



My Lords, in almost every tradition of global faith and of humanism around the world the dignity of the individual is at the heart of what is believed.

In the Christian tradition we are told to welcome the stranger. Jesus said “I was a stranger and you invited me in”. In numerous places in the Old Testament and New, the commands of God are to care for alien and stranger. My Lords, it has already been said, and I agree with it, that the way this bill and its cousin, that we debated in the summer works is to obscure the truth that all people, asylum seekers included, are of great value. We can, as a nation, do better than this bill.

With this bill the Government is continuing to seek good objectives in the wrong way. Leading the nation down a damaging path. It is damaging for asylum seekers in need of protection, and safe and legal routes to be heard. It is damaging for this country's reputation, which it contradicts, even as late as last week where the Prime Minister himself, spoke eloquently on the value and importance of international law for this country. It is damaging in respect of constitutional principles and the rule of law.

And most of all, my Lords, it is damaging for our nation's unity in a time when the greatest issues of war, peace, defence and security need us to be united. We are united, I think on almost all benches, in agreeing that the boats must be stopped, and the Government is to be congratulated that the number has come down. That the people smugglers who trade in human misery must be brought to justice, and it is good news that so many groups have been broken up, and we need to be united on effective controls on agreed limits to immigration. The right way forward though is to enable the unity on ends to be translated into a unity on means, and that is not happening in the way these bills are successively brought to the house and brought before the country.

The challenge of migration is, as has been said, long term and global. And so must our response be. We need a wider strategy, I spoke about this at boring length in the summer and I won't repeat it. We need a wider strategy for refugee policy which involves international cooperation, and equips us for far greater migration flows, perhaps ten times greater in the coming decades, as a result of conflict and climate change and poverty. Instead, this bill offers only ad-hoc one-off approaches. Rwanda is a country I know well. It is a wonderful country and my complaint is not with Rwanda, nor with its people. It has overcome challenges this house cannot begin to imagine.

But this bill continues, wherever it does it, to outsource our legal and moral responsibilities for refugees and asylum seekers when other countries far poorer are already supporting multitudes more than we are now. And to cut back on our aid. 76% of refugees globally are being hosted in low-and middle-income countries at the end of 2022, countries far poorer than our own. The UK should lead internationally as it has in the past, not stand apart.

Others on these benches will say more about international and domestic law, human rights and the constitutional impact. I will simply say that a

‘pick and choose’ approach to international law undermines our global standing and offends against the principal of universality that is their increasingly threatened foundation.

Finally, I and my colleagues on these benches take its revising role seriously. When we vote, we vote to seek to improve something. I will sadly not be voting with those who want to vote this bill down today, although I found Lord German’s speech convincing and powerful, but I think we have to wait until the third reading and we have done our revising work.

We have been criticised many times over many decades on these benches here, by those thinking defence of the Government of the day should be our highest virtue and aspiration. We were accused last week of not taking and voting against the Governments whip. I am sorry to say we don't take the Governments whip. It may be worse news for this House to recognise that on those benches, on the Labour benches, it's not 95 percent, which is a false statistic of times that there’s been a vote against the government whip, it has been 100 percent. Maybe they should be criticised for that obnoxious behaviour.

We serve on these benches as independent members. Last week, as recently as Thursday, we were discussing what had happened in a particular vote, and we saw that we'd cancelled each other out. Bishops often cancel each other out, in every possible way. We vote because we value deeply the traditions of this country and this House and the truth we derive from the Bible and our service to Jesus Christ, our first priority.

Slightly to misquote Luther, “On that we stand. We can do no other.”

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