minister had to have discretion because the folk were going to the House of Lords. We now have a situation in which the Wakeham commission recommends that every other appointment to the House of Lords should not be by the Prime Minister, but nobody has addressed the fact that we might yet have a situation where we defend the Prime Minister appointing bishops who do not go to the House of Lords. That would be a most paradoxical outcome.

Mr Paul Boyd-Lee (Salisbury): It is always difficult to follow Bishop Buchanan, especially after dinner when you have been drinking wine.

I realize that the amendment that I have put forward may seem like a very broad brush-stroke to remove everybody from the motion bar the Church of England. Maybe some people would like that very much but it is not what I am trying to do. I was on a train recently and some schoolchildren were telling each other jokes. One came out: 'How do you catch a squirrel?' The answer came back, 'Act like a nut.' I feel something like that tonight because I do not quite know whether I am the squirrel or the nut. In essence, however, I have had great difficulty in deciding how to word this amendment without appearing to discriminate against any one body or another.

Synod will be given the opportunity later to vote on an amendment which is particularly selective, that of Mr Leyton, but that is not what I am doing here. Let me please remind members that already it has been recognized from all the papers that we have received on this subject, including *The Role of Bishops in the Second Chamber* and several press reports, that the Church would welcome wider representation in the House of Lords, and I was very pleased to hear the first speaker this evening mention

that if places are given up by our bishops they should be given to other Christian bodies; that is the sort of aspect that has already been put down.

In addition, I feel that the Bishop of London's amendment contains a very important message which highlights the complex issue of how the wider community might be dealt with in perhaps appointing or selecting them to the House of Lords. However, this whole debate has moved on some way since the Private Member's Motion was originally tabled in the last Synod, and I suggest that a long motion at this juncture clouds the main issue of whether bishops and/or other members from the Church of England should be in the second chamber and, if so, how many and for what purpose. It is even suggested by some that it may be inappropriate that this body spend priority time deliberating on the representation of other bodies in the House of Lords. I suggest that this is a national political matter rather than an ecclesiastical one.

People will be there from other groupings and for another reason anyway – that has been said – so what I am doing here is giving the opportunity not to go the negative way of removing all other groups but rather looking at it positively in order to emphasise what the Church of England itself has to offer. I think that this is one thing that the Government are looking to us for. We are all here members of the Church of England (though we do have representatives of other Churches as well, but I think that members will understand what I mean). We are here to do a job for the Church of England. Let us get on with that job. We should know more about that than perhaps other people. Let us concentrate our ideas in a clear message of what our attributes are for in respect of representation and presence in the House of Lords. Here is an opportunity to give a distinctively Anglican response, and if members feel that that is the way forward I hope that they will support my amendment.

The Bishop of Portsmouth (Rt Revd Kenneth Stevenson): I am grateful, like others, to Fr Houlding for introducing this debate and I would like, if I may, to make two points, the first from the wider context and the second on a specific matter.

On constitutional reform, I am very glad – though Synod may not believe it – that Bishop Buchanan spoke in the way he did. It is very clear that the Government are committed to the work of constitutional reform, and this came through in the House of Lords during the first day of the debate on the Queen's Speech two weeks ago. Reform of the House of Lords is only part of a package which includes other matters such as regionalization, equal opportunities and much else, and while a great deal of attention has been given to the composition of the second chamber, we need to realize that House of Lords reform is about its workings as well, whether this is to do with the hours when debates take place – why on earth should I speak about fox-hunting at one o'clock in the morning and foot and mouth at 11.25 p.m. the next day? – or the details of the legal relationship with the House of Commons.

The fact that the Wakeham report has endorsed the place of bishops in a reformed upper chamber is very significant, it seems to me, in the whole discussion, and while it

recommends that the number be reduced to 16 I do not think that we should get too hung up on the question of numbers; I understand that this figure originated in part from a smaller second chamber. There needs first to be some overall agreement on what kind of service is expected of the bishops, and that is why that word 'consultation' is important and figured prominently in the debate two weeks ago.

