



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

Archbishop Stephen spoke in the debate on the Humble Address to His Majesty in the House of Lords today. His speech follows in full

Watch the speech here

My Lords, it is an honour to respond to the gracious speech. I, with those on these benches wish to welcome the noble and learned lord, Lord Hermer, the Solicitor-General and thank him for a really moving maiden speech – not least his desire that we listen to and respect one another, and work consensually. Like others, I want to focus on something badly needed in our national life: rebuilding trust in democracy itself.

The turnout on 4th July was shockingly low. Research shows a 13% gap in turnout between the constituencies with the highest and lowest proportion of home ownership. Furthermore, an estimated 400,000 people were turned away at the polling station because they did not have the right ID.

These are alarming statistics. I look forward to the changes outlined in the government's manifesto that could start to address these, including reducing the voting age to 16.

But it is the link to poverty that causes me the gravest concern; it shows that a large proportion of our population do not feel they have a stake in our national life nor much of a future to look forward to, and therefore that voting isn't worth it.

There are things in the King's Speech about poverty that I welcome, particularly the Children's Wellbeing Bill and the plans for universal free breakfast clubs. However, I must take the opportunity to join others in calling for the removal of the two-child limit to universal credit, which is the single biggest driver of rising child poverty, and has a big impact on trust in our democracy.

I have often spoken about the power of devolution, not just to shift power away from the centre, but to shift perspective and enable consensual politics to thrive, and for us to take a longer view.

The recently established York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, where I live and serve, is already starting to demonstrate the difference this can make for rural as well as urban communities. I therefore wholeheartedly welcome the establishment of a Council of the Nations and Regions.

Another Bill which you won't be surprised to hear me welcome is the extension of the Lords Spiritual Women Act 2015.

The tone of the Government's manifesto and what was heard from the noble and learned Lord today, speaks about governance as service. This is so important for building trust in our democracy.

No one meant it to happen, but there has been an erosion of respect for the rule of law, of convention, and of the weighty responsibility to tell the truth. However, the nature of our uncodified constitution is that it relies on conventions derived from tradition. Therefore, it's up to us to

respect each other, to listen to each other, to build consensus, to work together. I want to take a lead from the noble and learned Lord and say that we can be part of this in the way that we conduct our business in this House.

However, there remain legitimate questions about the nature of this House itself.

First, we are a scrutinising chamber, offering wisdom and a balance of power. It is for this incoming government and the Ministers appointed to this House to ensure that this role is clearly understood.

Second, we ought to better represent the breadth of the nation we serve. 24% of our membership have links to London and 21.7% to the South East, but only 3% to the North East.

Thirdly – I don't know what we do about it - there are just too many of us, and that is not good for us.

And fourthly, while we on these benches, we do value our very particular role as Lords Spiritual, we think other faith communities could be better represented as well, and we believe that there does need to be a wide debate about reform of this House. We are confident that when this happens, the place of faith in public life will matter.

We look forward very much to working with members across the House in the coming session to address these issues.

Finally, I want to pay tribute to something that it would be all too easy to take for granted, which shows the underlying strength of our democracy (which does need to be rebuilt and renewed). That is the respectful and peaceful transition of power from one government to another that we witnessed a couple of weeks ago. For me, that is a great sign of hope of what we can be at our best – working together for the common good.

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