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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
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House of Lords

Friday 8 December 2023

10 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Chelmsford.

Love Matters (Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households Report)

Motion to Take Note

10.05 am

Moved by *The Archbishop of Canterbury*

That this House takes note of *Love Matters*, the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, I want to start by thanking the usual channels for allowing me to hold this debate today. I am very grateful to all noble Lords who have come to participate in it, or just to be here for it. On these Benches, we do not take for granted in any way the remarkable privilege of having such a debate roughly once a year; it is a great honour to be allowed to do so.

Families really matter. It is obvious. We know that. However, sometimes we forget why. They are the fundamental building blocks for a flourishing society. This was the motivation for, and the conclusion of, the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households, of which the co-chair was the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham.

I pay tribute to the commission's members, who worked for over two years on this, particularly its chair, Professor Janet Walker, and all those who took part and gave evidence to the commission. It was the last in a series of commissions which grew out of a book I wrote in 2018, *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope*. The book encouraged us to reimagine society as dedicated to the flourishing of the common good of peoples and communities. The Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community reported in 2021 and the Archbishops' Commission on Reimagining Care reported at the start of this year.

For as long as human beings have existed, we have formed families and households. Families were the birthplace of society itself, and states followed on—they are a later creation. Families are the source of flourishing for so many. At their best, they are the place of belonging and security, of growth, care, healing and reconciliation, of training in being a citizen. They are where we learn to love and be loved, to forgive and to be forgiven. They are where we learn about trust, respect, commitment and values, where we learn to be safe and confident in our identity. But we know that families come in all shapes and sizes in all different societies, and that the shape of the family has changed enormously in our lifetime. They are not simply nuclear.

As the press widely reported when they had nothing better to talk about, my own childhood was messy due to my parents' alcohol addiction. A few years ago, I,

like many people, discovered that the father I had grown up with was not my biological father. Those who, like me, do not grow up in stable immediate families often find hope, comfort and healing in being welcomed into and supported by other loving families, as I was, or extended families. In my case, that included my grandmother, who cared for me in the times when my parents could not. For others, it is an aunt and uncle, a godparent, a loving neighbour.

Households and families—I will call them “families” for short throughout this speech—come in so many shapes and sizes. Those who are single, deliberately or by circumstance, also contribute greatly to households and families through friendship networks and are usually part of extended forms of households. Our families and households grow, adapt and age with us. We see the wonder of familiarity and change, the promise of renewal. If we have children or siblings, we are given the gift of viewing life at both ends—as son and father, granddaughter and grandmother, nephew and uncle.

The commission expressed brilliantly—I had nothing to do with its writing—the opportunity we now have to reimagine a society in which all families, of all shapes and all loving relationships, are valued and strengthened. My right reverend friend the Bishop of Durham will speak more about the commission's focus on valuing all relationships, including those of people who are single. But family must not be idolised. While very often it is the greatest source of contentment and hope, it can for many be a cause of despair, unhappiness and trauma, the place where our human imperfections—which we know as “sin”—give way to harmful and destructive behaviours.

We all know the statistics on domestic abuse and neglect. The NSPCC estimates that around half a million children suffer abuse in the UK each year, and the Office for National Statistics found that about 5% of adults had experienced abuse in the year ending March 2022. Around 80% of abuse happens within households and families.

In the Bible, family life is messy. Our complex relationships become part of the divine story of God—from Cain and Abel to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob's family, the beautiful story of Ruth and especially the holy family of Jesus.

So family matters, but what defines families and makes them so crucial for our well-being and for that of society? The answer—it sounds banal, but I will unpack it—is the bonds of love. Yes, of course it is; what else might it be? Well, it is often forgotten.

Throughout the commission's work, it found in evidence from all places within and outside the Christian or any other faith that “love” was the word most associated with family life, hence the title of the report. The report said:

“Love is undoubtedly the essential characteristic of supportive family life which knows no boundaries and which is expected to endure through the best and the worst of times”.

What do we mean by “love” though? We are not speaking of an emotional feeling. We and the report mean a deep sacrificial commitment to each other, even when it is really hard. Sacrificial love is at the heart of the Christian story, for God so loved the

[THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY]

world that he sent his son Jesus Christ both for our salvation, which we believe as Christians, but to model a radical new way of relating to one another, which is self-giving love without expectation of return.

In the Bible, love is described in the most practical way. Here is a passage that almost everyone knows:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”.

That passage from 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, is often read out at weddings, but has application far beyond. In my mind's eye, I see a journey that my wife and I made last year, when we stopped at a service station for a bite to eat. There was a very elderly couple, both finding extreme problems with mobility. They were married to each other and supporting each other as they made their slow and painful way back to their vehicle. That was nothing very dramatic, one might say, but it was a beautiful picture of love—not the love we hear of so much in novels, but resilient, enduring, sacrificing, self-giving love. That is the biblical position on love. It is not just for the benefit of us and our families, but for others. Sacrificial love develops in us the capacity to love and serve without self-interest.

The Children's Commissioner described a “protective effect” of the family. Family has the power to support its members through life's challenges. At its best, family is the first port of call in a crisis and a place where we can share both life's joys and life's sorrows with others who care for us. A colleague of mine is caring for a family who have just lost the second child in their lives to cancer—a young boy of 11 who died two weeks ago. The wider family has gathered round to bring strength to these people, who have suffered more than most of us can imagine, even those of us who are of that rare and unpleasant club who have lost one child.

That resilience that family brings is especially true for children. Family is the best place for children to grow up and develop resilience, and the evidence of the commission—the evidence, not just a vague thought—is that living with loving birth parents is best, where possible, and when it is not the state has an important role to play in ensuring that children can be integrated into other loving families which are “stable and committed” to one another. Stable and committed is not a question of sexuality, according to the evidence.

The commission found that:

“There is now scientific consensus that the period from conception to age five is critical in providing the foundation for future physical and mental health, as well as overall wellbeing and productivity”.

The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood is an extraordinary foundation doing remarkable work. In 2021, the Government presented a vision, which came partly from its work, for the first

“1,001 ... days through pregnancy to the age of two ... when the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid”.

There is evidence that mothers and fathers play a crucial role in these early years. The protective effect of families is particularly pertinent given the extraordinary rise in mental health challenges visible in both children and adults.

The Church of England Children's Society concluded in its 2021 *Good Childhood Report*—an annual production that I strongly commend to noble Lords—that:

“The continuing downward trajectory of children's happiness with life as a whole, and other important indicators, suggests the UK is struggling to create conditions in which all children can thrive”.

The commission's call is for all of us, as individuals, communities, government and the Church, to put families at the very centre of all we do.

How can we enable bonds of love to flourish within families and households? Exhortation is useful. Practical aid is essential, and that comes especially through basic needs such as good housing, social care, education, healthcare and nutrition. These are moral duties, not just economic calculations.

But to what extent should this be the responsibility of government? As I said, the family predates society, so government may be useful or harmful to families, but stable families are indispensable to government and society. We literally cannot exist as a state without them, and not only because it would cost too much. Governments must seek to support the intermediate institutions, which are the only way of delivering effective family support at the local level. Those bodies and groups which sit between the family or the individual and the state have, for much of history, done the heavy lifting and care for one another's well-being and promoting the flourishing of society. All our commissions made recommendations to the Church and for other bodies in society, not simply to government—and that applies to this one.

William Beveridge, often referred to as the father of the welfare state, saw the importance of voluntary institutions. In his 1942 report, where he identified the five giants to be conquered, he wrote:

“The State in organising security should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and his family”.

In 1948, Beveridge wrote in his less remembered and much ignored follow-up, *Voluntary Action*—it is gendered language, but this is 1948—

“how much all men owe to Voluntary Action for public purposes in the past”,

and suggested how it

“can be kept vigorous and abundant in the future”.

There is a crucial role for individuals, churches, and other charities and institutions to play in putting families first. The ideal is for the state to act in such a way as to create a positive reinforcing loop—a force multiplier—with the actions of individuals, intermediate institutions and families themselves, to make space for families, neighbours and communities to care for one another.

In this final bit of the speech, I will focus on two areas where the Government, through their legislation, regulations and example, can promote the flourishing of families and households. The first is ensuring that, whenever a policy is created in any government department, its impact on families and households is considered and acted upon. Does it enable the bonds of love within the family and the household to flourish? Does it support and strengthen relationships?

This week, we hear that many people in this country will be prevented from living together with their spouse, children or elderly parents as a result of a big increase in the minimum income requirement for family visas. The Government are rightly concerned with bringing down the legal migration figures—noble Lords will be relieved to know that I am not going into the politics of that—but there is a cost to be paid in the negative impact that this will have on marriage and family relationships for those who live and work and contribute to our lives together, particularly in social care.

The family test already exists. It was introduced by the Government of the noble Lord, Lord Cameron, in 2014. It seeks, through five questions, to introduce a family and household perspective into the policy-making process of every department. I know that DWP—I suspect that the Minister will comment on this—is currently conducting an internal review to look at ways to strengthen the test. That is welcome. The family test should be on the front of every Bill. It should have practical implications for policy, from Treasury spending decisions to the impact of sentencing in the criminal justice system, on which I look forward to hearing more from my right reverend friend the Bishop of Gloucester.

The main thing I urge of the Government is to consider giving the family test, with the support of the Opposition, greater teeth to support its implementation across government departments. Will they require completion and publication of the assessments to increase transparency and learning across government? Will they also consider reviewing the questions asked within the test to focus more on children and all aspects of well-being—emotional, social, spiritual and material? Let me remind noble Lords what I said a few minutes ago. The state is useful to the family, but the family is indispensable to the state. A lack of strong families undermines our whole society. The Government need families to work. They must not set a series of hurdles for them to jump over.

Another key consideration for policy is whether it is family-proof. Is it flexible enough to accommodate the different ways in which families live? One example is the two-child limit on benefits. I pay tribute to the tireless work of my right reverend friend the Bishop of Durham for his campaigning in this area. The End Child Poverty campaign estimates that removing the two-child limit would lift a quarter of a million children out of poverty. The moral case is beyond any question, yet the unfair penalty applied to additional children affects their educational outcomes, their mental and physical health, and their likelihood to require public support from public services later on. It is not a good policy. Will the Government—and the Opposition, should they become the Government at some point—consider removing the two-child limit and addressing other systems and policy choices which keep families in poverty?

Finally—I am conscious of the time—I turn to supporting families, housing and social care. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's recent report on destitution revealed that around 3.8 million people experienced destitution—the total absence of resources, not just poverty—including around 1 million children, in 2022.

That is two and a half times the number in 2017 and triple the number of children. Our social security system, designed by Beveridge to reach everyone, is simply staggering under the burden of trying to meet the needs. The situation is grave, especially for those who are disabled. In addition, our housing commission highlighted a chronic shortage of social and affordable housing. Good housing—sustainable, safe, stable, sociable and satisfying—is necessary. This integrates in supporting families. The Reimagining Care Commission called for a national care governor to clarify the responsibilities of everyone—government and others—in care and support.

Putting families first requires a long-term approach. I urge all parties, as we move towards an election year, to place flourishing families and households as a key objective within their manifestoes at the next election and to recognise their responsibility and self-interest for the well-being of adults and children alike and for transforming the way our society operates. Herbert's famous poem, "Love bade me welcome", speaks of the sacrificial love of Christ, who welcomed him in when he did not deserve it. Flourishing families are the place where we experience similar love and welcome. Love matters, families matter and relationships matter. I urge us all to seek ways to support their flourishing. I beg to move.

10.29 am

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): My Lords, it is a great privilege to follow the most reverend Primate. I congratulate him on a very powerful speech. I agree with much of what he said, especially his statement that family is indispensable to the state. In fact, when I saw the subject of his debate this year, I was particularly pleased, because nothing matters more to me than family.

But I have to confess that my heart sank a little when I read the *Love Matters* report, interesting as it is. I was pleased, as a single person myself, to see the status of "single" being included in the report. I look forward to the speech of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham, who will speak about single status. I do not know whether it was meant to make me laugh, but it amused me that, in the bit of the report about single status, Jesus was held up as a great example of a single person. I thought, "Well, if it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me".

But, in a report from the Church of England about love and families, I had expected to find marriage front and centre. It is in there, but is not, for example, mentioned in the key messages or the key priorities for action. I was surprised; I do not think that the most reverend Primate mentioned marriage in his speech. We all understand how important it is not to discriminate or judge families that take different forms; the most reverend Primate reminded us of his own. Relationships do break down irretrievably. It is right that women, for whatever reason, can choose whether to marry the father of their child. Like women, men too can find themselves bringing up children alone, through no fault of their own. In all these situations, there are fantastic parents whose children grow up to be fantastic adults. Nobody disputes that.

[BARONESS STOWELL OF BEESTON]

Even so, we ought to be able to say—and I think the Church of England should say—that marriage is, none the less, the most secure and optimum arrangement for couples who want to commit to each other, especially if they want to bring up a family and create the best chances for their children to succeed. I find it hard to understand why it does not. Even though the take-up of marriage in the UK has halved since 1990, the benefits of being married are clearly evident to high-income couples, as 83% of us choose to do it, yet we seem happy to ignore the fact that 45% of low-income couples do not choose all the benefits of marriage that we enjoy.

If we want a strong and cohesive society that is more equal in providing opportunities, we should do everything we can to turn this situation around. One of the great things about marriage is that it transcends difference: religion, age, class, education, ethnicity. Since Parliament passed the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 10 years ago, it is available to any couple who wants to honour the institution and gain all the benefits it has to offer. Now, I know that gay marriage remains a contested and difficult issue within the Church of England. I do not know whether it is resolvable and—I mean this sincerely—it is not for me to tell the Church what it should do. I am as committed to religious freedoms in the context of gay marriage as I am to people's freedom to say that they disagree with it. But I do know that not promoting the benefits of marriage to society as a whole will make the internal difficulties on gay marriage that much harder for the Church to resolve.

Because this year marked its 10th anniversary, I have reflected quite a bit on the way we succeeded in passing the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act through this House. Do not get me wrong: I do understand that the challenges facing the Church are greater and far more complex than any that a Government face when trying to pass a contentious Bill through Parliament. But there are lessons worth highlighting and something for all of us—politicians, the Government and the Church—to learn from going over some old ground. And by the way, as it has been a while and some in the Chamber today might not remember, I was the Minister in charge of the equal marriage Bill.

As noble Lords will recall, the Bill had been fiercely contested in the House of Commons and, while it left the other place with a large majority in favour overall, the majority of Conservative MPs had voted against it. The expectation was for similar difficulties here. Indeed, uncertainty was very evident among many Peers—and not just on the Conservative Benches. So I decided that we, the Ministers and Bill team officials, would take a different approach. Essentially, we reassured rather than demonised those who were against or unsure whether to support what, at the time, was a radical change. We made being unsure about the Bill a perfectly respectable position to hold. We worked hard to demonstrate that all the legitimate concerns of those opposed to gay marriage on religious grounds had been taken seriously, and we amended the Bill further to provide the clarification and comfort that some sought, when it cost us nothing to do so.

Our approach neutered the political opportunists, who quite frankly did not care about marriage much anyway, and prevented them using the Bill to cause division. Instead, we created the right conditions for us to make a positive case for what we were trying to achieve. Our argument was that the legal difference from civil partnership for gay couples was zero, but that opening up marriage was profound. Yes, it would make a big difference to the lives of previously excluded gay couples, by giving their committed relationship equal social status to those of a straight couple getting married. But the Bill was even bigger and more important than all of that. Passing it would future-proof the institution of marriage itself. In short—and this was the critical point—all of us would gain from this important change to our law.

We won the Division at Second Reading by a larger margin than in the Commons. A majority of Conservative Peers helped us win that and every other Division during the passage of the Bill. Afterwards, public acceptance of equal marriage grew swiftly, and I felt that the lesson from what we had achieved was clear. Profound social change can be successful only if it is beneficial to everyone, and its purpose is a stronger and more cohesive society. And by the way, it is okay if some people benefit more directly than others, as long as their gain is not at other people's unfair expense.