That brings me to my second point, which concerns the composition of the benches currently occupied by the bishops. I am sometimes asked why we are there, as happened when I went on behalf of the bishops to appear before the Neill commission on standards in public life. My reply then was to the effect that we are not there primarily to represent the Church of England, as if we are championing narrow Anglican privileges, but are there to speak on behalf of the nation in things spiritual and to articulate the religious reference to the nation. Hence the meaning of that rather archaic term 'lords spiritual'. The independence of this voice is very strong and it is expressed when a bishop is introduced into the House of Lords: unlike any other members of the House, where Black Rod and Garter King of Arms and all sorts of people surround them when they come in, bishops are introduced by their fellow bishops, and we sit as cross-benchers on the Government side but in critical solidarity with them.

Finally, who else should sit there? Wakeham recommends representation of other Churches and other faiths. So far, the Church's response has been to welcome that proposal. I am sure that the workings-out of it will involve complex questions about identifying who they should be, and I am sure that this will be in the context of the growing custom in the past 40 years of appointing leaders from other Churches and other faiths as life peers, not lords spiritual, like the late George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, and the late Lord Jacobovits and Kathleen Richardson, former President of the Methodist Conference. This will all go on and I am sure that it will take place within the context of a wider discussion of what that reformed second chamber is going to be.

I therefore support both the Durham amendment about adequate provision and the London amendment about 'members drawn from' rather than 'representatives' because that leaves the thing rather more open and it becomes more workable.

Mr Richard Leyton (Winchester): It was with some trepidation that I put down my amendment for it could easily be misunderstood if taken out of context, but I find consolation in the saying 'To avoid criticism do nothing, say nothing, be nothing'. We have heard from the Bishop of Portsmouth and others that the bishops in the Lords speak for much more than the Church of England, and it seems to me that this is a point of considerable merit: their concern should extend beyond narrow denominational and parochial boundaries. From time to time we hear excellent speeches reported that demonstrate the truth of this assertion. Therefore it could well be argued that there is little need or merit in providing places for other denominations in the new second chamber. I am inclined to the view that there is actually minimal

need, but for the Church of England to voice that opinion would certainly be for our Church to be perceived as arrogant and out of touch.

My amendment, however, addresses another issue in Fr Houlding's otherwise excellent motion, that of the possible representation of other faiths. Initially, I was inclined to go along with the view that we should be generous to other faith communities in this matter, but the more I thought and prayed about it the more convinced I became that it is inappropriate for Synod to pass a motion including these words. We of all people surely believe that England is still Christian at its heart. We have heard the statistic of 25 million Anglicans. As Christians we believe and affirm that there is only one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that the only way back to God is through the saving work of Jesus on the cross. On that basis other faiths have nothing to offer but confusion and disinformation. They deceive people and distract them from their search for the God who will save them. What is more, many of them aggressively and harmfully proselytize; in particular, they prey on vulnerable young people, especially those from disadvantaged ethnic minorities.

I am also hurt by the inclusion of these words for the sake of our Christian brothers and sisters in other countries –

The Chairman: I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr Leyton, but could I ask you just to moderate your tone slightly when speaking about other faiths, please?

Mr Richard Leyton (Winchester): In many parts of the world Christians suffer extreme discrimination and persecution, even martyrdom. Passing the motion containing this clause would be grossly offensive to Christians round the world and would be much misunderstood by them. We might attempt to explain it away; we might say, 'Well the Government are intent on doing it anyway.' Probably that is true, and they are scarcely likely to be swayed by the General Synod in any case; but they are consulting. Perception is what matters in this case: it is how Christians who are persecuted for their faith, or whose friends and relatives are, would view this that should be our concern.

I do not want us, as the General Synod of the Church of England, to put a single stumbling block in the way of any of our brothers and sisters, and that is the important thing for us tonight.

I want to address just one more question very briefly. In case the assertion might be made that this amendment in any way has any racial connotation, it is not about ethnic diversity; it is about other faiths. It would be as unacceptable, in a sense, to have anybody English born and bred, however we might define that, converted to any of the other faiths appointed as a faith leader from one of these other faiths; their faith and witness at the heart of our democracy would be equally misunderstood if supported specifically by the Church of England.

Therefore I want us to stand up for the unique gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in

solidarity with Christians round the world who are persecuted for their beliefs in the name of other faiths and to vote for my amendment when the time comes, if Paul Boyd-Lee's amendment has not already been passed. If it has, I am very happy to support that.

