

The Churches' Regional Commission inaugural annual lecture delivered by Baroness Helena Kennedy on 31st January 2008

'The need to Regenerate our Democracy'

Like all good orators Baroness Kennedy speaks without a written text.

It is a great honour and real privilege for me to be here tonight and I want to thank you for inviting me to come and to talk to you about a subject that's close to my heart at the moment, I mean passionately. We are talking about the passions that we have and that we try to speak to in the House of Lords, but my great concern just now has been a sort of disillusionment, which I think I share with so many people in the country, over what has been happening to our political processes.

What was interesting was that a number of years ago, about 3 years ago now, the Rowntree Trusts, which are really wonderful about doing great pieces of work looking at poverty in Britain; looking at some of the things that you really do have to put money into to get to the underbelly to see what's going on in some parts of our society, and they've always been prepared to finance that sort of research. This time they wanted to do research into democracy - what was happening, why people were not voting, why we were seeing such a slump in voting figures in local and in national elections. Also a concern about the fact that people were not joining political parties and they wanted to know what that was all about because of the profound damage that can be done to a society if those under-pinnings somehow disappear. So that was what I wanted to talk to you about tonight and so the invitation came at a very good time.

I think that to talk about democracy we have to first of all talk about power because behind any real discussion about democracy there is that question of "Who has power in contemporary Britain?" I sometimes pose the question of "Who runs Britain? Is it Downing Street, or is it Fleet Street or in fact is it the White House?" There are influences coming from different quarters. But that list of course, of those three, is not exhaustive because locating the purveyors of power and influence could probably keep us all entertained all night. Any real map of political power in Britain would have to include the power of money-markets of international corporations, of super national bodies - you know those things that gather in a whole set of nations like the European Union, or the United Nations or the World Bank or the World Trade Organisations. All of these things having power that impacts ultimately on our lives. Power in a global economy is diffuse and I think it's one of the things that makes people feel more and more powerless because they know that to have a handle on that is so hard.

National sovereignty has been reduced to create communities of mutual interest beyond borders and so we have seen a reduction if you like in the sovereign nation states and a greater involvement in larger bodies. Sometimes that works out very well for economic reasons; it sometimes works better to be part of an economic block. Signing up to international conventions on things like nuclear proliferation, or environmental issues, or human rights or torture or the status of refugees, or on the prevention of money laundering; these things that cross borders. It is important for nations to come together and to, if you like, dissolve some of our own sovereignty, our own national interest, in order to share power, in order to deal with some of those cross border problems. So signing up to international conventions has, on the one hand been a positive thing, but there is then of course the concomitant increase in the power of the judiciary, because the judiciary interpret those conventions because challenge may be brought in the

Courts, around for example issues like torture. I was involved not very long ago in a case about should we allow torture to be used in cases in Britain when the torture has happened – we forbid torture here – but when the torture may have happened in Nigeria or elsewhere. Do we accept evidence that may have come from such a source, when we have an abhorrence of the idea of torture and where it's one of the things that we rightly have such a strong resistance to?

So the Judges end up being in a much more powerful position than perhaps they had been in the past and we've seen ugly eruptions when politicians feel that the power of the Judges runs up against their power. This has largely happened around issues that struck that balance of security and liberty. We saw it around the Belmarsh detentions without trial, where the Judges and the House of Lords eventually said, "This is not acceptable if we have respect for human rights there has to be a trial process before we take liberty away, even of non-citizens." and of course Government, in the form of David Blunkett at the time, was very cross.

Power is moving into different places and the questions raised are about how such power can be transparent and accountable. It's one thing to have it in the Courts where we see what the Judges are doing but it's another thing when it's happening in the Board Rooms of Companies, when people seem to have influence on policy making, where it maybe for all sorts of interests. I have often asked myself the questions, "How did it come about that we had a policy for introducing super casinos?" "How did it come about that we got policies for 24hr drinking?" "How has it come about that we have so many computer run projects in Government now?" You only have to ask yourself the questions about whether there are company interests and then you have to ask yourself the questions of whether they are involved in donations to parties, are they involved in offering jobs to former ministers and all of those things I'm afraid.