Equal marriage did not happen because of our differences or what divides us. It happened because, during those few weeks in the summer of 2013, we understood that marriage upholds important values that we all share. But we seem to have forgotten that lesson, and sometimes I think we did not learn it at all, because collectively we—the Government, Parliament, the Church, all of us—have done little, if anything, since to promote marriage and why it is the best kind of setting for couples and families of all kinds. We should not be surprised, then, that the rate of marriage has continued to fall. At the rate it is going, some predict it will not even exist in 40 years' time.

I said earlier that the Church of England might never get as far as allowing gay marriage in church. Whether it does or not is not actually what matters most. Promoting the institution of marriage to society is more important if that institution is to survive. Doing that would help future-proof the Church itself, and the purpose of both institutions surviving into the future is the role they have in ensuring a strong, cohesive society for the benefit of us all. I hope the most reverend Primate can at least agree with me on that.

10.38 am

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): My Lords, thanks are due to the Archbishops and their commission for producing this report. Drawing on a wide range of knowledge and experience, it provides a good basis for discussion of these important issues. I particularly welcome the speech by the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury in stressing the importance of a partnership between families and the state. People have suggested that the family is everything and the state is a subsidiary part, but it is a partnership between the two. Quite rightly, the most reverend Primate stressed the role of the state in relation to the family, and I very much welcome that.

I thought it would be helpful for a committed atheist to contribute to this debate, if only to emphasise that believers do not have a monopoly on recognising the needs of families and individuals within society. I am going to avoid the theology, look at the practical proposals and make a number of comments where I think there is more work to be done.

First, I often have a problem with the use of the term “family” in this and similar discussions. Its use is particularly questionable in political discussions where it is often used as a way of dividing rather than uniting. Whenever it is used, we must ask ourselves what counts as a family. At least in the report, the particularly suspect term “hard-working families”, which is too often used when discussing social policies, does not appear. In awful truth, it is sometimes used in a form of dog-whistle politics suggesting that there is the other, the deserving and the undeserving poor, or us and them.

However, if the term “family” is to be defined as including everyone, it loses all meaning. Who is being excluded when we use the word “family”? I am therefore pleased and give tribute that, obviously, care and attention has been taken in drafting this report to avoid this trap. I assume this is deliberate, as the report notes:

“Terms such as ‘family-friendly’ can be alienating for people without children and those who live alone. They must be used with great care”.

So, while the report argues that

“strong and stable families and households ... are ... the foundation for our society”,

it then goes on to call for singleness to “be recognised and honoured” as

“a major part of our society”.

All well and good to see. It does suggest, however, that a lot of words could have been saved in producing the report by just referring to everyone.

The report also notes that

“Family life can be difficult and messy”—

all too true, although I will avoid the temptation to quote Philip Larkin. The report concludes, therefore, that

“All relationships ... can benefit from support at different life-stages”.

The key here is “different life stages”.

That brings me to the main point I want to make in this debate, which is about what I believe is a serious omission. I may be wrong—I may misunderstand the report—but as far as I can see there is no specific reference to issues that arise with families and relationships with increasing age, be they failing faculties, ill health or, ultimately, bereavement. There is no reference to old age or pensions or elderly family members, only one reference to retirement, which can be such a seminal event in anyone’s lifetime, and there is nothing specific about those who, through choice or circumstances, grow old alone.

I have to ask whether this was deliberate. Was it thought simply that a general age-blind approach was right? I suspect not, as children get a mention, with one of the priorities being identified, quite rightly, as ensuring that they get the best possible start in life.

Either way, I must express some disappointment. Forgive me if I have misunderstood what is in the report and, in any event, I am not suggesting for a moment that the commission does not care about the elderly, but the elderly have specific issues that need to be addressed in the context of the issues dealt with in this report, and I suggest that they might have been expressed more explicitly in its recommendations.

Looking at what is in the report, it includes 36 recommendations for the Church of England, and 29 for the Government. I hope noble Lords will forgive me if I avoid commenting on those for the Church, but turning to those for the Government, there are a number where specific reference could have been made to the elderly. They include where reference is made to “life transitions”. It should be kept in mind that facing up to old age is often difficult—looking around the Chamber, I feel that many will bear witness to that. It is not all negative, of course. It can be a form of liberation, providing new opportunities for development, but relationships might change and, certainly, as I can testify, slowly but inexorably, new life-changing issues arise that must be confronted.

The report also stresses that

“strong and stable relationships in every family and household” should be a priority for every government department, and it suggests a

“Cabinet level Minister holding responsibility for the implementation, oversight and publication of a family review”.

Care for older family members should obviously be part of such a review, which has important implications for the Government’s policy, or perhaps more accurately, lack of policy and financing for an adequate social care service.

Then there is the call on the Government to

“Value families in all their diversity, meeting their basic needs by putting their wellbeing at the heart of Government policymaking and our community life”.

One form of diversity is the growth of multigeneration households. ONS figures, for example, have shown a steady rise in three-generation households, which will typically include older people. I surmise that is due to growth in certain parts of our community. I am sure support will be needed to ensure their well-being, for example, more housing tailored for their particular needs.

Finally, I mention the welcome call in the report to

“Honour singleness and single person households, recognising that loving relationships matter to everyone”.

This again is particularly important where people are newly single, typically at older ages, and have to cope with the death of their partner after many years together.

I am sure that there are other examples. In no sense is this a criticism of the work that has been done; it is pointing a pathway to what more attention needs to be given to the needs of the elderly.

10.47 am

Baroness Thornhill (LD): My Lords, I am pleased to rise broadly to support what I consider to be the main thrust of the report commissioned by the most reverend Primates. I am not a good sleeper. Last week, I was awake at 3.30 am and decided to grab the iPad

[BARONESS THORNHILL]

and read *Love Matters*. My first thought, if I am being honest, is that it sounded like the title of a book your parents might hide in their bedroom. I also hoped it would be a cure for insomnia, but how wrong I was on both counts. I found it to be a lucid, challenging and compelling read—I was still there at 6 am. From the most reverend Primates' foreword onwards, it was quietly explosive. It was not that it was saying things that we did not know; in fact, that was perhaps a disappointment. The facts and data in all the chapters are known to us. I am sure there are clearly some omissions, as noble Lords will point out, but the report made a readable narrative of those facts. It was not the interpretation of the facts because they too are also known to us—for example, that poor housing leads to poor outcomes, to name but one. It was the fact that we were challenged to look at the solutions to those known facts as problems through what I call the love lens.

The definition of love as explained by the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury within the biblical and religious context is used a lot in the report, which makes it very different from any normal public policy document. Its fundamental tenet is that families matter, relationships matter and love matters if individuals are to flourish, and I agree. It explains and expands the concept of “family-ness” support. It completely rewrites the definition of “family”, which some would and have taken issue with, and yet we would all surely recognise that love and meaningful relationships come in many different guises and that all are valid and valuable, but it is important to remember that it is still obviously pretty controversial.

Yet, when we actually know people in those many and varied relationships, we can see that they often work in spite of our prejudices. That is perhaps because of the presence of something that is difficult to define, which I have called “the something else”, and the report bravely attempts to do just that. It accepts the fact of diversity as the lived experience in the 21st century and goes beyond it to seek commonality and define that “something else”. The 12 independent commission members distilled down the essence of what makes those families work and what they need to flourish from what they saw and heard, rather than judging and proselytising a set position of what a family is and how it should function.

From that point of view of the Church, it is a brave, bold and challenging report. Its messages have been hard for some Christians to hear, and probably those of other faiths too, because it is explicit that, while being part of a family is central to our existence as human beings, we should recognise and value the diversity of families and households and, much more significantly, reflect that more honestly in policy-making. We should seek to create solutions that build relationship capability and resilience. That is perhaps easier said than done, but the report tries to pin it down to practical and tangible recommendations.

I felt that the report reflected reality, pulling together the many threads that affect families and bind us together as a society. It exposed that in parts those threads are wearing thin and in others they are snapping

—indeed, that there are many holes in the social fabric of life. There are many sensible, proactive recommendations, such as more support for couples getting married or partnered, or making decisions about having children or separation. These are crucial life decisions that are often traumatic for children, but all too often support is missing; it is just not there. It is patchy at best and certainly is not being promoted as “what you do”. The report lays bare the inadequacy of the support given to families as they make these big life decisions, which have such an impact on many lives and, ultimately, on society as a whole. There is a huge cost to failure.

The blueprint for success in relationships is not in a formula such as “one man plus one woman plus marriage—preferably in church—plus children equals happily ever after”. We know that, for many, that formula is not an end in itself. For me, it is what makes loving and stable relationships that is more important. I agree with Philip Larkin, from personal experience.

The report takes us on a journey and challenges us that if we use the family lens test to view policy then it might just produce better outcomes, because it is certain that if we do what we always do then we will get what we always get. For me, the real challenge that was missing from the report is: how do you start to demonstrate that family is at the heart of policy? What does that look and feel like, whether you are sitting in a council chamber, in here or in a Select Committee? How do you start to make policy in that way? It certainly feels a long way from how we do things now, although the report is helpfully peppered with good practice from different parts of the country.

To me, it seems that faith can sometimes be very harsh and judgmental about how people live their lives, and that banishes them from churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples because they know they cannot live up to those ideals. This just is not real life to them; it is excluding and judgmental. Worse still, it is responsible for mountains of guilt that individuals feel, which is damaging to their mental health and well-being. Perhaps the real challenge for us all is how to demonstrate that love matters in a world where the word is overused and trivialised to the extent where it is devoid of meaning. It strikes me that the report holds challenges for all of us but also for the Church itself, which the report does not shy away from.

I end on a lighter and more hopeful note—as, indeed, the report ends, with “Reimagining the Future”. The report references the Australian soap “Neighbours” as an example of what happens when neighbours become good friends. I suggest that we have an equally good British example in “Coronation Street”. I challenge noble Lords to watch the episode from Wednesday 6 December, where they will see everything that the report evidences as a snapshot of modern life, albeit condensed into one street. In fact, I vouch that we could use that episode alone to conduct a meaningful session on building relationship capacity, community resilience and that “something else” that is gently at work in the actions of its many characters—but, being a northerner, I would say that, wouldn't I?

10.55 am

Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB): My Lords, I am very sad not to continue with the suggestion of “Coronation Street”. I congratulate the Archbishop’s commission on its brave report. It is very welcome. It chimes with much work that I have done over many years. I found it very difficult, when looking through the report, to decide which of its many subjects to say something about today, but I shall pick up on children, building a fairer society and dysfunctional families. It is no wonder that I chose dysfunctional families, because I was a family judge, so nearly all my work has dealt with dysfunctional families or oligarchs hiding their money so they did not have to pay their wives.

In 1987-88 I chaired the Cleveland inquiry on child abuse. One of its recommendations was that the child is a person, not an object of concern. I add, having heard for years since then how so many children are treated, that children are absolutely not packages.

I am impressed by this report’s emphasis on children, particularly on listening to children and young people and taking seriously what they have to say. Unusually, perhaps, children used to come and see me in my room, and I found that quite young children gave me astonishingly accurate reports of what they were concerned about and how they thought I, as a judge, might be able to put it right. I have seen a great many videos made by child psychiatrists and social workers with children as young as five or six giving an entirely accurate account of what has happened. I have to say that many times I preferred to hear that from a six year-old than from a 15 year-old, who might well have an agenda.

I do not underestimate the information that children can give. It is crucial to listen to them and take them seriously. We should not necessarily agree with what they have said or do what they want, but we must give them a chance, as the report underlines, to play their part in what goes on. I add that it is important to recognise child trauma, and the lack of sufficient facilities to deal with it.

A few years ago I chaired the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public life. Its report was called *Living with Difference*. I am interested in *Love Matters* recommending the building of a kinder, fairer and forgiving society, because in our report we suggested that

“It should be a high priority, not only for interfaith organisations but also for all religion and belief groups, educational institutions, public bodies and voluntary organisations, to promote opportunities for encounter and dialogue”,

particularly for young people and children. Again, we learned the importance of listening rather than talking to other people and of learning from what other people could teach us. That seems to chime with the report from the Archbishop’s commission.

It seems also to me that the Church of England can do even more to promote the inclusive discussions between the Abrahamic and the dharmic traditions. That seems the one part of the work done by the Church of England that may not be as fruitful as it could be.

I am very fortunate: I came from a stable family and was very lucky to be married for 64 years—to one person, I might add. I also had the tragedy of losing

one of my three children. One of the important things that I would like to share with the House is the problems of dysfunctional families, some of which I will refer to briefly. There is a lack of legal aid in family disputes. This was, very sadly, identified when very recently a judge was attacked by a litigant in person, obviously overcome by the appalling trauma for him of the court case. We obviously need not only more legal aid but more counselling and mediation. We need help for families who are troubled.

I declare that I am chair of a commission on forced marriage, which has learned how most families love their children but that it does not necessarily mean that, objectively, they do the best for them. Parents’ view of love, honour and duty pushes some families into marrying a son or daughter without their consent to a person whom the family considers is appropriate for marriage and to join the family. This occurs, I must tell the House, well beyond south-east Asia and it happens throughout the United Kingdom. In some particularly sad cases, there is a gay son or lesbian daughter who is married, in a form of conversion therapy, to honour the family and with the parents loving that adult child. I hope that the excellent suggestions of the Archbishops’ report will help to solve some, at least, of these problems and that the Government will support its recommendations.

11.03 am

The Lord Bishop of Durham: My Lords, I thank the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for holding this debate on a matter that is foundational to not only the well-being of us as individuals but the whole of society. I should obviously declare my interest as co-chair of the commission that produced the report. I also thank him for the privilege of being asked to co-chair it, alongside Professor Janet Walker. It was an honour to work with her and the 10 other commission members in listening and speaking to children, young people and adults from all faiths and all walks of life.

I thank each of the commission members, who generously gave their time and expertise voluntarily to contribute to this. Their work has been invaluable. I also pay tribute to the Children’s Commissioner for England for the way in which she shared with us her work, which took place in parallel. Our conclusions are remarkably similar.

My most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury opened the debate by speaking poignantly on the importance of family. I will speak on what is at the very heart of families, which is relationships. Throughout the commission, we met and spoke with people from across the country. They were people from different backgrounds, ages, cultures and faiths. Despite these differences, there was a theme that echoed throughout all our conversations: the importance of family and loving relationships.

For an individual and family to flourish, each person must have their basic needs met—water, food, clothing, enough money to live on and a roof over their head—but true flourishing comes from loving relationships. It is through these relationships that we find support, connectedness and belonging. Families today come in all shapes, sizes and structures, but the commission

[THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM]

found that what matters most is the quality of the relationships and love that we receive and give. We are made for loving relationships—to love and be loved.

Family life is messy. Let us be clear: there are huge joys in family life, but there are also the stresses of life that can put strain on relationships. The breakdown, separation or divorce of a committed couple relationship can be extremely painful and particularly detrimental to any children involved. Entering a long-term committed couple relationship with another individual is one of the most significant decisions we can make, yet there is often little preparation beforehand.

The pre-marriage course developed by Holy Trinity Brompton is a successful example of a course that helps to prepare couples considering marriage and wishing to build a strong and lasting relationship. The course encourages couples to discuss issues they may not have considered, their hopes and fears, and the everyday worries that they will face together. Those who have done it are positive about its value. Throughout the commission, we found consensus that marriage preparation should be made available to everyone forming a committed couple relationship. This is because we believe that marriage, with the seriousness of the vows undertaken and the covenant made, is the best option. Will the Government ensure that all registrars are required to signpost couples to marriage and relationship preparation, available in their community, when the couple give notice of an intention to marry or form a civil partnership? Please note that we do not think registrars should do it; they should signpost to the experts who can.

It is important for couples to be supported not only on entering a lifelong committed relationship, but at all stages. Relationship support should always be available, particularly during significant life transitions, whether that be entering marriage, having children, experiencing conflict, or grief and bereavement. I believe there is particularly great potential for relationship support to be made available through the emerging family hubs. There is already a welcome focus on parent-infant relationship support within family hubs, but greater emphasis on parent-relationship support would further benefit the whole family. It has been encouraging to see many family hubs opening their doors for the first time in recent months, as part of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme. I hope these hubs will be places where families can go in times of need and where the whole family can receive the support it needs to truly prosper.