The Bishop of Durham (Rt Revd Michael Turnbull): Following on that last speech I ought just to say that in the context of the House of Lords some of our closest partners in trying to get over the principles and motivations of our common life together as a nation are leaders and members of other faiths, and we are very thankful for that.
(Applause)

I was of course disappointed that the debate last July was postponed because time ran out, and I do sympathize with Bishop Buchanan's frustration. I hope that it may be possible for the Business Committee to look at a wide-ranging debate on greater and wider constitutional issues than this quite specific one. Nevertheless, I am very glad – and I believe that the Synod is in debt to Fr Houlding – that it has come so early in its life to this new Synod, for during the lifetime of this Synod the reform of the House of Lords will proceed very considerably, and it is clearly the Government's determination that it will. So it is a great encouragement to those of us who are sometimes drawn into discussions and negotiations about the future of the House of Lords and our place within it that the Synod is giving its attention to this. Believe you me, we bishops who are in that position are listening very carefully to this debate and we take encouragement from the fact that this is an opportunity for the Church to show an interest in what is a significant part of our lives and ministry.

So I am grateful to Fr Houlding for persisting with it and indeed gaining strong support for having this debate tonight. I was grateful for his speech and his admirably clear paper. Since last July of course much discussion has taken place and further steps in the reform process are already in place; things have happened in the past year which have changed the membership and constitution of the House of Lords, so we are in an evolving process. The Queen's Speech, as has been said, indicated that it is still a priority of the Government. So this debate is timely and I hope that this Synod can usefully inform those who will be negotiating this matter on behalf of the Church of England.

Members will have seen GS 1385, the note prepared for the July 2000 debate, containing the Church of England's response then to the Wakeham proposals. I fully endorse what Fr Houlding says about this not being a debate about Establishment and I fully expected Bishop Buchanan to make the kind of speech that he did make. It is very easy, I am afraid, Bishop Buchanan, to make emotive comments about democratic deficits and so on; in fact, democracy is a very slippery word and it is questionable after the last election what democratic legitimacy is held in the House of Commons alone. It is also important to develop a reform of the House of Lords which in no way in the end is seen to compete in democratic legitimacy with the other House; they must be complementary and not seen to be in competition.

I take Bishop Buchanan's point about an alternative to bishops in the House of Lords representing faith communities, and indeed we have not at all discounted that; but we do believe that in this rather rapid progress of change it is right for us to maintain that the bishops for the moment – not necessarily for ever – are the right people to take this role. There will no doubt be many other opportunities for us to debate these wider issues, but there is now a quite specific opportunity for the Synod to engage in the reform of the House of Lords and at this moment wider issues can wait.

I have one difficulty with one point in the motion as it stands, and at the appropriate time, Mr Chairman, I shall move an amendment about it. First, the phrase about retaining the 'existing provision for 26 bishops' might look a bit defensive and unnegotiable and lay us open to the charge that, while everyone else is being reformed, the bishops are immune. Second, it might be too prescriptive, so that we are left with either 16 or 26. The important thing that we have to negotiate is the principle: what kind of service does the Church want us to perform in the life of the nation and what kind of service does the House of Lords see us performing there?

Bishops are already stretched. The Queen's Speech debate saw major speeches from bishops about education, the Constitution, health matters, criminal law, and they were speeches of a very high quality; but it was not without a cost to the Church, to the dioceses and to the bishops. To reduce our number would increase that cost and to reduce it too far might take it to breaking point. Those who are negotiating will make these points, but to be prescriptive about numbers at this point might not be so helpful. That is the point that we need to take from this Synod to the negotiating table as we engage with the Government in the next stage of the process of reform.

The Bishop of London (Rt Revd Richard Chartres): – bishop for the bohemians of Bloomsbury!

I very much welcome this motion by Fr Houlding. The modest amendment that I am proposing bears on the concept of what it is to be representative, and of course Bishop Buchanan is right: bishops are indeed representative but they do not behave nor are they regarded, I believe, simply as representatives of a single denomination and its interests. Recent experience shows bishops' contributions ranging across the whole agenda of Parliament and frequently in matters like education, where every member of the Synod would want to thank the Bishop of Blackburn and his predecessors for many late hours and many lost nights of sleep; the bishops speak for the whole constituency of religious schools and not just Church of England schools.

