



Read the text of the Archbishop's speech:

My Lords, the events of the last two weeks have led to some of the most dramatic and dynamic changes that we've known. The course of the campaign was both robust, as it properly should be on such great issues, but at times veered over the line on both sides into being not merely robust but unacceptable.

Through those comments were created cracks in the thin crust of the politeness and tolerance of our society, through which, since the referendum, we have seen an out-welling of poison and hatred that I cannot remember in this country for very many years.

It is essential, not only in this House but for the leaders of both sides, and throughout our society, to challenge the attacks, the xenophobia and the racism that seem to have been felt to be acceptable, at least for a while.

Last week, just over a week ago at Lambeth Palace we had an itfar – the breaking of the fast at the end of the fasting day of Ramadan – in which I shared with the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Kahn, and with the Chief Rabbi. We had over a hundred young people of every faith and of no faith, and that sense of hope and energy and a future was one that carried through the rest of the week. It is there, and we can reach for it.

But, my Lords, if we are to thicken that crust through which these cracks have come. If we are to move to a place where not yet to speak of reconciliation but to begin to get on a path where in the future healing and reconciliation will begin to happen, then we need to beware.

St Paul in his letter to the Galatians says to them at one point, "Love one another, cease to tear at one another, lest at the end you consume one another." We are in danger of that in the way that our politics is developing at the moment.

If we are to tackle that, we have to look at some of the fundamental issues which must be put in place if we are to have a society that is capable of creating the agile, flexible, creative, entrepreneurial, exciting society, full of the common good, of solidarity, of love for one another, that is the only way that this country will flourish and prosper for all its citizens, in the world outside the European Union of the future.

The biggest thing it seems to me that we must challenge, my Lords, if we are to be effective in this creation of a new vision for Britain – a vision that enables hope and reconciliation to begin to flower – is to tackle the issues of inequality. It is inequality that thins out the crust of our society. It is inequality that raises the levels of anger and bitterness.

We have done it before, my Lords. This is not new. In the 19th century we tackled inequality. In the great governments following 1945 we tackled the inequality that had been so ruinous to our society in the 1930s and led to the failures of that time.

The tools to tackle inequality are as readily available as they ever were, my Lords. They are the obvious ones of education, of public health – and we would add today mental health – of housing. But those tools are tools that we have to take up and invest in.

I'm glad to say that the education side of the Church of England, to which I believe my friend the Bishop of Ely will speak later, has just launched a fresh vision for education, which draws together not only the need for skills but also the need for a whole person deeply imbued with the virtues, and with the hopes and with the aspirations, that we will need in our society.

But we also need investment in public health. We need to narrow the gaps of inequality that have emerged in recent years. Last week we saw figures that were horrifying as to the levels of child poverty in our country. We have seen a widening of the unfairness in our society, and with that it is no surprise that some of the things that have so shocked us have emerged in the last few days.

But my Lords, if those tools are to be used effectively, they are no use held in some kind of vacuum of values. We need a deep renewal of our values in this country. We need a renewal of a commitment to the common good. We need a renewal of solidarity. We need a sense of generosity, of hospitality, of gratuity, of the overflowing of the riches and the flourishing that we possess, not only into our society.

The issues of immigration, the issues of the hatred expressed to those who may have been here for two or three generations, are not to be solved simply by pulling up the drawbridge. They will only be solved – as will the plight of the many British citizens in Europe, and this morning, my Lords, I was talking to the Bishop in Europe whose churches have many of them attending, and hearing from him the massive concern, the deep insecurity of them, and I'm so glad that the Noble Baroness, Baroness Smith; the Noble Lord, Lord Wallace; and the Lord Privy Seal have all been clear about the unacceptability of treating people as bargaining chips. I want to add my voice to that.

We are to have a new sense of values. In December, my Lords, if the usual channels are helpful – as they've promised to be – I hope there will be a day's debate which I will be holding on a Friday on the nature of British values. I think that has become much more important. I hope some of your Noble Lordships will be able to participate.

We cannot despair, my Lords. Many of us will have been part of the 48, some of the 52. To bring them together for a country that flourishes for all its citizens is now our great challenge.

I started with scripture in St Paul, I will finish with Deuteronomy. As the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, God said to Moses: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

We live in a society deeply embedded in that sense of destiny, in that sense of hope. We can catch hold of that hope and be that agile, flourishing and entrepreneurial society that will benefit the poorest and the richest. That will reach out with a forward foreign policy to the poorest around the world. That can renew the standards that we believe are the best of this country.

My Lords, I hope in this debate we'll have that sense of optimism and hope.

6 min read

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