The family hub guidance provided to local authorities clearly states:

“Voluntary, community and faith organisations should be key partners, collectively improving the reach and impact of additional support for seldom heard parents and families”.

Despite being well placed in communities and having the ability to help to deliver family hubs cost-effectively, there is currently very little evidence of engagement with the faith communities. What steps will His Majesty's Government take to further encourage local authorities, and hold them accountable in partnering with voluntary and faith communities as they develop family hubs?

Research has demonstrated that the foundations of our relational capability are laid down in childhood. Learning about relationships should, therefore, begin as early as possible in a child's life and continue throughout their years at school. Friendship and family relationships, as well as intimate couple relationships, should be embedded in the school curriculum along with the relational skills that are crucial to loving relationships, such as dealing with conflict and communication. This should include the good of marriage as a covenanted lifelong relationship, but relationships cannot simply be taught from textbooks. The ethos, behaviour and culture at a school, and how staff relate to one another, will teach a child far more on how to conduct healthy and caring relationships than any worksheet will ever do.

Interestingly, on the train down this morning I found myself sitting opposite an RE teacher coming down for a course, who is also interested in relationships education. I tested this out with her. She said, “You are absolutely right, Bishop. The young people in my school do not want relationships education to be about the manual aspects of sex. They want to know how to be better friends and how to relate better to their parents and one another. That is the heart of what they want from relationships education”.

Discussions about the importance of people who remain single forming loving relationships should also be included in relationships education. According to the Office for National Statistics, England saw more than an 8% increase in people living in single-person households between 2011 and 2021. People remain single for a wide number of reasons—some through choice; some because they have not yet met a life partner; some due to separation, divorce or death. Our culture can idolise romantic relationships and indeed marriage, at times causing those who are single to feel inferior. This has been particularly true of the Church, but single people are just as much relational and family people as those who are married, have children or are in couple relationships.

For many, family stretches beyond the biological and includes friends, colleagues, neighbours and members of their community. Support should not be limited to those in couple relationships; everyone in society—regardless of their relationship status—must be supported and valued. I am reminded that Jesus remained single throughout his life, rooted in family and community. He was single, but a family person—although of course his view of family stretched to include those way beyond his close biological family. I encourage noble Lords to consider how we can reflect his attitude in the way that society values those who are single and in the policies that we make. How can we ensure that the value and dignity of each person, regardless of their relationship status, is truly recognised in our society?

I offer a brief comment to the noble Lord, Lord Davies of Brixton, on reference to the elderly. He is absolutely right; our report is weak on that, but that is because we already had the Housing Commission report and the social care report, which dealt with many of the issues he raised. He needs to look at the three together to see the whole picture. I hope that helps.

Today we are lifting the lid on a matter that is rarely spoken about in this House yet impacts us all: love. The commission concludes that

“love is central to how people think about ‘family’ and it is necessary for families and households to flourish. Love provides us with a blueprint for strong relationships. The New Testament provides a vivid yet simple understanding of love in its purest form which sets the principles for how we should relate to each other. In St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians”—

I make no apology for repeating what my right reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury said earlier—

“we are told that ‘Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes in all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.’ This text, which is popular at weddings and funerals, frames love not as an unattainable ideal, but something which is deeply practical, with Jesus Christ as our teacher. We see a description of love being worked out in human circumstances, relationships and situations with kindness and patience, laying aside boasting, pride and dishonour. It speaks of trust and perseverance rather than keeping records of wrongs or being easily moved to anger. What these verses ... make clear is that love is not a feeling but an attitude, a choice, a commitment to give to, and promote the flourishing of the other. Love puts others before self. If every family and household could aspire to this kind of loving as the foundation on which flourishing can be achieved, then our society would be stronger, kinder, fairer and more just”.

Love is often separated from public life and policy-making, yet it is through loving relationships that we truly flourish. By placing them at the centre of our policies, we can reimagine a society where everyone is supported and valued, regardless of their background, culture, age, relationship status or family structure. Is this not the society we all desire to live in?

11.16 am

Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone (Con): My Lords, the standard set in 1 Corinthians is a high standard for some of us to meet. I have been married for only 56 years to the same person—not as good as the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss. I think our marriage survives only because we are in separate Houses; he is the Father of the House of Commons, and I am here.

Quite often, I have referred to a comment to me by the late Dukey Hussey, who was in this House. He said, “Murder, frequently; divorce, never!” Within that context, I endorse the comments from my noble friend Lady Stowell that marriage gives an additional piece of glue holding people together: a coalition. I might have gone off him quite often, but we are married and therefore it is obligatory. I urge noble Lords to say that there is a role for marriage, but it has to be handled sensitively and appropriately.

I speak also as somebody who worked in a child guidance clinic as a psychiatric social worker. I was on the board of the Children’s Society and, of course, I was the Minister responsible for implementing the seminal Children Act 1989, which has stood the test of time. I remember so well the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, and her inquiry. Having previously been a juvenile court chairman, I was so aware of the issues involved. The difficulty with children is that something can be true, but it can be fantasy. Taking children away wrongly is a terrible thing to do; leaving

children in their homes and disaster ensuing is a terrible thing to happen. Very few understand the complexity of these decisions.

I am a committed Anglican. I was a lay canon at Guildford Cathedral. However, like the Church of England, the Conservative Party I joined was one where no one was ever so vulgar as to ask what you really believed. I own my own beliefs and faith; they are not imposed. I am not sure how well I would do at an examination if asked exactly what I believed—either by the Tory party or by the Church of England. However, I am totally committed to the Church of England as it is.

I also speak as a grandmother of eight. I simply say that I come from an extended, close, united tribe. There is mutual support, sharing, caring and holidays. Even then, bringing up children is a nightmare. They are demanding; they are difficult when coping with jobs and holidays. Now, children are supposed to be occupied every minute of the day—it is a very bad thing—with coaching on tennis or football or piano. There is no peace for a child now, which may be one of the reasons for some of the mental stress of teenagers. They are so exhausted with this battery of improvement they have from their parents. When people used to have more children, there was less intense pressure for them to be perfect and live up, let us be frank, to their parents’ ideal.

Having been chancellor at the University of Hull for 17 years, and through my work for Frank Field at the CPAG and as chair of the juvenile court, I know only too well the chaos, despair, deprivation and complete lack of support that so many families face. The dilemma of real poverty is not only a lack of resource but the complete unpredictability—you are not quite sure which house you are going to be in; you are not sure whether your partner will be there. It is as much having no agency, no control and no ability to plan your life as it is the financial difficulties. I used to say that if you had a PhD in nutrition, maybe you could get by on the poverty wage, but then you had everything else organised in your life; these are families—as the Church knows so well—who do not have that opportunity, control and support. I therefore see these issues in that context.

I warmly endorse and support *Love Matters*, and I commend the most reverend Primates and the right reverend Prelate on all their wonderful work. To me, it is realistic and pragmatic: it accepts the world as it is. It does not hanker after a sentimental, suburban picture of family life—which I really doubt ever existed anyway. I have always thought that overidealistic goals make everybody feel a failure. It is like dieting—if you have a picture of the perfect shape that you ought to be, you will always be a miserable person. It is similar in family life; as Winnicott used to say, you only have to be a “good enough” mother, you do not have to be a perfect mother. I think that is a great comfort. Many noble Lords will have seen the Royal Shakespeare Company’s wonderful production of “Hamnet”. It reveals family life in Shakespeare’s time, which did not look all that tidy either.

I share the tributes to Professor Janet Walker. I congratulate the most reverend Primates for choosing such an excellent person as chair. She was a probation

[BARONESS BOTTOMLEY OF NETTLESTONE]
 officer for 10 years, working with extremely troubled offenders; she has done over 50 research studies into all aspects of family life; and she was director of the impressive Newcastle Centre for Family Studies. Recently, as I know my noble friend Lord Robathan will particularly like, she has done a report for the MoD on the pressures for military families. Again, it is useful, powerful and unsentimental, and it really hits home.

The most reverend Primates suggest that

“Our flourishing as a society depends on the flourishing of our families and households”

and families and households must be

“at the heart of our collective thinking and actions”.

I absolutely agree with that. I really endorse, approve and admire the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury's book, *Reimagining Britain*, which at the time I thought was particularly powerful and relevant to the real world in which we find ourselves.

We can analyse the problems—and there are a lot of problems—but I feel passionately that we should celebrate the many impressive initiatives across the country, which are so often facilitated by churches responding to local needs and problems. The Church has always reached out—we just have to look at the introduction of education; the work of the Children's Society; Bob Holman, who started the first children's and family centre in Bristol, which I remember visiting; and the work of the National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants, now Carers UK. The latter came about because a Methodist minister noticed that the single women with elderly dependants were not coming to church. It is a very big problem if you do not go to church, because someone will start a charity to support your cause. The Church has been as a practical catalyst and facilitator, to reach out and ensure that we do all we can for the most vulnerable and most frail.

I pay particular tribute to the charity ATD Fourth World. Even the most apparently hopeless parents—parents whose children have gone into care or parents who feel they have failed against some standard of what they should be able to achieve—want to be good parents. They want to be the parents that they never had. They want to do the best for their children, and the failure compounds their own sense of failure. Lord Joseph, formerly of this House, talked about the “cycle of deprivation”. We know those parents for whom it is almost impossible to be the stable role model, providing unconditional love for those for whom they are responsible. I will remember many early child abuse cases. It is really hard to understand. What triggered the abusing behaviour in a particular stepfather—Heidi Koseda's case, I think—was that the child would not say that he was her father. The child would not say that she loved him; she would resist and resist, even with the consequence of harmful abuse. It was the man's desire that he should be treated as her father and be a good person.

The Church can provide wonderful role models of consistency—but there must be consistency. I used to talk at the Trinity College Centre in Camberwell. I would say to those privileged and clever students who came from Trinity College, Cambridge—I know a few people who have been there—that they should not

promise anything to those children that they could not deliver. The children's whole lives had been filled with people who had promised a present, a holiday, a bicycle—anything—and who had failed and disappointed them. If you say that you are going to send a Christmas card, send a Christmas card. You do not want to compound these children's sense that all of life is adults who say one thing, do another and do not really care.

We accept that unconditional love provides the blueprint for strong relationships and human flourishing. Of course, people need to have their basic needs met, but it is relationships that really matter. As the report acknowledges, it is the conflict between parents that is so damaging—more so than separation itself. Separation is wretched, but people can live in single households, as has been so well expressed in the report and in the House today. It is the dispute, aggression and vilification of each other that causes the real damage to the children. I therefore welcome the Government's recognition of that priority through the reducing parental conflict programme, making funding and support available centrally and locally, helping to address conflict and thereby improving children's lives.

I particularly commend an organisation that I had not previously known about: the Positive Parenting Alliance. It talks about the #ParentsPromise, helping people going through separation and divorce. What I like about this is that it is not only the usual suspects who are supporting it—the charities and foundations—but there are also HR directors engaged in this initiative, which I believe is really relevant and to the point.

I have a concern that families who do not live up to the idealistic norm may not feel welcomed in church. It seems to me that those who are separated or divorced need the Church all the more. Michael Marshall, in his colourful way, used to say that churches should be for the bad, the sad and the mad—I take the point and I hope that noble Lords all do as well. The attitude to divorce is quite quaint, given that divorce—or, rather, annulment—was a rather important factor when the Church of England was established all the way back in 1534 by Henry VIII. Perhaps we should be more considerate of no-fault divorces and non-conflictual separations in the Church. As the report says, we should move

“from the language of hostility to the language of peace”.

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 was widely welcomed, but we must use that 20-week waiting period for support, information and advice for parents. It is fundamental that parent couples can talk openly and comfortably about their struggles without feeling criticised or alienated. Of course, even when there is divorce, they remain parents. Being a parent is not a role that you can divorce yourself from. The challenge is to ensure that those divorced parents retain an ongoing relationship with the children.

I want to say more about Anglican clergy and laity. In saying that, I refer to ministers and priests of all religions: they are a dedicated and powerful force, handling what can be a relentless task. I was once asked to speak to all the northern bishops' wives by the Bishop of Carlisle, and I said, “Being married to a priest is exactly like being married to an MP. The

Member of Parliament spends all their time helping other people's children, helping other families, supporting them at Christmas, but their own family is completely on the back burner: it is a very difficult role". Indeed, when I was the Children's Minister, I was absolutely never at home, working all the time. I finally said to my daughter, "Darling, if a strange woman knocks on the door and says she's your mother, let her in; it might well be her". I think this is something experienced by a great number of similar people.

In paying tribute to the clergy, let me quickly mention Clive Potter, the vicar at my local church, St John's in Milford, where he served for 16 years. He did not get a PhD in theology, he has not had a particularly privileged life and he has been the most wonderful parish priest: uncomplicated, virtuous, available, Christian. We said goodbye to him last weekend with great love and admiration. On the laity, I say in passing that Clare Sandy, just the most wonderful woman, who died last week, was always there to support and help the bad, the mad and the sad.

Our work is hugely enhanced by the number of female clergy—it is remarkable for those of us who remember there being no female clergy—and particularly in this place. I am delighted that the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester is here; she was the pioneer and she survived the test of time. It is tremendous that there are now five female Bishops, I believe.

I want to make a small point about the Lords spiritual. I passionately want the Lords spiritual to remain, but I do not think they enhance their prospects by looking like a Persil advertisement. I have spoken to virtually every Bishop about removing the robes. They do not need to wear them. So long as the Bishop saying prayers—officiating—is wearing a robe, they can keep the Robing Room, but all the others should modernise their attire and look more normal, even in their dog collars and attractive shirts. I have said this politely to so many Lords spiritual, but now I have had to call upon the House to help in my campaign.

I have so much more to say. I can say only that love matters and the Church matters.

11.32 am

Lord Mann (Non-Afl): My Lords, I welcome this report and I particularly welcome the Church basing a report on something from scriptures. Far be it from me to ever advise anyone in the Church on the structure of the Church, but over the years I have been baffled over how much time the Church has been deflected into issues that do not appear to feature very much in the Bible—yet here we have a report that uses a thematic, a concept, a word, that is embedded in the theology at every level, not quite in every verse but in every chapter, one might say, and I commend it on that.

I have not done any early morning revision, but I do not recall the word "divorce" featuring in the scriptures; perhaps it does and I am mistaken. I am advised that it does once. Well, there is a good balance, then, in terms of where the balance of work should be. I want to talk about separation, but a separation in terms of distance that I think is crucial to how this commendable report could assist in policy-making. Perhaps this could have been stressed more within the report, but if one compares

with other faith groups—Judaism, the Muslim faith, Hindus, Sikhism—one sees strong family structures. Without question, the whole concept of faith is a key bind, but I think there is something more practical that we, as those attempting to advise and influence policy-making and decision-making by the state, could understand from the comparator, and that is to do with distance or non-distance.

What defines all those communities is that, geographically, they are rather compact. The housing that people live in is very near. That is a fundamental issue in relation to family. I have written down the term "dysfunctional families". There is no more dysfunctional family than the one whose son's birth will be celebrated in a week or two: a family that did not have stable housing. Availability of housing stock, it seems to me, is the single most fundamental issue in relation to family. I have been married for 37 years—I am almost beginning to lose count—and I do not fetishise the concept of marriage, but the concept of family I absolutely do, which is why I think this report is so helpful.

We live in a society where families are far less connected, and that is a significant problem. When I was a representative, for nearly 20 years, in a former coal mining community, there were many families with problems that experts could classify as dysfunctional families. They survived and often thrived, despite the problems they had, because they lived together. If I were to hope for a second report, on which the expertise in this House would be profound, including among the Bishops, it would be on the role of grandparents in society. There is an expertise in this House. I have my own modest share of it, and I am sure that there are many such experts on the Benches.