It is also clear that people outside the Church see bishops as representative figures in regions and not just of one ecclesiastical body; the most obvious recent example is the approach to the Bishop of Exeter to chair the convention leading to the formation of an assembly in the south-west, and the Bishop of Durham has had a similar experience in the recent past. It is also instructive to realize that the writs that you receive, summoning you to serve in Parliament, actually summon you by reference to regional

offices; they convey no suggestion that bishops are delegates of one particular denomination.

Of course the Establishment has evolved very rapidly in recent years and sometimes it is attacked by being presented in a very antiquated form. People paint an 1832 picture of portly port-swilling, pheasant-stuffing prelates and then proceed to knock it down, but the Establishment has recently evolved very rapidly, becoming more hospitable, and it enables the presence of other faiths and the voice of religion to be heard in the public realm. One of the alternatives in Europe, for instance, is the situation which obtains in France where religion is quite consistently pushed to the margins of public life and is confined to the private realm, and it may well be that the welcome so generally extended to the possibility of enrolling members of other faiths in the second chamber itself comes from the fact – and I believe that it is a very modern fact, in tune with the world that will be in the twenty-first century – that this deliberative and revising part of our Constitution does not exclude the vital religious element in life.

Whereas bishops – and here I totally agree with Bishop Buchanan – do play these symbolic and practical roles in the legislative process, it should not blind us to the fact (hinted at in Fr Houlding's opening speech) that this is somewhat of the nature of theatre. In many respects the Church of England is the most disestablished Church in Europe, and I think in particular of the huge national and local responsibilities that the Church bears for 40 per cent of all the Grade I listed buildings in the country, for a start, and for innumerable other heritage sites; with many members of Synod I share the experience of trying to explain the situation to European visitors: how we are uniquely dependent on volunteer effort and finance and are even taxed for our pains in trying to maintain the national architectural heritage. (*Applause*) People from Scandinavia and Germany are frankly incredulous, and even in France, where there is a total separation of Church and State, all Church buildings before 1904 are the responsibility of the State or the local municipality.

I do hope as well, as we contribute to this consultation process, that we will come up with some fresh ideas of our own about the composition of the second chamber. It seems to me that there is much to be said for the institution of some kind of limited membership of the House of Lords; you might call them 'peers for a year', which could be the basis on which the second chamber could welcome and hear from such significant characters as the Lord Mayor of Birmingham or the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Mention has been made of the democratic legitimacy of the second chamber: how have these people really been elected? Well, looking round at some of the members of the House of Lords, the close scrutiny that is given by one's colleagues in professions like the military and the law amounts to a mode of election by continuous assessment far more searching than that which Members of another place have to experience once they are past the small selection committee in many of our safe constituencies.

The House of Lords is going to be a more important place in the present Parliament, I believe. It has been confirmed in a sense that it has a legitimate job to do. Its benches are most often full. Its standard of debate is frequently very high. Despite those doughty controversialists, Tony Benn, Lord Tebbit and the Bishop of Woolwich, this is not the time to retreat from the public arena so that we can merely speak words of fire to one another in gatherings of consenting adults.

Revd Richard Cattley (Oxford): I am more a lone voice in some ways. I feel that it is not good for the Church in many ways to be attached to an organization like the House of Lords that is clearly an organization in retreat. There were danger signs at our last election of people appearing indifferent to the whole political process, and I am sure that part of that indifference is towards the House of Lords as well as to the Commons. It is time for a radical re-think about the different Houses of Parliament. I am not sure that the Church should support the continuation of the House of Lords itself, so I am not sure that we should be thinking about having bishops in a House that I do not agree with. I believe that the House of Lords itself should be abolished. People are saying to the Church and Government, 'Get real about what's important in society.' Is the House of Lords and its trappings real? I ask that same question about the House of Commons as well as the House of Lords. My feeling is that we should really be honest and say that the House of Lords is an anachronism and needs to dissolve itself, and that we need as a Church to help it to do so and give it its funeral service.

Mrs Joanna Monckton (Lichfield): After all these erudite speeches I feel nervous with my rather basic suggestions, but I wholeheartedly support the motion. I think that it is vital to keep all our hard-working bishops, who do a wonderful job in putting forward Christian views in many varied debates in the Lords, but I fear that if there is not a consistently better attendance the Church of England will lose this privilege and have the number reduced, as suggested in the Wakeham report.