So what we want in a society that is truly democratic is greater transparency and accountability and it's why all mechanisms have to be challenged. Like for example, the way in which Judges are appointed. Over the years it was one of the things that I used to raise, that if we want to have a judiciary that has public confidence there has to be a sense that it is reflective of our society and that the judiciary shouldn't just seem to come from one section. Experience has taught us a number of important lessons about power. Particularly political power. The great Lord Acton's words are often quoted "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" and I now have developed it into "Power is delightful and absolute power is absolutely delightful." Power has to be controlled, and it was this truth that was learned here in these Isles, ahead of any other nation, that led to the creation of the rule of law. It is something we should be proud of and should talk more about, that it was invented here the rule of law. No person however powerful, even the King, would be above the law – that's how it all started. This has been translated into the near universal contemporary acknowledgement that Prime Ministers, Presidents, Ministers of State; around the world everybody says "Of course we respect the rule of law" because there's an acceptance that somehow those who govern have to be contained. That all employees of the state - policeman, immigration officers, prison wardens – because we give to them on our behalf power to deal with other citizens, with others who come to be in our society, then we have to make sure that their power might not be abused.

All wielders of power are subject to law and to human rights standards and that's what makes for a civilised society. The potential for corruption takes on much subtler forms in some democracies than in others and I think here in the United Kingdom we can be proud of the fact that there is very little serious corruption. In fact we have so much subtler forms and practices, which I think can be embarked upon with total insouciance, without people really feeling there's anything wrong with it, but which leaves a bad taste in the public mouth. That is true just now; we've seen in the last few days, a sense in which politicians are fiddling the system so that their families can have jobs and end up taking out of the public purse £286,000 a year, and we are talking about Northern Rock in that it might be costing some money from the public purse to protect families, and we see that kind of abuse. Is it any wonder that there's an unease in the public about our politicians and about those who govern us? It involves Ministers and senior advisors leaving office to take up jobs immediately in businesses linked to the very departments in which they worked, and that really does make people feel unhappy. We've seen it with health ministers, going off into private sector companies within months of leaving office. We've seen prison ministers going into private security firms. Senior policy advisors leaving and going off into highly remunerated roles in the private sector, linked to the very issues where they were advocating privatisation; then they become the beneficiaries of it. There's something that's very uncomfortable

about all of that, linked often to pharmaceutical companies, linked to arms companies and so on. Securing positions for which their only conceivable qualification is inside knowledge and contact, the address book, the fact that they can come and ring another politician, a sitting Cabinet Minister, in the way that you and most members of the public couldn't do. It means the total lack of insight displayed in the acceptance of consultancies and share options and we can point to many different examples.

None of this is new, of course, it's not just a Labour in Government that's been party to this sort of practice; the privatisation of public utilities during the Thatcher years led to similar questionable directorships and consultancies. The role of money stuffed brown envelopes is something we still remember. This kind of soft corruption goes beyond personal gain because it also means the fudging of statistics and the cherry picking of research, as I'm afraid has happened too often recently from the Home Office particularly. Presenting facts to support a policy and not giving the full picture. It means manufacturing, as we had I'm afraid in the lead up to the Iraq War, the manufacture of dossiers on intelligence which were really not reflective of the actuality. It means that public consultation exercises are conducted which are purely cosmetic and when the outcome has quite clearly been decided in advance.

Now I mention all of this because when the Power Enquiry, the Rowntree Trust funded enquiry, was eventually reported in 2006, what we discovered was that the general public was not taken in. Everywhere we went - we travelled round the country, we took evidence and went to community centres. We went to further education colleges and schools and sat and had gatherings of people. We went to Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, we went up and down the country, we also went to football stadiums and that was interesting. When we sat down with people, we went through a whole set of things asking people, and asked them "Did you vote at the last election?" "If you didn't, why not?" The general thing is that people are not duped, they're not taken in, they know. People said that they weren't voting and that they weren't joining political parties because they didn't think their vote mattered. They didn't think they could make a difference.