In the community I represented, grandparents were critical to the upbringing of children. Often, one did not know who was really bringing up the child. If a daughter or a son, particularly a daughter, had problems with drugs, alcohol or whatever else, which was not uncommon, in reality the children would be brought up by the neighbouring grandparents, or sometimes aunts and uncles, because the geography allowed it. How did it allow it? It allowed it because, for all sorts of historical employer-based, profit-driven reasons, I suppose, housing was built that gave a choice in housing—council housing, but also housing from the NCB, the Coal Board, which was the biggest single provider of housing from the non-local authority state. There was lots of mining housing, big family-size housing. People could get that housing. The removal of that housing stock and that choice to rent housing near family is fundamental in the destruction of society that we have seen in the last generation. We are doing nothing about it. The noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, made a differentiation between well-off and poorer families. Housing is fundamental in that.

I can afford to choose to live near my grandchildren because I can purchase property there. An exception to this would be if they lived in London, in which case that would be beyond me now, and therefore beyond most people. We have allowed a distortion in the housing market—in the private market, of which London is the classic example in our country but certainly not

[LORD MANN]

the only city across the world like this, and in the rented sector, which we have allowed to disappear as a coherent entity. My grandparents would visit me as a child twice a week; I would visit them once a week and other family would be there. We did that every single week, without exception. That creates a strong family unit.

There are new family units—perhaps this could have been a by-line. I have many problems with the internet but one thing it has done is allow us to have a Facebook page and a WhatsApp group called “Family is Forever” which is, strangely enough, made up of family members. I am less active on the Facebook page than others. I spread family news to people who already know it—because it has been posted, and it is immediate, everyone apart from me already knows it; perhaps I am a little elderly to master these things, culturally more than technically. That has strengthened family units across distance.

I put it to those who wrote the report and to the Government that, if any Government are going to be truly pro-family, the rented housing sector has to fundamentally change, so that whether in a small rural village, a mining community or the city, people have the option to live near family. That is what is really creating the dysfunctionality. Family units and households can always be dysfunctional, and have been, and will be. But families can overcome much of that, particularly the protecting of children, if there are people available. These days, the way of work is making that significantly more difficult.

My final point has already been referenced by others, and concerns looking at those at the older end, which, by the day, I become more interested in thinking about. What does one do with elderly family? Again, how we structure housing and accommodation is absolutely fundamental. We do not make it easy, and we do not incentivise, but it is within our powers to do so. My plea to decision-makers is to take this report as a useful prompt to think through how we could make a change in housing—there will be other changes, but housing is the number one change—that would make a difference in supporting families.

11.43 am

Lord Herbert of South Downs (Con): My Lords,

“Marriage is a vital social institution. The exclusive commitment of two individuals to each other nurtures love and mutual support; it brings stability to our society. For those who choose to marry, and for their children, marriage provides an abundance of legal, financial, and social benefits. In return it imposes weighty legal, financial, and social obligations”.

These are not my words but those of Chief Justice Marshall delivering the judgment of the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 2003—the case that decided that same-sex marriage should be lawful in the first state in the United States. The words are so powerful that they are often read out at the weddings of opposite and same-sex couples. I am proud to have read them at the wedding of a close friend. We stood on a beach on the west coast of California. As the ceremony progressed, it became clear that the tide was racing in. In the case of this reform, the tide of public opinion is moving in only one direction.

In 2003, when that case was decided, there was only 50% of public support in Massachusetts for same-sex marriage. In December last year, that number had risen to 83%. We all know that opinion poll approval ratings of any issue are very rarely that high. That has been the experience of this reform worldwide. Same-sex marriage is now permitted in 35 countries, covering a population of 1.4 billion—17% of the world's people. On 1 January, Estonia will become the 36th country. Perhaps the arc of the moral universe does, in this case, bend towards justice.

In England and Wales, this reform has now been in place for a decade. I am very proud to have played a part in that, having set up the Freedom to Marry campaign and voted for the change in the House of Commons. In the 14 years that I was a Member of Parliament, there were very few occasions on which the votes I cast pleased my constituents; much of the time, my voting made my constituents furious or unhappy, as we sought to tax them, regulate them, or restrict their lives in some way. The only effect of this vote was to create happiness and joy. The vote did no harm to anyone else. As the years have gone by, the arguments against the change have fallen away. I do not seek to relitigate those arguments today.

I noted what my noble friend Lady Stowell said about the Members of Parliament who voted against the change—some of them in good conscience, and others because they were fearful of the reaction of their constituency activists. Of those in the last camp, many have since expressed their regret and apology—including in formal statements in the House of Commons—for the decisions they took. They found themselves unwelcome at the weddings of friends or of the children of friends. They found themselves facing difficulty in their own conscience about going to those events when they had sought to prevent them taking place.

Thanks to the decision of Tony Blair's Government—but with the support of the Conservative Front Bench—to introduce civil partnerships, I was very grateful to have entered into one. It was one of the most important things I have done in my life. I remember mentioning—I thought only in passing—to my then partner and now husband that it might be a good idea, since this legislation had been introduced, to consider entering a civil partnership. I forgot, of course, that he was a lawyer. That evening, the forms that one had to fill in to apply for a civil partnership had been completed, complete with yellow Post-it notes where I was required to sign, and placed by the bedside table.

For a while, I thought that entering into the civil partnership was enough—after all, it conferred all the legal rights and entitlements of a marriage. I came to realise that it was not. As we advanced the arguments for this change, I saw how important the institution of marriage was. It is one of the joys of the legislation that it creates the legal fiction that a couple who entered into a civil partnership and changed that to a marriage are deemed to have been married from the date of their civil partnership. That in itself expresses the importance of the change.

In 2018, there were 6,700 same-sex marriages in England and Wales. That is something like 3% of the total number. That might seem a low figure, but it is of

immense importance to the individuals concerned. Significantly, it is six or seven times the number of civil partnerships. As the institution of civil marriage became available to same-sex couples, their choice was not overwhelmingly to enter civil partnerships but to enter into marriage. That says something about the enduring importance of the institution in the eyes of a section of society.

The report notes that in 2019, religious ceremonies accounted for less than one in five opposite-sex marriages. That is a sharp decrease from the year before. It also notes that 0.7% of marriages conducted in a religious institution in that year were of same-sex couples. There is, of course, a fundamental difference. Religious marriage is in decline by choice. I regret that, and I have no doubt that most noble Lords will regret it too. However, the number of same-sex religious marriages is so low not by choice, but because the individuals are forbidden by our established Church from getting married in their institutions. That is a decision of the established Church, that, while I disagree with it, I wholly respect.

As my noble friend Lady Stowell said, religious freedom is absolutely fundamental and is enshrined in the legislation that introduced same-sex marriage. It should be a matter for each church denomination to decide what it is appropriate for it to do. I note that the United Reform Church, the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland have all decided that they will introduce same-sex marriages, and that the Church of England Synod decided narrowly that it would bless same-sex marriages from 1 January. I do not underestimate how difficult that debate has been, but this is an important step in the right direction. The most reverend Primate said in his speech that families come in all shapes and sizes and are not simply nuclear. Of course, today that is simply true. However, there are devout same-sex couples who want no more than that their marriage should be consecrated in church.

It is refreshing to be debating love when so much of today's news seems to be about hate. We see a tale of two worlds. One world is the world I described, where human rights are flourishing and progress towards important reforms is happening. However, we see another world too, where human rights are not only not moving forward but going backwards—and no more so than in Uganda, which recently passed what can only be described as the most hateful legislation, discriminating against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Indeed, it is arguably the most discriminatory and repressive legislation introduced by any democratic country, creating the death penalty for aggravated offences. What is extraordinary is that the Archbishop of Uganda said that he was “grateful” for that Anti-Homosexuality Act. I congratulate the most reverend Primate, who clearly rebuked the archbishop. He called on international bodies that represent conservative churches to make explicitly and publicly clear that the criminalisation of LGBTQ people is something no Anglican province can support, and that this must be stated unequivocally.

I appreciate the concerns that leaders of the Anglican Church have about schism. However, these laws are nothing less than hateful. I am afraid it is true

that many of them are being driven by religious fundamentalism, not just in Islam, but also in some elements of the Christian Church. No religious leader would want to feel that they are on the wrong side of the history. Rather, I suggest that they will want to be on the right side of what is becoming an increasingly stark moral divide.

As the Prime Minister's special envoy on LGBT rights, I have the great privilege of travelling the world. When I visit countries, the first meetings I ask to hold are always with the activists in those countries, sometimes very brave people, who are campaigning for nothing more than the same rights we enjoy in our country. In one such meeting a few months ago, I was joined, at his own expense, by my husband. As is usual in these situations, we went around the room introducing ourselves. When it came to my husband's turn, he said that he was my husband. With that, one of the activists burst into tears, simply because, for him, the idea that somebody could be themselves and enter into not just a union but a marriage with his same-sex partner was so profound and so out of reach for that individual in his country that it expressed something immensely important to him—so important that it moved him to tears. Marriage is a public statement as well as a private commitment. That is why the reform of same-sex marriage mattered so much.

The commission which set up this report asked:

“How can we support every family to flourish? What kind of society do we want to live in?”

That is the right question. It is one that was answered by another Chief Justice, the Chief Justice of the United States, delivering the judgment of *Obergefell* in 2015, which said that same-sex marriage was lawful throughout the United States. I hope noble Lords will forgive me for quoting a very short piece of that judgment to end my remarks.

“No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfilment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilisation's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right”.

11.58 am

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab): My Lords, the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury is to be congratulated on securing this debate and allowing us to explore the different aspects of this very important report, which we have all now had time to read. I found myself initially thinking that this is such a statement of what we must surely all want that it felt like it lacked a bit of grit and edge. When I got to the chapters on “Every Child Matters” and the life we live, some of that was corrected and I was able to form a more rounded judgment of the report as a whole.

Noble Lords have already covered much of the ground that I had sought to establish in my remarks, so I will observe the strict self-discipline of not going

[LORD GRIFFITHS OF BURRY PORT]

where others have already trodden. I will also endeavour not to fulfil the stereotype of the Methodist preacher who preaches very long sermons, in the hope that I may not speak for quite as long as one or two who have spoken already—time will tell.

The most reverend Primate has made ample reference to the Beveridge report and its provisions, and quite rightly. A pub quiz question which I put to many people in Parliament and other places is: if the welfare state consists of the implementation of the recommendations of Beveridge and covers six areas of our national life, with perhaps the Butler Education Act at its beginning and the health Act at its end, who can name the other four, and the person who directed them through our Parliament? That question stymies most people—I can see bewilderment on bishops' faces even now. No—the most reverend Primate and I will talk about it later.

The person who put four Acts of Parliament on the statute book was Jim Griffiths, who was our Member of Parliament in Llanelli and who lived in Burry Port, where I come from. He began his life in the mines, worked his way up to be head of the South Wales Miners' Federation, and went to the miners' college in London long before he entered politics, because he thought he had something to say only once he had done all that. He then showed the most humane way, leading a debate here in this House—because at this time the Commons was sitting here—daring to ask the Government in time of war to debate the provisions of the Beveridge Act in March 1943 and to promise to undertake to implement its provisions once the war was over. I am very proud to come from a stable that produced such a man.

I will give just one little illustration from my early life of where those considerations played a very real part. I was raised in a single-parent family; like the most reverend Primate, I discovered late in life that the man I thought was my father was not my father. For all that, we—my mother and two boys—were thrown out of the family home. We lived in one room, a lean-to in a brickyard. If it were not for school meals, I would not have eaten meat until I was well into my teens.

The incident I wish to recount because of its illustrative value is the visit of a man from the National Assistance Board—I should have said that the four Acts we are talking about were National Assistance, Family Allowances, injuries at work and National Insurance Acts. We were visited by a man with a briefcase, wearing a suit, in our humble little abode, who wanted to question my mother as to whether she was entitled to benefits. She had suffered irreversible injuries carrying sheets of steel from one part of a tin-plating process to another in the local factory until it broke her body, and she could barely stand after that. This man's questioning of my poor mother as to whether she was entitled to benefits and whether she should not make herself fit for work, was what a 10 year-old and 11 year-old boy could not tolerate any longer. With a wink exchanged between me and my brother, we set upon that man: we hit him, beat him and threw him

out of the home. That has remained: it satisfied all of my pugilistic needs for the rest of my life—the antidote is still being played out.

For all that, I learned what threatens families from the side of officialdom. Again and again through my ministry, I have stood by claimants in offices that purport to be there to help people along, where, frankly, the atmosphere is foetid and the humiliation of the person making an application is total. That is what it did to my mother. I have learned that sweet talk about families, even when they seek to be good families, is sometimes threatened by external—and systemic—forces, very often imposed by people like us sitting in places like this. That was the first thing: a bit of grit that was stimulated by my reading of this report.

We fast forward a little now to my time as a minister in Essex. On Friday evening it was my job as an officer in the Boys' Brigade to look after what are called the "anchor boys"—the tiny tots—between five and seven. So, every Friday, between 5 pm and 7 pm, there I was. I soon became aware of something transactional happening in those sessions. The mothers of the children would bring the boys, but the fathers would fetch them. It was considered to be a safe place in broken families where the children living at home during the week with their mothers could be handed over to their fathers. Therefore, in days when the Church has suffered more than most with all the stuff to do with safeguarding over the years, it was a marvellous thing to have that trust placed in one. But it also made me aware of the pressures under which families live, and under which they are broken. It is true that the housing shortage that we are currently going through was not, even in those post-war years, the problem it is today. How can even the highest-minded parent bring up children in the squalid conditions and under the inhumane provisions that are currently in force? I learned lessons about the pressures on families that way.

Finally—to fulfil my self-fulfilling prophecy here—mention has been made of long marriages: I heard 56 and 54. Well, we are at 55—yes, the same woman. We had three children and had the very happiest of times with them. The boys were born in Haiti, with Haitian doctors and nurses and in a Haitian hospital, with Haitian people in a similar condition alongside them. We had a fabulous time. All my three children can tell you the French word for a Jerusalem artichoke and all of them can sing the Welsh national anthem. But, curiously, despite all that was positive, two of my three children are on their second marriage. I will not recount chapter and verse, but I will say that, even in the best of circumstances and to the best people with happy memories, bad things happen. So it is important, in looking at the family and recognising that it matters, and at the place of love in helping to form the cement for that, for us never to forget that there but for the grace of God go any one of us, and that from one moment to another, things happen. We must therefore not feel that even the worthiest of recommendations we can produce will solve the problems we face easily.

A Methodist minister sits down after 10 and a half minutes and hopes to be commended for it.

12.09 pm

The Lord Bishop of Gloucester: My Lords, I will try to do even better than 10 minutes. I am grateful to my most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury for putting forward this Motion. I should like to focus my remarks on families and children in relation to the criminal justice system, and particularly imprisonment, and I declare an interest as Anglican Bishop for Prisons in England and Wales.

Jesus Christ once placed a child front and centre as he taught his listeners. I want to use that image simply to pose the idea that we would navigate things differently, we would see different sorts of manifestos committed to the long-term and make better policies if the child were always the central focus and starting point for all our policy-making. It seems that so much of government policy is focused on short-term fixing for the now or a few years' time. What would it look like if policy and legislation were shaped in response to the child born today into a network of relationships, and then their life as an adult in 20 or 30 years' time?

This means investing more intentionally in the early years and family life. I say that as someone who was once a paediatrics speech and language therapist with training in family therapy. We need a systemic approach with a long-term view. Data published by the Ministry of Justice shows that 57% of adult prisoners have literacy levels below that of an 11-year-old, and we know that 42% of prisoners were expelled or excluded from school. What is going wrong upstream, not least in families, that leads to these statistics? Although not linear, research has shown how important it is to be aware of adverse childhood experiences when considering the causes of offending. As you have heard me say many times, prison costs between £50,000 and £60,000 per person, per year. Then add to that the social and economic cost of reoffending, estimated at £18 billion per annum. Much of this could be spent upstream, focusing on the multiple layers underlying the causes of crime, not least with a focus on early years, the child and the family.