Before Christmas I set about finding out the facts. I obtained the names of all the bishops eligible to sit in the Lords and of those who had attended the House on a particular date in November and how they voted, and I have a copy of the verbatim report of the debate. I then wrote to them all and they all replied. The results were as I had expected: the majority of them could not attend for various reasons, distance of diocese from London and difficulty with trains being the main one. The agenda for the Lords is rarely set even a week in advance which meant that there was a conflicting engagement in the diary. I also learned that some who attended this debate felt unable to speak, knowing that they had an evening engagement, as it is a tradition that if you do speak you must remain for the vote. I also learned that the sessions for the Lords are not set far in advance. So it is the terribly busy lives of our bishops that is the cause of their absence.

It is only an idea, and I wait to be shot down, but I wondered if in a large diocese where there are perhaps three suffragans it might be possible for the suffragans to take

turns to cover for the diocesan, the year to be divided into thirds and each suffragan in turn making sure that they do not have a vital engagement on the same day as their diocesan: a confirmation, for example. Thus if the diocesan sees an important debate which he wishes to attend he can ask the suffragan to step in and the suffragan then has to cancel his not so very important engagements. (*Laughter*) This could be done on a rota basis week by week rather than by thirds of a year, but I do understand that many more hours will be spent sorting out different diaries.

I gather that one bishop just blanks two weeks in his diary per year for attendance in the Lords and of course there will always be debates in this period when the Christian voice needs to be heard, though incidentally I was heartened to hear from one diocesan that in many of the debates the Christian values are often espoused by other members.

Of course we must remember that the bishops sit in their own right and not as C. of E. representatives, so on the November day in question four voted for the motion and four against and several did not vote at all because they had other engagements.

I just feel that we must make it easier for our bishops to sit in the House of Lords before it is too late and we lose ten of them in the next reform. Is it our wish to have diocesans based in their dioceses or representing a Christian presence in the national interest?

The Dean of Derby (Very Revd Michael Perham): – responding as chairman of the Business Committee to the challenge of Bishop Buchanan, who wants to know what we have to say before he decides how to vote. The Bishop of Durham has also encouraged me to say something about the attitude of the Business Committee.

There are two things to say. First, at every point in this debate where somebody has said that we need a more general debate on the future of the upper House there has been applause. Members of the Business Committee I am sure have all heard that, as I have, and we will reflect on it at our next meeting. It seems likely therefore that we shall come back with a proposal before too long for a more general debate.

The second thing, however, is that the whole business of constitutional reform is immensely complex and has a whole series of parts to it, and what we have been doing in a very good debate so far this evening is examining one of them. It may well be that over the course of the next few years we need several debates about particular aspects of constitutional reform but that at some point along the line we need one big, much more general, all-embracing debate. How we organize that is for the committee to reflect upon, listening to any advice that it receives, but inasmuch as I can speak for a committee that has not discussed the matter I believe that the Business Committee will be minded to bring forward a more general debate before too long.

The Bishop of Durham (Rt Revd Michael Turnbull): I beg to move as an amendment:

‘*Leave out* the words “the existing provision for 26 bishops of the Church of England” and *insert* the words “provision fully adequate to enable bishops of the Church of England to continue to contribute effectively to a reformed House”.’

Revd David Houlding: I am very grateful to the Bishop of Durham for his contribution and I am very minded to accept this amendment. The point, as members will have gathered from my speech, was that we need to provide for adequate representation from the House of Bishops. Any reduction from 26, whatever it may be, will be difficult for the bishops. Their job will not be easy, and it may be that the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester will find that they have to do more duty – presently they are excused, of course, having to do the prayers and so on. I think that we should accept the amendment of the Bishop of Durham but I am happy to test the mind of Synod on it.

Dr Philip Giddings (Oxford): The key to this amendment lies in its concluding words: ‘contribute effectively to a reformed House’. The two words that the Synod needs to hear this evening are ‘only connect’. It would have been very helpful to have a contribution from our young adult observers to this debate. We live in a society whose political system is in serious disarray. To focus our attention on what is, in that context, a trivial domestic issue about the number of bishops in the second chamber of a legislature that could command so little response from our society at the recent general election really does deserve that overworked reference to deckchairs on the *Titanic*.