Looking at those who are in prison, we should be focusing on rehabilitation, with relationship at its heart. At present, over 50% of those serving a sentence of under a year go on to reoffend. This is not good for offenders, victims, families or communities. Focusing resources on addressing homelessness, addiction and purposeful work is vital to reducing reoffending, and front and centre is the importance of stable and affirming relationships. I found it very interesting to discover that people in Dutch prisons work on their reintegration from day one of their sentence, which includes having to focus on their social networks. This connects to the significant reviews of the noble Lord, Lord Farmer, on family ties. Prisoners visited by family or a partner are 39% less likely to commit another crime.

If sentencing focused on the child and the family, we would make stronger use of community sentencing and other options for non-violent offenders. That would include ways of strengthening social networks and healthy family ties. It would also mean, I believe, that we would change our policy on sending pregnant women to prison, not least given the stats on stillbirth, premature birth and even death. Where is the focus on

the child? Then there are all those children in households which are impacted by parental imprisonment. It is estimated that more than 300,000 children have a parent in prison, but we do not know the exact number because there is no statutory way of recording these children or even knowing where they are.

As the prison population continues to rise, so does the number of children and families impacted, and parental imprisonment is recognised as one of those adverse childhood experiences which contributes to long-term health and social problems. There is an excellent recent film produced by the charity, Children Heard and Seen. It highlights horrifically the impact on a child when their parent is in prison. It ranges from reduced educational achievement and mental and physical well-being, through to losing their home and their school. Perhaps it is good to be reminded that almost 25% of the adult prison population have previously been in care. Nearly half of under 21 year-olds in contact with the criminal justice system have spent time in care. No child should be punished as a result of their parent's offending. Early interventions by charities such as Children Heard and Seen need to be mainstreamed, and we need statutory provision to identify these children to ensure appropriate support for the long-term good—for everyone.

I was very pleased to hear the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, talk about the importance of listening to children in order to stop those intergenerational cycles of offending and reoffending. What we are doing is not good for families, for communities, for victims and offenders who are part of those families and communities. Unsurprisingly, recent research by the Prison Advice and Care Trust found that prisoners' families are affected emotionally and financially. This might include losing a household income, as well as the cost of simply visiting someone in prison. Of course, the bigger picture, as I said, includes the children, young people, families and communities impacted by crime. All of this makes for more fractures in communities and conveys a subconscious message that love and relationships do not really matter.

The public narrative shaped by media headlines is that we need to be tougher on crime, and that equates to locking more people up and for longer to make our streets safer and our communities stronger. It is not true, and it is not supported by data or evidence. Actually, what we are doing is a soft option, particularly when there is no focus on rehabilitation and meaningful relationships when people are in prison. How often do we even hear the word love when it comes to criminal justice?

Let me say again: we are not serving offenders, victims, families or communities well. The tough option would be to look systemically at what we are doing, to ask what prisons are for, to put the child—one day to be an adult—front and centre and ask what we hope our interventions are really going to achieve long term. And to name love. If we agree with the Archbishops' commission that loving families are central to the well-being of adults and children living in all types of households, then I believe we need to be asking what this means for reform in our criminal justice system.

12.18 pm

Lord Robathan (Con): My Lords, I add my congratulations to the commission; it has produced an interesting and very detailed report. I will not say that I have read every word of the 238 pages, but I have read it and it is worth reading. I do not agree with every word, either. I am very sceptical about government interference, perhaps in a slightly different way from the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths. I am not involved in pugilistically admonishing civil servants; however, I do not think that government interference in personal lives is necessarily a good thing. It can be, but we should be very cautious about it.

I also very much enjoyed, as always, listening to the most reverend Primate. It saves me travelling to Canterbury—or wherever he gives them—to listen to his Sunday sermons; they are very good sermons, anyway. I was interested, for instance, to learn about hook-up culture. I had never heard of it before, but I got the gist pretty quickly, I think.

Turning to *Love Matters*, I was brought up on the authorised version of “faith, hope and charity” and “charity faileth not”. I am not a Greek scholar, so it may be that St Paul actually meant love, but I think love can be a rather debased word in our society. Anyway, we will stick with “love matters”. In the report, there is a lot of talk of other religions, of “Every Child Matters”, in chapter 6, and of singleness. It is all good stuff. I was single until I was 40—over half of my life, so I agree with that, too; and, of course, there is listening to children.

But I want to turn to what was not said in the report—here, I follow my noble friend Lady Stowell, who said it with much greater clarity than I shall express it. *The Good Childhood Report*, produced by the Children’s Society—which I think used to be the Church of England Children’s Society—

The Archbishop of Canterbury: It still is.

Lord Robathan (Con): It still is, is it? But it does not call itself that. In the past, it has highlighted—the study ran for about a decade—how children want to be with both parents. I think it found that some 80% of children who were asked wanted to be with both parents. On page 77 the *Love Matters* report states that

“44 per cent of children did not live with both ... parents ... to the age of 17”.

The report also tells us that 50% of children in poverty live in single-parent households. Might I say, “Only connect”? There is a correlation here. I used to go to magistrates’ courts quite often. All too often, sadly, the defending counsel would say, “Poor Johnny came from a broken home”—as we used to call them; I do not know whether that is still the case. It was not everyone, of course, but there is an understanding that coming from a home where you do not have both parents is not the best solution. According to the Prison Reform Trust—again, this was a few years ago—76% of young men in prison in England and Wales had absent fathers.

So what is missing from the report? I suggest two things—and it is not to undermine the people who have put a great deal of hard work into it. The first is upholding marriage, as my noble friend Lady Stowell said. There are lots of people in all sorts of diverse relationships who bring up children brilliantly—but marriage is the best and I think that the Church of England should say that. My noble friend Lord Herbert made a moving contribution, quoting from a Supreme Court judge in the US about marriage. If you are brought up by married parents, you have a four times better chance of living with both parents until the age of 18 than those who are not.

Secondly, there is no mention of responsibility—especially the responsibilities of men, of fathers. A relationship may last one week, two years or 10 years, but it is all too often fathers who walk out, leaving mothers literally holding the baby.

There is no mention in the report of the reasons for overcrowding. Often, it is because families have more children—perhaps for cultural reasons—than our houses are designed to cope with. Our houses are not built to have six or eight children in them. I have to say that it is the same with child poverty. Most people restrict the number of children they have to those that they can afford—but if they have six or eight children, it becomes very difficult.

When the most reverend Primate, in his excellent speech, got into politics, I started to differ with him—I have to say that I am not surprised, because I note that 98% of votes cast by bishops in this Session have been against government policy, but it might be a surprise to the huge number of Conservatives who go to church. The leader of my church thinks there is a “moral case” for removing the two-child limit in benefits. Well, he could make that “moral case” to the majority of people who responsibly choose to restrict the size of their families to the number of children they can afford. I do not think that is in any way a difficult concept; most people will restrict the size of their family.

The report also talks about abuse in families. Again, if one goes to court, one will discover that abuse in families is very often by a man—it is typically a man, but not always—who is not married to his partner and beats her up. Of course, there is a lot of abuse in married families as well.

So, yes, we should be more forgiving and more understanding, but all of us have to be held responsible for our actions and the consequences of them. Above all—I go back to my first point—the Church of England should stand up for what may be considered old-fashioned values of individual responsibility and, above all, the conviction that marriage is best. So please—I say to my Church—say so; otherwise, to refer to St Paul in 1 Corinthians, I am afraid the trumpet is giving an uncertain sound.

12.25 pm

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, I too thank my most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury for securing this important debate. *Love Matters* is, as noble Lords have already remarked, impressive for its scale and breadth. Covering subjects

from tackling child poverty to valuing single people in our churches, the report is able to draw some creative links across a range of topics.

Today, however, given my role as the lead bishop for housing in the Church of England, I want to focus my remarks on the report's findings on bricks, mortar and the communities that well-designed, affordable housing can foster. It is in houses and flats that families and households of different shapes and sizes are built, and housing which, done right, creates homes and can enable the health and prosperity of those who live in them. I want here to thank in particular the noble Lord, Lord Mann, for his valuable contribution on housing-related issues in this debate.

Noble Lords will know that this report is the last in a series of three. The first, published in 2021, was on the work for which I am now responsible: housing, church and community. I cannot take any credit for the report itself, but I am delighted to be involved in that work. The report, to which the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury has already referred, was called *Coming Home*, and it recommended, among other things, that housing needed to be stable, affordable and of high quality to enable people to put down roots and build healthy lives, families and neighbourhoods.

The principle of stability goes to the heart of what I want to contribute to today's debate—again, “stable” was a word used several times by the most reverend Primate in his opening remarks. For too many people, housing is not stable; it is unaffordable; it is not decent; the tenure is insecure and thus it is not a long-term home but a temporary base where it is impossible to put down roots. Such housing is no foundation for strong families and households. By contrast, where there is high-quality, affordable housing, it is much easier to find secure, healthy and happy families.

Let me make four points on stable housing to underscore this point. First, stable housing is healthy housing. Poor-quality housing—indicated by damp, mould, poor insulation and heating, unsafe installations, lack of natural light and overcrowding—can and does affect the health and well-being, both mental and physical, of its occupants. Poor health has knock-on effects for families—lower educational outcomes, for example, or higher caring costs—and in particular, as we have heard, for children, who we know are all too often at the sharp end of the poor health outcomes caused by low-quality housing.

The cost to the NHS of treating people whose health has been impacted by poor housing conditions is estimated at £1.4 billion per year. Unhealthy homes are a widespread and serious barrier to the creation of stable, healthy households and families. Looking back to the peak of the pandemic, as *Love Matters* does, we can see that housing inequality can be a driving force behind health inequality. I reiterate the call made by my most reverend friend the Archbishop of Canterbury that high-quality homes, and especially social housing, where the Government can have a particular hand in improving standards, should be placed at the centre of manifesto pledges ahead of the next election.

Secondly, stable housing is affordable housing. To make starting a family viable for many young couples, particularly in areas including London and the south-east where housing costs are high, genuine affordability must also be considered. If, as for many young couples, even on a dual income, the only financially viable option is a one-bedroom flat with little space and scant disposable income, couples who wish to start a family may have no choice but to delay.

At the other end of the life of a relationship, the stresses and strains of managing finances are one of the biggest contributing factors to relationship breakdowns. Where housing eats up a large slice of a household's income, extra pressure is piled on at every stage.

Housing affordability is not an abstract concept over which we have little control. The Government can take steps in the here and now to relieve this pressure on households. In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor made the welcome and long-overdue announcement that local housing allowance would be unfrozen and brought back in line with its former level, covering the lowest 30% of local rents in a given area. While I warmly welcome the change, it is also vital that it comes into effect as soon as possible to provide a lifeline for those struggling to afford housing costs, rather than waiting until April as currently proposed. Winter is the toughest time for families and households to make ends meet. The vision of the *Love Matters* report for a society in which families are strong, healthy and happy will simply not be possible if the support available to those on the lowest incomes does not cover the basics. Will the Government look again at the timing of the change to LHA to promote healthy, strong homes over the coming winter months?

Thirdly, stable housing is for the long term. Earlier this year, figures from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities showed that record numbers of households were stuck in temporary accommodation—over 100,000 households between January and March, with over 130,000 dependent children. For refugee families, the move-on period from temporary accommodation when an asylum claim has been granted can in practice be little more than a couple of weeks. How are young refugee families looking to set down roots in the UK, often after a drawn-out and traumatic experience, supposed to feel that they can begin building a settled home? We all want to see stronger families and households, but without a commitment to long-term housing options it is not clear how this can practically be achieved.

Fourthly, stable housing is tailored to the needs of its occupants. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Davies of Brixton, for drawing attention to this matter. Not every household or family will fit one of the familiar flats or homes most common to our cities, towns and villages. We need to see more intergenerational family homes built, where grandparents can live alongside their children and grandchildren, with each able to support the other and maintain a level of independence. Such housing should take into account the family in all its fullness, including uncles, aunts, cousins and neighbours, who are like family to us but are not usually considered in the setting of family policy.

[THE LORD BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD]

There are numerous benefits to building this kind of housing: lower combined housing costs, childcare readily available from grandparents, reduced loneliness and lower care costs, to name just a few.

We know that we need to build more houses, but I take this opportunity to call on local authorities and those involved in commissioning new projects to look creatively at the breadth of housing offered. The Church of England is committed to leading by example, and as bishop for housing I am overseeing the work to change the way the Church thinks about and manages its land and property assets. Our goal is to build many more stable homes for families who desperately need good housing in our villages, towns and cities. However, I am disappointed that it is taking us so long to develop this work. We still have much to do to agree and implement a whole-Church approach to using our assets for the common good. We have made some real progress, but there is so much more to do to make the really significant impact on the housing crisis envisioned in the *Coming Home* report, which is possible.

I end by reiterating the words of *Love Matters*:

“Housing is more than bricks and mortar—it is where we should all feel safe”.

Stable housing is healthy, affordable and appropriate—and one of the most fundamental building blocks of happy and healthy families. We might get some way towards achieving the visions set out in the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households by robust and creative investment in this fundamental building block.

12.35 pm

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, it is a very great pleasure to follow the right reverend Prelate's splendid speech. Housing is fundamental to decent family life and she is right to make those points. I add my congratulations to the most reverend Primate of all England on choosing this debate and the manner in which he introduced it.

It is entirely appropriate to have a Christmas debate focused on the family. Christmas is the season which above all is focused on the most famous family that ever lived. It is a privilege to take part in this debate. I want to choose my words with real care because I so agreed with my noble friend Lady Stowell when she focused on marriage. Like my friend, the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, I have had a long marriage to a single wife—56 years in my case. What I am even more pleased about is that both of my sons have celebrated their silver wedding anniversaries and one is heading for his 30th next year, which is very good. The family is the fundamental building block of society. Strong marriages make for strong families.

My noble friend Lord Herbert made a powerful and moving speech. He indicated that he respected the views of those who take a different view. While I am proud to have many gay friends whom I like and admire enormously, I hold to the traditional Christian view that marriage is between a man and a woman. Many Christians do not agree with that, and I respect them. Perhaps I am wrong. However, I hold to that view. It is extremely important that we do all what we

can within the Christian Church to encourage marriage, because there is a stability in that relationship which is not present in others.

I support what the General Synod decided a couple of weeks ago. I am sorry that the majority was such a narrow one, because I think that it is right that those of the same sex who wish to live together as a permanent couple should have an opportunity for a blessing in a church. I welcome that and support it, and will continue to do so. I have every sympathy with the most reverend Primate, who has, in seeking to lead the Anglican Communion, a very difficult task indeed. He deserves the support and the prayers of us all, because what my noble friend Lord Herbert said about Uganda is, frankly, toe-curling. I do not see how any Christian can give support to a regime that will punish with a death sentence people who follow particular inclinations in their lives. He has my complete support in the hard work that he seeks to do there.

It is appropriate to turn to the role of government. I agree with my noble friend Lord Robathan, who made the point that he was not a supporter of the nanny state—he did not put it in those words. Nor am I, but I think that the Government have a real task to encourage family life and to do all they can, to touch on the point made by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford, to ensure that there is proper housing available. It is difficult to hold a family together if it has to live in the sort of conditions that the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, so movingly described in his speech.

There is another thing that I would like to see government do. I am one of those who believes there is a real virtue in a civil national service for young people who reach the age of 18. After all, if we do not treat our children properly, we are sabotaging our own future. I am not suggesting that it has to be full-time, and it can be in conjunction with university or other studies or occupations, but there is real value in giving, or encouraging in, young people a sense of civic and national pride and patriotism—I use that word deliberately—by obliging them to perform certain tasks of a civil nature. The National Trust encourages this, and it is very good that it should, but it really should be for every young person to have that opportunity, and it should be underwritten by government funding, whichever party is in power.

I am one of those who just escaped national service. I was old enough and had it deferred: in those days, if you went to university, it was virtually automatically deferred until you got your degree. By the time I had graduated in 1960 or 1961, it was all over. I rather regret that, but nevertheless, there we are. There is a great deal to be said for a form of civil national service for our young people. It would chime with many of the recommendations made in this hefty and lengthy report, on which I congratulate the two Archbishops and all those responsible for it. Again, I thank the most reverend Primate for giving us the opportunity to debate this in your Lordships' House.

Lord Hacking (Lab): My Lords, I hope the noble Lord will allow me to break in just before he sits down. I did not avoid national service: I did my two

years and there is much that he said that is true about it. But, having listened to the whole of this debate, the emphasis surely should not be on marriage. We understand entirely why the noble Lord, Lord Herbert of South Downs, feels so strongly about marriage, but the centre point is the family and the household.

12.44 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, a debate like this is an odd one: by going through it, you suddenly realise the great reach of the Church of England. It is a big institution. It has done many things which are good and one or two things that you might disagree with, but you cannot deny its reach and power. Also, I feel that any report that gives a greater number of recommendations to itself to change than government probably deserves some attention from everybody. It has not said that its own house is correct—that gets it a hearing, at least from me, when it comes to the process.

On the emphasis on family, anybody who has done anything in the many fields in which the Church is involved knows it as a delivery structure or campaigning organisation. This report is mainly about children. I enjoyed the thrust of the noble Lord, Lord Davies, and the counter and parry by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham. That was one of the little things I enjoyed in this debate. Fair enough: age was not mentioned, but it had been mentioned somewhere else.

I was talking about family and children. Children who have problems and get through them usually have a family behind them. They have an immediate support structure, which knows what is going on, recognises it and campaigns.

It is now time to declare my interests. I am president of the British Dyslexia Association and I am dyslexic. I am chairman of an assistive technology company. My experience of dealing with a group that struggles with the education system—the thing that gives them the building blocks to access other bits of life—is solidly wrapped up in the principle, and the rather black-humoured joke that I have used too often but is still relevant, that to be a successful disabled child, you need to choose your parents carefully. Once you have that support structure, you stand a chance in the future.

I have another aside on the comments from the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, about when we put gay marriage through the House. I was slightly disappointed by that process, because she managed it so well. I was expecting a good fight, but we did not really get one, so well done to her. I think my noble friend Lady Featherstone, who initiated that legislation in the Commons, feels the same way: “Oh, it’s gone through no problem”. It was a masterstroke of strategy. To use a rugby analogy, we had very good ball in space and used it well, so congratulations. I will explain that later; do not worry.

I return to the point that any family unit, no matter how it is constructed, is needed to support the child. When you do not get that interest and support, because the family is not functioning, it becomes massively difficult. We heard about the prison population. Most people in prisons are educational failures. I do not

know the figures. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop—I need to get this right; I am sorry, I do not know whether the word is a “flock” or “pack” of bishops, but there are many. A “coven” was suggested from behind me, but that must be wrong. Anyway, every person with problems probably has not had a family who can do something for them.

What is needed here, and the Government talk about this and dance around the edges, is someone who can intervene early enough to support that family, parent or group, take it on and be successful. However, even with the best will in the world, some heads of families or carers are unable to do that, very often because they lack educational attainment and an understanding of the system, or because they are so stressed by other problems—poverty and bad housing—that they are not in a position to dig and find out. The day-to-day realities of keeping a roof over your head or putting enough food on the table overwhelm people. These things go together.

The noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, has of course slipped out the minute I try to refer to him. He pointed out that, historically, people may not have been given what they are entitled to. The amount of unclaimed benefit has always astounded me, and it is usually because people do not know that they can get it or feel guilty about taking it. Let us face it: we do not give much away easily. If it is there, it is for a recognised reason. Making sure that it is attainable will help the family and give them the background to create.

The second thing I would like to do—to go totally towards my own end of the sandpit when it comes to education, namely special educational needs—is make sure that it is not the parents’ job to get a diagnosis, or to campaign to get a plan, and that it is the school’s job to do more. You do that by making sure there is better awareness, and the capacity to handle different learning patterns caused by conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and autism, within the mainstream school—because they are there. We have 80% non-recognition of dyslexia in certain age groups—that is just one condition. They usually hunt in packs, by the way; ADHD often accompanies dyslexia and autism, and the rest.

Often, we are not talking about those people with the most obvious need; we are talking about the person who is failing consistently, or just failing, or just passing, or passing with such a huge effort of extra concentration that they will not maintain it for very long but will jump out early. I am due to host a meeting of the British dyslexia police association, which has dozens of examples of people who have gone through exactly that journey. That is our police force; think how many did not make it—basically, their client base. If we are going to do this, we must look at the structure and the help; we must make sure that this group, who are basically the failures, get alternative provision within education.

The Government recently said they accept that virtually everybody in this growing group—which has grown over the years, and I will give noble Lords my 30-minute diatribe on why academisation was not any

[LORD ADDINGTON]

good at some other point—has a special educational need, most of them unidentified. They must now have extra capacity to identify.

If you are going to allow families to have their best option, and get the best results out of them, do not expect them all to be wonderful tiger parents. Allow them to be an ordinary parent doing their best job. Make sure that the rest of the system comes in and helps. If you expect people to be wonderful, occasionally the lucky and the brilliant will get through, but that is the definition of a failed system. Can the Minister give some hint as to how a better integrated policy for taking this bit of pressure off parents will be developed? How are we going to make sure that you do not have to find a £600 assessment, and pay for it yourself, to get a child identified for the right help?

I have already gone on slightly longer than I had hoped to, so I will finish on this. A recent piece of work from the LSE, by Dr Tammy Campbell, points out that, in more deprived areas, more people are identified as having educational problems but far fewer as having specific problems. With all of the conditions I have talked about, you do not need to work harder; you need to work smarter, because your brain is not accepting information in the way others do, thus it cannot give it out. Dyslexia, autism, dyspraxia and ADHD—all of them—share this. They are not the same, but they are all there. What development has been taken to take this strain off families and carers? It ties in with everything else and is part of the picture.

At the moment there is still some truth in the stereotype that dyslexia, for instance, is a middle-class disease. Little Johnny, who is a complete swine in the classroom—we can use stronger language if we like—has got ADHD if he is middle class but, if he comes from a more traditional working-class background or a non-exam-passing one, he is just a swine. The girl who does not get recognised because her coping strategy is to disappear in the middle of the class does not get any help at all. What are the Government doing to make sure that the entire sector is better at recognising this group? Writing off 20% of our population in the educational process under normal circumstances is surely something that should have gone a long time ago.

12.55 pm

Baroness Twycross (Lab): My Lords, I declare an interest as deputy mayor for fire and resilience in London. I thank the most reverend Primates the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York for commissioning the report *Love Matters*, and the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for choosing this as the subject of his annual debate. I have learned a lot during the course of the debate, including from many personal recollections and the perspectives of many noble Lords.

I echo the point made by the noble Lord, Lord Addington, about the reach of the Church of England and the approach it has taken in making recommendations to itself as well as to the Government. I look forward to the Minister's response to questions directed at the Government, both in the report and in the course of the debate.

The most reverend Primate presented families as the original social unit, predating what we now view as society, and it is worth remembering that. It would be hard to disagree with his view that families and households, of all types, including those made up of friendship bonds, have a value and should be supported. In the spirit of not quite quoting Larkin, it is also true that families are not always ideal and should not be idealised.

I agree with my noble friend Lord Davies that those without faith also have a view on this issue and are a vital voice. Like the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, I remained single until my 40s. However, I think this is where our shared view ends, and I am afraid I disagreed with most of what he said.

Like my noble friend Lord Davies, I recognise frustration over the use by policymakers of terms such as “family friendly”, and I add my pet hate of the use of the phrase “as a mother” to justify a political point of view where it could easily be replaced with, “as a decent human being”.

The report notes that love is rarely referred to in any analysis of family life, nor in policies or services. It also concludes that love on its own is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure that everyone can flourish. I am not sure the country is ready for manifestos next year leading with a pledge on love, but I think the country is ready for a commitment to ensure that everyone in society has their basic needs met.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham referred to the commission's sentiment that, without a roof over our head, and without food or money, daily life becomes a huge struggle for survival. I want to focus a bit on low income. Low income has been found by the Trussell Trust to be the main driver of rising hardship and hunger. When I started doing research on food poverty as a new member of the London Assembly more than 10 years ago, my first report aspired to a zero-hunger city. The truth is that, since then, the aspiration to achieve this in London and around the country is even further away. Shockingly, the Trussell Trust is, for the first time, expecting to provide more than 1 million food parcels this Christmas, with families with children continuing to be the most likely to need support from food banks.

Can the Minister tell us the Government's assessment of the level of hunger in the UK and why it appears to be continuing to rise? What are the Government doing to address this, including supporting emergency provision over this Christmas period? Research from Barnardo's has found that families are having to prioritise food and heating over replacing mouldy bedding or broken beds.

My noble friend Lord Davies highlighted the need to consider older people, but the report focuses on children, and my comments do as well. Shockingly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has estimated that, in 2020-21, around one in five of the population were living in poverty, including almost 4 million children. Just this week, we saw appalling statistics published by UNICEF stating that child poverty in the UK has increased by 19.6% since 2014. How can we have reached a place where the UK is bottom of the 39 high-income countries considered in that study in worsening child poverty rates? Why do the Government believe this to be the case and what is their strategy to tackle it?

As we have heard repeatedly throughout the debate, poverty in childhood has lasting consequences. As the report states, the number of children living in poverty is

“a barometer of social injustice in the UK today”.

The report makes it clear that

“being hungry has significant negative impacts on children’s ability to learn”.

This simply is not rocket science. A Labour Government would be ready to break down the barriers to opportunity. That includes a breakfast club in every primary school so that no child has to start a day in education hungry and unable to learn.

The most reverend Primate rightly focused on early years in preventing adverse childhood experiences that lead to issues later to life, including issues around offending. Early investment helps. The report highlighted research that demonstrates that the first 1,000 days of a child’s life are essential. Your Lordships’ House debated childcare and early years last week. During that debate, it was made clear that many early years and childcare providers were struggling to stay afloat while many parents were struggling to pay for childcare—in some cases, the cost were higher than their rent or mortgage payments. As has been widely reported, there is a staffing crisis in the sector while the cost of doing business crisis has seen thousands of nurseries shut their doors. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham highlighted the role that family hubs could play in supporting family relationships. Will the Minister commit to the Government considering this?

Labour would reform childcare and early years. We know that children who are eligible for free school meals are already five months behind their peers when they start school. With that in mind, Labour has commissioned an early years review, led by the respected former chief inspector of Ofsted, Sir David Bell, who will be supported by a panel of independent experts.

My noble friend Lord Griffiths gave a powerful personal account of what threatens families in dire cases, such as housing and claiming processes—barriers that the state can put in the way of families thriving. However, I am not going to have an argument with him.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford focused on the need for stable, affordable and decent housing. As the noble Lord, Lord Mann, highlighted, there is an extreme need for housing, and income determines whether people can afford decent homes. A good start in life can be enhanced by external support, but a safe, warm home is essential. The report that we are debating makes it clear that:

“Overcrowding and unsuitable housing can cause stress, depression and anxiety”.

The housing market in many parts of the country, both rural and urban—London was mentioned—is effectively broken and pricing people out of decent homes. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford and my noble friend Lord Davies highlighted the need for multigenerational homes. The Labour Party plans to build 1.5 million homes over five years, including social housing, to provide families with a secure home in order to build a family, with first-time buyers getting first dibs on new homes.

Cold homes and damp homes with mould have been mentioned, and both have physical and mental health impacts. While energy bills and the cost of living have soared under the Tories, Labour’s plan to switch on Great British Energy could save struggling families up to £1,400 a year and ensure that people do not have to choose between heating and eating in the winter.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, highlighted the risk to children of abuse or neglect in their own homes. For many children, their home is not a safe place. That is echoed in the report, which also refers to the pressures on the 800,000 young carers looking after a family member. I note and commend the work of the noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, on child abuse in Cleveland. The need to see children as people with their own voice and needs is key, as she referred to. In my view, listening, which she recommended as a policy, is an act of love.

With most local authorities under immense financial pressure and some of the statutory services failing to meet urgent need, will the Ministers say what more the Government will do to avoid children taking on the burden of caring responsibility? How will they ensure that the children’s social care system can cope with ever-increasing needs?

The report makes it clear that there are many shapes of family and that

“the protective effect of family depends on the quality of family relationships”.

It highlights the risks of loneliness and the way that Covid-19 exposed these in quite brutal terms. The lasting impact of the pandemic was reflected in the report, which states that the country is picking up the pieces relating to isolation and loneliness, deteriorating mental health, self-neglect and a huge amount of unresolved grief. Research commissioned by the Greater London Authority, published in 2022, described how 700,000 Londoners experienced severe loneliness even before the pandemic. This is reflected across the country. The research highlights the major factors that contribute to loneliness, including acute poverty and disability, through to prejudices and the challenges associated with major transitions in life. A cross-governmental and cross-societal effort is required to address this, but the Government can do more to address the mental health crisis, including by introducing the long-awaited mental health Bill.

The report also referred to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic and how it highlighted levels of inequality, disadvantage and discrimination in England today, including racial inequalities and discrimination. Can the Minister outline what the Government are learning from this, ahead of the Covid inquiry reporting, and how they intend to address this social injustice?

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham highlighted the need to support relationships through marriage preparation. I should probably declare an interest as somebody who went to a church preparation session before I got married. The potential for more formal signposting by registrars would surely be beneficial to many.

A number of noble Lords have reflected on marriage. The full report goes into some detail on this, including the costs, which I consider that many people would

[BARONESS TWYXCROSS]

find prohibitive. That may be one of the reasons for falling numbers of people getting married. Clearly, the strain that comes with poverty puts a strain on relationships—and conflict in relationships harms children. We should recognise that there are clearly cases in which marriages should end where they are not healthy. This includes violent or financially abusive marriages, or relationships which do harm. I welcome the proposals for greater investment in support for couples at all life transitions, including before marriage, at the start of parenthood and at the point of separation, and to keep children's interests at the heart of this. The noble and learned Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss, highlighted issues to do with family law, which surely increase many tensions.

The full report goes into more detail on single-sex marriage than the summary, including many examples of religious ceremonies within other denominations and faiths where it is permitted. I agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, that if marriage is desirable, it should be promoted to the whole of society. I pay tribute to her work as the Minister in taking the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act through this House. I know that is something she worked closely on, across the House and cross-party, and recall a picture of her with my noble friend Lady Thornton holding a placard saying, "Girls marry girls—get over it".

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): We did not get married, though.

Baroness Twycross (Lab): Yes, I know that you did not marry each other. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Herbert, for sharing his personal and political perspective on that legislation, and the joy it has brought to so many people.

For institutions to survive, they need to adapt to social change. The commission has thought very carefully about how to present what is a clear division of views on the issue of same-sex marriage, and we have heard the counterview from the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, today. It is welcome that the Church of England has now allowed blessings of same-sex unions and I hope that, in time, the current decision not to allow same-sex marriage will be further reviewed by the Church.

Finally, I particularly welcome the recognition that couples without children are also a family, that families take a range of shapes and sizes, and that singleness should be recognised and honoured as a major part of society. However, this must not be at the expense of failing to recognise the particular pressures on single-parent households and single people, or those without children in a world that still largely assumes that to be a family that is valued, you must have children of your own.

As I said at the start, it is unlikely that we will find mainstream political parties putting love as a commitment in their manifestos. But government should recognise that all parts of society, including government, faith groups, civil society and the voluntary sector, and those with and without faith, have a role to play in creating a more just society—a fairer society, in which every individual and every family and household can flourish.

1.09 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Viscount Younger of Leckie) (Con): My Lords, it is an honour to close this debate on *Love Matters*, the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households. I start by thanking all noble Lords for their valuable contributions today and, in particular, the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for initiating this important debate and for treating the House to a moving and passionate speech. If noble Lords will excuse the pun, in looking up to the gods, I thank the commission for its work in producing the report. It is a landmark report for the Church which makes valuable recommendations. I assure the House that these have been closely studied by the Government and are reflected in our plans and actions across the families agenda.