If we are to have, as I trust we will, proper representation of the established Church in our legislature, the first question to be settled is what our legislature is for and how we are to connect it with the whole of our community. At the moment it is seriously unconnected, partly because of the disastrous way in which both our main political parties organize their affairs. One of the particular contributions that the bishops bring to the debates in our Parliament arises from the fact that they are not committed to political parties. It is the independence of their point of view which is the critical contribution that they make to that public realm which has been rightly stressed in this debate. Important as it is that the interests of the Church of England, as an established Church, should be protected by this Synod, I fear that the Synod does itself a disservice by focusing public attention on the fact that the only serious contribution that we appear to be making to the crucial subject of the reform of our Parliament is to argue about the number of bishops who are to be there. The issue is how we can have an effectively reformed legislature in a community as complex and as needy as the one in which we live.

The amendment was put and carried.

Mr Paul Boyd-Lee (Salisbury): I beg to move as an amendment:

'Leave out all words after "be retained".'

Revd David Houlding: I am afraid that I am inclined to reject this amendment. It is a process, as we have heard, that is going on in the reform of the House of Lords. There is nothing fixed, and I think that we can afford to be generous – indeed we must be generous – for that negotiation to take place; we must also be realistic about the society in which we live. So it is inevitable that if we want a sufficient number of bishops adequately to fulfil the role that we wish them to on behalf of the nation, there should at the same time be representation (whatever that might mean), but there certainly should be members drawn from other Christian denominations and faith communities.

I am afraid, therefore, that I am going to reject this amendment, and I ask Synod to do the same.

The amendment was put and lost.

The Bishop of London (Rt Revd Richard Chartres): I beg to move as an amendment:

'Leave out the words "representatives of" and *insert* the words "members drawn from".'

Revd David Houlding: I am very grateful to my own bishop for giving us that image of pheasant-stuffing, port-swilling prelates, and I have to say this, do I not, that it could never be said about you, my lord! (I might want a job one day.) I am very mindful to accept this amendment – (*laughter*) – and I think that I need say no more than that!

The amendment was put and carried.

Mr Richard Leyton (Winchester): I beg to move as an amendment:

'Leave out the words "and other faiths".'

Revd David Houlding: For the same reasons as I gave before, I cannot recommend to Synod that we accept this amendment. It has already been debated in a sense, and I would rather not comment any further. I am sure from the responses that we have had that Synod will want to follow that lead.

Mr Geoff Locke (Lichfield): My brief remarks are set in the context that overall I agree very much with what Dr Giddings was saying just now but I will confine my remarks now to the words of this particular amendment.

I am very conscious that this amendment has suddenly gone a little electric, if I may say so, and I just think that we need to review carefully the implications of the words which are here. If I may remind the Synod, a few years ago the then English football

manager – no names, no pack drill – expressed some words in the light of the advice of his guru concerning people who suffered from handicaps and said that this was deserved in consequence of the lives that they had led in previous incarnations. Synod will recall the storm of protest that broke about his head; within a few days he had resigned from his post. Everything then calmed down a little and subsequent articles in the press tended to take one of two forms: those who took a compartmentalized view of life asked what his religious views had to do with running a football team, and those who took a rather broader view of life felt that he had just been pressured out of running the England football team but the views that he held were those of millions of perfectly orthodox Hindus worldwide.

That is worth pondering because it seems a strange situation whereby one says that holding certain views would disqualify someone from managing a football team yet holding those same views would qualify someone to be a member of a legislative House.

The second example I want to quote is this. On Sunday morning Synod is invited to worship at the Minster, as it much appreciates each year. Worship will take the form of communion as our central act of worship because the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus are at the very heart of the gospel that we believe ourselves called to proclaim. I have had occasion to quote the Koran in Synod before because I am trying to do some study on it. Let me just quote briefly from it again. Sura 4 says:

That they said (in boast),
 'We killed Christ Jesus
 The son of Mary, the Apostle of God'; –
 But they killed him not,
 Nor crucified him,
 But so it was made
 To appear to them,
 And those who differ
 Therein are full of doubts,
 With no (certain) knowledge,
 But only conjecture to follow,
 For of a surety
 They killed him not: –.

That Muslim denial of the death of Jesus on the cross and, in consequence, its leaving no place for the resurrection is perfectly orthodox Muslim belief. Again it seems strange that we have a high regard for the beliefs and contributions of our bishops in the House of Lords and then seem to say that the centrality of what we believe in is now discounted in the interests of a rather generalized spirituality which denies the heart of our faith.