I add that it is a delightful change to see that there are more recommendations for the Church than for the Government on this occasion. However, just to reassure the House, there still remains much for us to do. As my noble friend Lady Bottomley said, faith groups and the Church are a crucial element in communities around the country and support many families. We have strong partnerships with the Church, including on the delivery of high-quality education in schools, and I will say more about that later.

Before I begin, I will just round up some of the themes. There were a lot of wide-ranging themes this afternoon: the importance and value of marriage, including same-sex marriage and in the traditional sense; a focus on children; views on single-person households and lone parents; relationships generally, and relating better, and how much this matters; a focus on the elderly from the noble Lord, Lord Davies; the joys or otherwise of being married to an MP; national service for young people cropped up; and, it is fair to say, bad days at the office for benefits officials struck me as being quite interesting. There was an emphasis on friends and "Neighbours", and we have been exhorted to watch "Coronation Street" next Wednesday—I must make sure to put that into my diary.

I happen to be wearing a tie with an elephant on today, and the House will know that elephants have deep family bonds. They are loyal to a fault and they are known to spend time with the relics of their ancestors, so clearly, in that respect, love matters. I welcome the report's focus on love, which provides an important reminder of the human element, the unconditional bond that underlies the entire families agenda. We all know that children benefit from growing up in a family that provides love and support and is part of a community. These are the things that ultimately make a difference to children's happiness and success throughout childhood and up through as far as employment.

We also know, sadly, that this is not the case for all children, and that some families require greater support. As a result, providing such support to create an environment where all children can thrive is a key priority for this Government. That is why, in February, we published *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, which sets out our vision for a social care system built on love,

safety and stability, along with the actions being taken to reform children's social care, a focus shared by the report. This is just one part of our wider support for families, and I will highlight some of the further initiatives shortly.

The term "family" does not automatically imply everyone living together under one roof, nor only those who find themselves under the branches of the same family tree, so I welcome the report's broad definition of family. In preparation for this debate, I was struck by one definition I happened to come across. It goes as follows.

"Family is loving and supporting one another even when it's not easy to do so. It's being the best person you could be so that you may inspire your loved ones".

Indeed, as my right honourable friend the Prime Minister puts it, quoted by the report,

"whatever your family looks like, it doesn't matter as long as the common bond is love".

I echo the report's celebration of all forms of loving relationships. As the most reverend Primate and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham said, they are significant for every individual, whether they opt for a life as a pair within a family unit or as a single person. We must respect and recognise the different family arrangements and structures, so that we can provide the right types of support. However, I listened very carefully to my noble friends Lady Stowell, Lord Cormack and Lord Robathan. They spoke passionately, particularly my noble friend Lady Stowell, about the value and benefit of marriage and the need to keep promoting this, and they are absolutely right.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham echoed the view, which was also raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, that the marriage ceremony is enormously important, and the preparation for the ceremony—preparing for the commitment of marriage—was at the heart of this. The right reverend Prelate cited a role model for this at the Holy Trinity Brompton. I also declare an interest that I believe that I am a beneficiary of good preparation for marriage, having just, last June, celebrated 35 years—not quite as many as some others in the Chamber. I also noted the question raised by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham about the registrar possibly doing some signposting. I will reflect on that, and I will certainly get back to him, and put a letter in the House Library regarding that important point.

In terms of supporting marriage, I remind the House that the Government do indeed support the institution of marriage. The House will know that we introduced the marriage allowance in 2015 to recognise marriage and civil partnerships in the tax system as just one example of our support for marriage. The Government also have a strong track record of advancing LGBT rights, including the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2013. I was deeply moved by the speech from my noble friend Lord Herbert.

The most reverend Primate mentioned the importance of state intervention where needed. The noble Lord, Lord Davies, added in at different stages, and I think he alluded to the reference made to the elderly. I will come back to that, hopefully, with time later.

I will directly address what support the Government are providing on issues that affect families. As my noble friend Lady Bottomley highlighted, my own department, DWP, oversees the reducing parental conflict programme, which shows that supporting parents, inter alia, to reduce the damage of frequent arguing—I make the point that it is frequent arguing, not just arguing, that is very damaging—achieves positive and sustained impacts for children. This programme is delivered through local authority family services and with local community and faith partners. The most reverend Primate emphasised the importance of local action in this respect, and he is right. We continue to provide ongoing support for local authorities across England on this programme and are on track to have directly supported 40,000 parents in the last two years.

In addition, the start for life and family hubs programme has created a network of centres for families with children up to 19, or up to 25 where the child has a disability. These family hubs link professionals, local partners and faith groups to support families. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham spoke about family hubs very eloquently. They also support the very important early years development, which I know is a priority for the Royal Foundation and her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales. I am sure that the House will welcome the joined-up support being given by midwives and family hub workers to expectant and new parents, helping them with both their child's and their own health and well-being.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham asked how the Government will ensure that faith groups are involved in family hubs, and that they provide the necessary relationships advice. He is right: faith groups are at the heart of many communities and therefore are a key component of the family hub model. We have published guidance for local authorities on the services we expect family hubs to offer, including helping families access support for separating and separated parents, and to reduce parental conflict.

In another passionate speech, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Gloucester spoke about children with a parent in prison—a very important subject. A parent going into prison can have a profound impact on children, which I would say is an understatement. Local agencies are best placed here to determine what support is needed, for example, *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges* states that the additional needs of children with a family member in prison or who are affected by parental offending should be considered.

Healthy relationships are built on a foundation of mutual respect, trust and honest communication. In schools, our children are being taught about the importance of healthy relationships through the inclusion of age-appropriate relationships, sex and health education within the curriculum. This helps them to develop mutually respectful relationships more broadly, but that is not all the help that they get on relationships. School mental health teams are already making a difference when relationships get tough, to help children address problems early before they escalate.

The reality is that not all relationships stand the test of time. The noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, put it very well when he said, "Bad things happen", and indeed

[VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE]

they do. In 2020, the Government introduced the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act. The legislation has modernised divorce laws and has created an online divorce service to help with financial settlements and childcare arrangements after separation.

In addition, the Child Maintenance Service—which I am directly responsible for—plays a crucial role in securing financial support for children where parents have separated. It mandates—and, where necessary, enforces—appropriate arrangements so that children have the best start in life with a solid financial foundation. Through both private family-based arrangements and more formal Child Maintenance Service arrangements, looking at the years 2020 to 2022, on average 160,000 children were kept out of absolute low income on an after-housing-costs basis.

Despite this progress, however, there is much more we can do. That is why, in October, my department announced measures to strengthen the Child Maintenance Service by accelerating our enforcement powers and removing the £20 application fee. We will also consult on the ways in which the Child Maintenance Service collects and transfers maintenance payments, all with the primary aim of getting more funds to children. My noble friend Lord Robathan is right to mention that it is mainly men—93%—who have strayed in a marriage. However, I emphasise that not all do not take responsibility for their children, so it is a complicated story.

The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham spoke about the two-child limit, which I was certainly expecting to speak about this afternoon. He will probably know what my answer will be; my noble friend Lady Stowell alluded to it. The two-child limit has been extensively debated in this House. On inception, the policy had two clear intentions: first, to make universal credit fairer and more affordable to the taxpayer; secondly, to make sure those supporting themselves through benefits face the same financial choices around the number of children they can afford to have as those not on benefits. The House will be aware of the exceptions that apply. Child benefit continues to be paid for all children in eligible families.

Going further, in 2014—as the most reverend Primate highlighted—we introduced the family test, which guides policy-makers in assessing the potential effects of their decisions on family dynamics, including elements related to marriage. The family test is for individual departments to apply. The approach allows for flexibility to consider the test at the most appropriate points in the policy-making process. In my role, I have actively supported the family test and I remain committed to promoting it across government.

I know the most reverend Primate regards this as being very important. We acknowledge that some people, including himself, might like to see the consideration and publication of the family test become a statutory obligation. To work best, an assessment of the potential family impacts of policies needs to be done early in the policy development process, so that consideration can be given to adapting proposals. Feedback from policy-makers tells us that statutory tests risk becoming a box-ticking exercise at the end of the policy process, with pass or fail outcomes. However, perhaps I can reassure him and the House that we continue to work

across government to support officials developing policy to apply the family test from the earliest policy development stages and encourage the sharing of best practice. We are also starting work across government to consider the language of the family test questions and supporting guidance. We really do want to ensure that it continues to be relevant and appropriate. We acknowledge the recommendations in the report, but also in the Children's Commissioner's report.

I will turn to some other matters raised in the report. On reducing poverty and supporting low-income families, the Government believe they have a strong track record of helping vulnerable families. There were a number of questions from the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, and I will need to write a letter as there were an awful lot of them. I will be touching on housing later, however, which was a general theme during the debate, so I hope that some answers may come to her from that.

The House will be aware of the £276 billion spent on welfare in Great Britain over 2023-24. I will not rehearse all the Autumn Statement announcements, because the House has heard them on several occasions over the past two weeks or so. However, as I said earlier, I will focus on housing. The noble Lord, Lord Mann, raised this, and the most reverend Primate also spoke about the importance of family, where they live and how they live, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford spoke about the types of houses, the intergenerational focus on the buildings and, frankly, making it a lot better for families to live near each other so that we have the influence of the intergenerational aspects. Those are incredibly important points, which I certainly take on board.

In the meantime, as the House will know, in the Autumn Statement the Government are raising the local housing allowance rates to the 30th percentile of local market rents in April 2024, which will benefit 1.6 million low-income households by on average £800 a year in 2024-25, and of course help many who are in poverty. The right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Chelmsford asked about timing. I will certainly take her point back about perhaps bringing the date forward but I certainly cannot offer any reassurance on that.

The report rightly identifies many of the features that support families' flourishing, including friendship, shelter and the ability to deal with conflict. However, I highlight the importance of work. I have to say that I am slightly amazed that this has not been raised at all during this debate, so I will take this opportunity to focus on it. It has been a long-standing principle for the Government that the most effective and sustainable way to tackle poverty is by championing employment, acknowledging the mental health benefit that this brings and supporting people, including parents, to progress in work. Work can be an important part of bringing families together, supporting their mental health, and role-modelling positive behaviours for younger generations. The Government are committed to improving lives by ensuring that more people can reap the rewards of work. The voluntary in-work progression offer is now available in all jobcentres across Great Britain. We estimate that around 1.2 million low-paid workers will be eligible for support to progress into higher-paid work, and we will encourage them to take up this offer.

On childcare and the actions of my department to support parents into work, from June 2023 we increased the universal credit childcare cost caps by 47% to £951 a month for one child and £1,630 a month for families with two or more children. Importantly, we can now also provide even more help with up-front childcare costs when parents move into work or increase their hours. I reiterate my appreciation to faith groups and their commitment to parents, carers and children, and I am grateful to the commission for its invaluable contributions to supporting and strengthening family life since it was established in March 2021.

I want to raise one very important point, which is the role of grandparents—the noble Lord, Lord Davies, referenced the elderly in his remarks, but I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Mann, profusely for raising this important subject. The intergenerational aspects of grandparents—the way they play a pivotal role in families, often stepping up to provide kinship care and support to children and their parents—are important. Many kinship carers, especially grandparents, take on this role at a time in their lives when they least expect to raise a family, we would guess. They provide support, sage advice and stability, forging strong relationships not out of duty but because love matters.

I will answer a question raised by the noble Lord, Lord Davies, to do with having a Cabinet-level Minister for Children. Perhaps I can be helpful by saying that of course he will know that we have a Children's Minister, but that was not his point. The Secretary of State for Education fulfils the role of Cabinet-level Minister. She makes sure that the best interests of children and families are front and centre in policy and decision-making at this highest level of government. She has a statutory duty to promote the well-being of children in England under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, and is responsible for overseeing domestic implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and leading the reporting process on behalf of the UK to the UN.

The Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing also chairs a cross-government child protection ministerial group. This group helps to ensure that safeguarding is championed at the highest level by government departments that provide services to children and families. Through this group, the Secretary of State also ensures that other government departments are held to account in delivering for children.

This Government are committed to delivering on issues that matter to the British people. That is why we will continue with our mission to help all families to thrive, and our young people growing up within them to flourish.

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): Before the Minister sits down, can I ask him whether he used a word in his section on divorce advisedly? He referred to a proportion or percentage of men who had “strayed”. To me, that suggests an element of blame, whereas I thought that the whole thrust of developments in divorce law is for the law to avoid allocating blame.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con): The noble Lord is absolutely right. I clarify that I was not attaching any blame; I was just making a factual point that it is

the 93% of men who stray. There is a balance that we strike within the Child Maintenance Service to be sure that we take account of the issues relating to paying parents and receiving parents. It is very important that we do not take sides, but we also have to look at the facts.

1.31 pm

The Archbishop of Canterbury: My Lords, this has been a remarkable debate and I am extremely grateful to all those who have taken part. Given that I am sure everyone is anxiously awaiting the Answer to the PNQ, I will try not to take too long—the Minister is poised to leap up and give the Answer.

I am going to pick up just one or two points, but I want to thank all those who have contributed and all those who have been so kind about the commission—I am sure that it will find out about those kind words—and who have clearly read the report, or its summary, very carefully. It was described as “quietly explosive” by the noble Baroness, Lady Thornhill. That is such a wonderful, Anglican expression. I felt my heart sing at the thought that the Church of England had discovered a way to be quietly explosive. It is such a very Anglican thing to be—we would not like to be noisily explosive any more than we would like to be enthusiastic.

I particularly want to pay tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell. I am one of those who was here when the equal marriage Act went through—I was very new in post at the time—and I remember the graciousness, and the care and attention that were paid, which ensured that it was absolutely undefeatable and unopposable. Even for those of us who did, it was put so well and done so carefully, with respect for all sides involved in the debate. It was a model for how that sort of controversial subject can be handled in Parliament. It is a good thing to remember that and to remember it with gratitude. In so doing, I say the same thing to the noble Lord, Lord Herbert, who played a very significant role in that.

Speaking of the noble Lord, Lord Herbert, I was grateful for his mention of the complexity of the Anglican Communion. I would like, just for the record, to make it clear that the Primates of the Anglican Communion, the Lambeth Conference of worldwide bishops and the Anglican Consultative Council have, on numerous occasions, emphasised their opposition to the criminalisation in any way of same-sex relationships, in the broad sense of the word, and to treating those who are lesbian, gay or transsexual in any way as “other”, condemning and opposing them. I re-emphasise my full agreement with the opposition to criminalisation. I am glad to say that, if you go back to 1967, you will find that my illustrious predecessor, Archbishop Ramsey, was one of those who led the campaign for decriminalisation in this country.

I regret, as was made clear, the legislation in Uganda and in other places, where it was emphasised by colonial legislation. I also very strongly oppose the death penalty, and to combine the two is the worst of all possible worlds. I am not defending that legislation in any way, because I opposed it and I opposed it publicly, but it is certainly true to say that in that particular law, which I had to read, the “aggravated homosexuality”—not my

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words—includes, as far as I could see, only those things which are in this country criminal anyway, such as offences against children. However, that does not defend that law.

I will pick up on the comments about marriage, which are very important. The noble Lord, Lord Robathan, and the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, quite rightly raised it. In the full report there are 300 mentions of marriage and it comes in at number 5 of the key conclusions in the summary report. In one sense, there are a number of other things we did not mention, but it does not mean that we do not support them vigorously. Look at what the Church does as well as what it says. Day by day, from my own experience when I was parish priest doing preparation for marriage for couples and seeing the number of marriages increasing in my own parish—from eight to nearly 40 in my last year in that particular post—I would say that the Church shows its commitment in its active support for marriage.

On the issues around same-sex marriage, noble Lords will be relieved that I am not going to ride off on that hobby-horse, save to say that I appreciate the sympathy of the noble Lord, Lord Cormack, for trying to square that circle.

Marriage is extremely important, but it is not a magic wand. The figures show that domestic abuse happens as much within marriages, with step-parents, and, tragically, with grandparents and others—mainly men—involved in the family, as much as it does in other ways. That is one of the reasons the report carefully emphasises that marriage is of enormous importance, but it is not a panacea; it is not something that makes all life go well always. Children want both parents in their lives, but that is not always for the best if marriages are broken. That is my own experience. Yes, fathers must fulfil their responsibilities, but holding a marriage together is, tragically, not always the safest and best way for the children in the family.