The things that I am saying here are not things that I am saying only in these privileged circumstances. The first one I have shared with Hindu friends; as for the second, I was at an inter-faith conference in Germany in March and discussed this very issue with

Muslims. So I am well aware of the sensitivities but also of the importance of getting them out into the open. I just want to urge the Synod that there is more to Mr Leyton's amendment than the tenor of our debate has acknowledged.

Revd Ian Paul (Salisbury): I can push the significance of this amendment even further in this direction. We have been debating whether this discussion is about the reform of the House of Lords more broadly or whether it is a specific discussion about the nature of Christian representation. If we want to make recommendations about the place of other faiths in a reformed House, we need to have a wider discussion about the constitutional significance of that House. If this debate is actually about Christian representation then we should stick to the subject in hand. I would therefore want to support this amendment, not because I necessarily agree with the proposer of the amendment, nor necessarily because I agree with the previous speech but simply because, if we are concerned with Christian representation, let us stick with that concern. It is not appropriate for us to say one way or the other whether there should be representation of other faiths in the context of this debate.

I support the amendment.

The Bishop of Guildford (Rt Revd John Gladwin): If we fail to pass the motion as it is set we should give an entirely wrong signal about our intentions. One of the most important things – picking up on Philip Giddings's most important speech – is to remind ourselves about what democracy means. Democracy is not a system whereby the majority enforce their wishes on the minority. Democracy is a system of government by which all perspectives and characteristics of the life of the community are represented in the governing bodies of the nation. We will give a signal that we have not understood that principle if we do not at this moment, in terms of a religious discussion, recognize that Parliament needs to be representative of all faces of our national life. That is what democracy means; I believe that it is properly rooted in Christian faith and that we ought to reject this amendment.

Prebendary Horace Harper (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I beg to move:

‘That the question be now put.’

This motion was put and carried.

The amendment was put and lost.

Revd David Houlding, in reply: I remember very clearly, as a boy at school, studying the British Constitution and going up to London on my own to attend the final debate on the abolition of capital punishment. Needless to say, being a rather churchy if not quirky schoolboy, I was intrigued by the presence of so many bishops; they were there in force, as members may imagine, for such a debate. The Archbishop of Canterbury made a stunning contribution, which clearly commanded the whole attention of the

House. Characteristically, Michael Ramsey enunciated a clear Christian perspective on the whole issue, one which not only the House itself but the whole nation needed to hear. This of course is not a debate on capital punishment, but may I quote a short section from the speech that he made to demonstrate what I mean? 'There ought to be the recognition of the fact that the taking of life as a penalty does devalue human life. It means that society is to say in effect: this person has killed someone. Very well, we will kill them too. This does not enhance the sacredness of human life. I believe that it derates it further.' With the same principle in mind we should note the very significant contribution that the Church has made in recent years with the Education Acts, on immigration and on asylum issues, to name but a few. I mention no bishops by name, although that was done earlier by the Bishop of London, but we all know that without their forthright bringing to bear of a Christian perspective on these matters our country would be the poorer.

So I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the debate. I am grateful to Dr Marshall who reminded us that consultation is very much a process, and that the process will inevitably continue and we need to be involved in the debate. The Bishop of Portsmouth has reminded us that the bishops are not representatives. As I said in my opening speech, they do speak on behalf of the nation, coming from the different regions and parts of England, and that is a very important concept to retain in our minds as we vote on this.

What is the best form of second chamber in our parliamentary democracy? This is the question that Bishop Buchanan asks and it is the question, I would suggest, on which a further debate may be appropriate if I could commend that to the Business Committee. How do we want to see a second chamber for our parliamentary democracy evolve? That would make a good debate.

The bishops have to go to Parliament not just to say the prayers – but thank God they do say prayers in Parliament every day – but to be a sign of the Church's presence at the heart of our nation's life. Bishops must sit in sufficient numbers to enable them to do the job that is required of them on behalf of the gospel. That is what our motion as amended is all about this evening, and I beg members to support it.

The motion was put and carried in the following amended form, 372 voting in favour and 25 against:

'That this Synod call upon Her Majesty's Government, in the reform of the House of Lords, to ensure that provision fully adequate to enable bishops of the Church of England to continue to contribute effectively to a reformed House be retained, and that members drawn from other Christian Churches and other faiths also be added to the composition of a new second chamber in our parliamentary democracy.'

The Session was adjourned at 9.52 p.m.