The noble Lord, Lord Davies, in a memorable speech quite rightly drew attention to the need to take care of the use of the word “family”. I hope we tried to do that sufficiently in the report. He also, quite rightly, raised the question of old age in the Church of England. Old age, as in your Lordships’ House, is something with which we are relatively familiar, given that the average age of Members is 69, or round about that—many of the Members of your Lordships’ House today would qualify for the youth groups in most of our churches.

The noble Baroness, Lady Butler-Sloss—for some reason, I have written “Bishop Butler-Sloss” in my notes, which was slightly confusing me; but she is wearing purple—talked about the impact and importance of listening to children. That has to be one of the key ways in which, as the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Durham mentioned several times, we provide support. The support comes in listening. Holy Trinity Brompton’s marriage course is now used very effectively all over the world, and, for some time, was used in an adapted form as a compulsory run-up to marriage in three provinces in China for anyone wanting to get married—I trust that the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, feels that that is what Governments should intervene in, and

make it all absolutely compulsory. It has made a huge difference: all our own children who have married, and many of my young colleagues at Lambeth Palace, have used the course. I will not repeat everything said by the right reverend Prelates the Bishop of Durham, the Bishop of Gloucester or the Bishop of Chelmsford—save to say that I agreed with them entirely.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, commended the Positive Parenting Alliance. I emphasise that and thank her for mentioning the Reverend Clive Potter. It is typical of what happens in most marriages, most of the time, in this country. You could get rid of the House of Bishops tomorrow and it would be years before anyone noticed the difference, but if you got rid of parish priests, the whole thing would collapse overnight.

The noble Lord, Lord Mann, alluded to the role of grandparents—I agree entirely on that—and the importance of multigenerational families. That is especially important to encourage, because it is a great source of resilience that tackles the problem of isolation, which is why we must take the concept of families in the widest sense.

We heard a marvellous passing comment—I cannot quite remember who from—on the old chestnut about bishops always voting against this Government.

Lord Robathan (Con): It was me.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: I know—I was being tactful.

Lord Robathan (Con): You can be honest.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: Yes, noble Lords will find that we did the same thing with the Labour Government—the noble Lord, Lord Collins, will remember it well. It is just a general principle; we sit on these Benches. It is nothing new and it will not change in the future. It is, of course, a misuse of statistics. We supported the Government in stopping the Illegal Migration Act being voted out, and on the Brexit Act after the referendum—if I had picked that Session, it would have been 90% the other way. It all goes to show that statistics have their uses but not always their illuminations.

The two-parent limit is a serious point. The Minister and I know that we will disagree on this. The point about it—this is why it is not a political comment in the sense of a cheap, low comment—is that it penalises children for what happens to the parents. That is the wrong thing to do. If a child who is born happens to be the third child, even if it is because the parents have irresponsibly not thought about their budget before making love—I am sure noble Lords always think about their budget in those circumstances—it is not right to penalise that resulting child.

A family may have four children when their circumstances are good and then face a disability or illness. These things happen. That is why we raised the moral question of whether it is right to penalise the children even if one agrees—which I do not always; in fact, I do so very seldom—that the parents have been

irresponsible. The parents may have paid their taxes and their NI for years and, at the moment of need, as Beveridge encouraged, they look for social security.

I was particularly struck by the speech from the noble Lord, Lord Addington. He was looking for how to describe a collection of bishops. There are many descriptions I could use, but I am informed that the technical phrase is “a psalter of bishops”. If I am wrong, I apologise to the House—I have never used that one. I thought particularly about his comment—as he said, he has used it before—that to be a successful disabled child, you need to choose your parents carefully.

Family support is important in disability. It saves the state more money than we can begin to imagine. It always has and always will. We have a child with learning difficulties; do we look after her—she looks after us, in many ways—and care for her because we are paid? Of course we do not; we care for her because we love her. Even in our family, with excellent education and lots of experience, navigating the benefits system is really tough. I commend that thought to the Minister.

Just before he goes, because I could not miss this, I thought that the speech from the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, was one of the most outstanding of this debate. It was just wonderful—and short. It was shorter than mine.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): It was a lesson for us all.

The Archbishop of Canterbury: Exactly—I am trying to get there. The noble Lord caused me to reflect that marriages can be good or bad; they are not an end in themselves but they are a means to an end. His comments about Jerusalem artichokes—which, by the way, are topinambours in French, since you ask, although I am not quite sure why—and the ways in which the Beveridge report resulted in the most extraordinary series of legislation, from which he and his family benefited, in one of the most extraordinary periods of legislative action of this Parliament, brought home how government action can facilitate, but is not sufficient for, making families work well. I am very grateful for that speech.

I thank the Minister very much for his excellent closing speech. He rightly mentioned work, which made me think of the numerous churches with job clubs to help people get back into work. That is very important. I thank him for picking up the points so beautifully through his answer.

I have two final things to say. This debate shows how the different aspects of what we have been talking about are interlinked: we cannot silo these issues. Housing helps families, care helps families and education helps families. The Government and the Church operate in different departments. How we cross those silos is probably the hardest test for any administration. That has been shown by a series of powerful and thoughtful speeches in answer to a powerful and thoughtful report.

Finally, on the question of marriage—noble Lords may note a faint tone of defensiveness here—I shall pick up the point made by a noble Lord and a noble Baroness about not mentioning it enough. As some Benches will no doubt have guessed, I am a regular

reader of a notorious left-wing magazine—I read it every week—called the *Spectator*. I read it to keep my blood pressure up and it works extremely well. On one occasion, a diary article by the noble Lord, Lord Moore, described me as “uxorious”. It is funny what sticks in your mind; I had to look that up and it means unnaturally devoted to marriage. That is my final defence, my Lords.

Motion agreed.

Rwanda Treaty

Private Notice Question

1.50 pm

Asked by Lord Collins of Highbury

To ask His Majesty's Government what additional costs they expect to be incurred as a result of this week's signing of a treaty to facilitate the removal of migrants to Rwanda.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) (Con): My Lords, the Government of Rwanda did not ask for money to sign the treaty, nor did we offer any. Costs and payment will depend on the numbers of people relocated, timing of when it occurs and outcomes of individual cases. Spending on the migration and economic development partnership will be disclosed in the annual Home Office accounts.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, yesterday, my noble friend Lord Liddle asked what is the present capacity of Rwanda to take asylum seekers. The Minister said that the Government do know that number but that he did not. Please will he tell us today what the Government know? In April 2022, when the economic transformation and integration fund was established, it was clearly part of the refugee scheme. The announcement then also said that the United Kingdom is funding the processing costs for each person relocated, saying that we anticipated the amount would be comparable to processing costs incurred in the United Kingdom. So what are the anticipated costs now, in the light of the provisions of the treaty, which changes fundamentally the original scheme? Why, for three financial years, under three Home Secretaries, have the Government been committing money to a scheme that has not seen a single asylum seeker sent to Rwanda, and which will see the United Kingdom accepting people in return? This Parliament deserves very clear answers from the Minister.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the noble Lord is quite right: I was unable to answer that question yesterday, for which I apologise. To answer the noble Lord, Liddle, the Court of Appeal said there was evidence of only 100 places in the initial accommodation. Its assessment was based on evidence up to the summer of 2022. Since then, additional capacity has been added, but the exact number is immaterial because the scheme is uncapped, as I did say yesterday. Capacity will continue to be added as required. When claims are

[LORD SHARPE OF EPSOM]

settled, people will move out of the accommodation. Finally, when the scheme works, and deters people from making illegal and dangerous channel crossings, we will need fewer places.

Yesterday, as noble Lords will be aware, the Permanent Secretary sent a letter to the Home Affairs Select Committee to disclose a further payment made to the Government of Rwanda through the migration and economic development partnership. This disclosed that a further £100 million had been paid in April as part of the ETIF. The letter also set out that, in the year 2024-25, we anticipate another payment of £50 million, in April 2024, again as part of the ETIF, as agreed with the Government of Rwanda when the migration and economic development partnership was signed. This brings the total spend so far to £240 million. The split is as follows: the initial investment of £120 million into the ETIF, a further £100 million into the ETIF, which was disclosed yesterday, and a separate payment of £20 million to the Government of Rwanda in advance of flights to support initial set-up costs of the asylum processing arrangements under the MEDP.

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab): My Lords, the International Agreements Committee will be scrutinising the new treaty. Will the Minister make sure that it has all the information it needs when it does that, including whether the treaty allows for any clawback of either unspent or unused money?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the Government have already committed to appropriate scrutiny of the treaty. I will take back the noble Baroness's points about clawback as I do not know the answer.

Lord Bailey of Paddington (Con): My Lords, there has been a great deal of focus on the cost of the partnership. Can the Minister please tell me how much money has been spent on housing asylum seekers in hotels and what the overall cost to the taxpayer is of the immigration system?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My noble friend makes a good point. Those focusing solely on the costs of the partnership are somewhat missing the point. The simple fact of the matter is that the daily cost of hotels for migrants is now £8 million. The cost of the UK's asylum system has roughly doubled in the past year and now stands at nearly £4 billion. So the payments so far made to Rwanda represent about 30 days' hotel costs. The criminal smuggling gangs are continuing to turn a profit using small boats. We have to bring an end to this. When this plan succeeds, as I think it will, I think British taxpayers will acknowledge that it represents good value for money.

The Lord Bishop of Chelmsford: My Lords, will the monitoring committee, as outlined in the economic development partnership and now the treaty, review how funds have been allocated by the Rwandan authorities towards meeting the needs of refugees?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): The treaty enhances the role of the independent monitoring committee. It will ensure that obligations under the treaty are adhered to in practice and will be able to take steps to prevent errors at an early stage. It will have the power to set its own priority areas for monitoring and will have unfettered access for the purposes of completing assessments and reports that will monitor the entire relocation process from the beginning, including screening, to relocation and settlement in Rwanda. It will be responsible for developing a system to enable relocated individuals and legal representatives to lodge confidential complaints direct to the committee and it will undertake real-time monitoring of the partnership for at least the first three months. There is plenty of scope in there for it to get involved in everything.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Lab): Will the Minister acknowledge and confirm that Home Office officials insisted on a letter of direction on this matter because they did not consider that this would be value for money? Can the Minister also tell the House why the Government are not devoting resources of this size to tackling the criminal gangs that are so cruel in bringing people in in such a dangerous way?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): On the noble Baroness's second point, the Government are devoting considerable resources to tackling the criminal gangs, as has been well established from the Dispatch Box in many previous debates. As regards the letter that was sent yesterday, I am sure the noble Baroness will recall that the Permanent Secretary appeared before HASC and the Public Accounts Committee on 29 November and 4 December. They asked about payments that the UK had made and he explained at that point that payments in the 2023-24 financial year would be announced in our annual report and accounts next summer, for reasons of balancing the public interest. Since then, Ministers have agreed that Sir Matthew can now disclose the payments for this financial year. That is what happened.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, we all completely condemn these terrible criminals, but how many have been apprehended?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I do not know the answer to that. Part of the reason that I do not know the answer is that so much of this activity takes place on foreign shores.

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, beyond costs and criminal gangs, may I ask for clarity following my question yesterday and the Minister's response? Have the Government fulfilled all extradition requests by the Government of Rwanda on matters relating to genocide and war crimes—and if not, why not? Or is there a reticence by HMG to do so, and if so, why?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I will have to write to the noble Viscount about extradition requests. I do not know the answer.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab): My Lords, the Minister said the funding of this ill-considered and, I think we will find, ill-fated scheme is coming from the Economic Transformation and Integration Fund. It is not clear who or what will be economically transformed or who or what will be integrated. Can he say how much of that funding will be taken from the overseas development aid fund?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): The money is actually going to the ETIF, which is responsible for the economic growth and development of Rwanda. Investment so far has been focused on areas such as education, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure and job creation. I am pleased to be able to reassure the noble Lord that none of it came from ODA.

Baroness Henig (Lab): My Lords, can I just ask about the deterrent aspect of this issue? By my calculations, more than 30,000 refugees are coming per year and so far we have heard today that something like 100 will be going back. Now, my maths is not wonderful, but that to me is less than 1%. Why does the Minister believe that will be a deterrent for anybody fleeing war or imprisonment? Following on from that, does the Minister not agree that in terms of value for money—I know that he is very much in favour of value for money—it would be a far more effective use of that money to help the poorest through the coming winter?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): In answer to the noble Baroness's first question, I say that the deterrent effect is already working; arrivals this year are down by around 30%, as my right honourable friend the Home Secretary noted the other day. As regards value for money, the point of this is to stop the boats. As I said in answer to my noble friend, hotel accommodation is costing the taxpayer £8 million a day. How is that value for money?

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (Lab): My Lords, I wonder whether the Minister will reflect on what he has just said. The Prime Minister said that the reduction in the numbers crossing by boat was mainly because of the deal with Albania, not the other countries that we are now dealing with. Will he return to my noble friend's question about numbers? The Rwandan Government have said that the total they can cope with is 200. Put that against the 30,000 to 40,000 who are coming in boats: it is a very small percentage, and will not therefore reduce the amount of money spent here to address the issue. It really is disingenuous to try to tell us and others that it will be all right, and we will not have that expense here because people will go to Rwanda, and we have covered that. It simply is not going to happen that way.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, in answer to the first part of the question, of course the Albanian returns agreement is a factor in this. No one is denying that or trying to claim otherwise. I think the number of Albanians we have sent back to Albania is 5,000 so far this year—I cannot remember the precise detail. As I keep saying from the Dispatch Box, and will have to keep repeating as it is the true answer, the numbers in this scheme are uncapped.

Lord Hacking (Lab): My Lords, if I can just come back again on the issue of money, I have a figure in front of me of £240 million and then £60 million, and that is the Rwanda policy. The Minister rightly draws attention to the daily cost of those kept in various facilities, including hotels—I think he said it was £8 million per day—but the execution of the Rwanda policy will not remove that. There will still be indigenous costs of looking after the migrants who remain here. One has to be worried that so much money is being spent in the direction of the Rwanda policy; there is so much need for money to be used elsewhere—in the National Health Service, in schools and so forth. Therefore, it must be a great worry to all of us that so much money is going in the direction of the Rwanda policy.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): What is a great worry to the Government is that the costs of the migration system, as I mentioned earlier in answer to my noble friend, have doubled to £4 billion this year. As the noble Lord has just rightly referenced, we are spending £8 million a day on hotels. That is clearly unsustainable and I do not think it represents value for money.

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Lab Co-op): My Lords, my noble friend Lady Taylor asked the Minister a simple question: have Ministers been required to issue letters of direction to instruct civil servants to proceed with this, because of the issues with this scheme? The answer is either that, yes, they have, or no, they have not. Which is it?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): The answer is that I do not know. I will have to write to the noble Lord.

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): My Lords, for those who are a bit slow with their arithmetic, £8 million a day is £3 billion a year, added to the cost of the policy itself. Is it not clear that it would be better to spend that money on clearing the backlog and dealing promptly with arrivals? That would be a real deterrent. This leads to the suspicion, which the Minister can confirm or deny as he wishes, that the Government do not want these cases assessed because so many of them would be accepted.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): That is an interesting conclusion to draw. The simple fact is that we are also clearing the backlog; as noble Lords know, the commitment is to clear it by the end of this year. If we stopped spending the £8 million a day on hotel costs, what would the noble Lord suggest we do with those who are seeking asylum?

Lord Berkeley (Lab): My Lords, how many British Government officials will be sent to Rwanda to process these people, and what is the cost of that? And if the asylum seekers are granted asylum, are they paid a fare to come back or are they told to get back on their own?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, the point of the scheme is that if they are granted asylum then they stay in Rwanda. As for the precise costs of the officials who will be based in Rwanda, I do not have those figures yet, but as soon as I do I will make sure the House is aware of them.

House adjourned at 2.06 pm.