At the last election more people abstained than actually voted for the Government. So we actually had in abstentions more people than voted for the Government. The total turnout at the election was just hovering on 60%, so 40% of the public, who could vote, didn't vote. So let's just deal with that 60%, 34% of voters voted for Labour, but it still meant that Government went in with a majority of 60 seats, so it means that any policy can be got through by Government which has only been voted for by 34% of those eligible to vote. Now it doesn't matter whether you're a Labour person or not a Labour person because sometimes it swings in the other direction, as it was during the Conservative years in Government. But what's concerning is whether there is a mandate for some of the things that are being done. So the landslide of 1997 was in fact on a smaller vote than actually had secured the victory of John Major in the 1992 election, which is quite an interesting thought. Very worrying to me was that only 39% of young people under 24, eligible to vote, went to the polling booth at all. So very much less than half. What is especially alarming is that the old comforter that they start voting, you know the young might not vote but once they start having families and mortgages and having to pay tax they'll get out there and vote, is no longer true. Following it, and there are people in our Universities who are doing this work, following it through we found that actually that old step into maturity, or responsibility, doesn't shift things. People who don't vote and don't gain the habits of voting, don't start voting now. What we find is that you then get a very interesting demographic - twice as many people over 75 vote as under 24. So it's the older sections of our community who are voting, but it does mean that it may make a difference as to what the concerns and interests are of the people of the new generation who are coming up through society.

The membership of parties of course is haemorrhaging too. 50 years ago 1 in 11 persons belonged to a political party, now its 1 in 88. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the National Trust have double the membership of all the political parties put together. Contrary to what we were told by politicians and political insiders when we were taking evidence, what politicians always say to you is "Oh it's because of apathy." "People you know, they're watching telly, they can't be bothered to go and vote." Or they say "It's because people are now so affluent, people are so well off and comfortable they don't bother to vote, they're contented, or they're ignorant, they're too stupid to vote, they don't see the point." In fact what we found as we went around was that it wasn't so much that, people had their views on almost everything, but they didn't feel that their voice would be heard. It wasn't that they weren't socially concerned; they were just completely alienated from political institutions and formal democracy.

Now these problems of low turnout and failing political parties are a feature in other democracies too and it's interesting looking at what is happening in the United States because they've been having a real slide in turnouts in elections, but suddenly it looks as though they've got the bit between their teeth because they feel the need for change. They're having an economic recession, they're in a war that the majority of people now are feeling very hostile to, and they have become very disillusioned with Bush in the White House. So suddenly the desire for change is making people perhaps much more concerned.

The interesting thing about both the United States, other nations in Europe, western democracies, and our own, is of course that there's a growing number of people who are our poorest in society who do not feel represented at all by Parliament. It's partly because the nature of Parliament has changed because of, if you like, the lessening of the power of the Trade Unions. The Trade Unions were so often an avenue by which, particularly men, but men and women too, became confident about finding their voice on political issues and they often became a route through which they went into politics. That has decreased in recent times. So for example if you were to do an examination of those who were going into politics on the Labour benches, and the Conservative benches, you'll find that they're, the vast majority, university educated and people who often have no other career. Increasingly we are seeing our members of Parliament are people who very early in their lives, in their 20s, decide they want to become politicians, become researchers to politicians, aides to politicians, go into think-tanks, whatever and that is their route into politics now, it's a career choice that is made at an early stage. What it means is that people who have been teachers, people who have run businesses, community organisers and so on, are less likely to go into politics. We are seeing a different profile on those who are our elected representatives, or who stand for Parliament. So we are seeing a shrinkage of the pool of people who are interested in this as a life. Now part of that may be, of course, because of a whole lot of things that are changing and I'll refer to them as I go through.

Our system of representative democracy dates back to the 19th Century. The way in which political parties work; you know it's quite interesting that the political parties really took off in the 19th Century and it meant that the party became the way by which the elected representative spoke to the wider community and the party was the process and if you like the conduit between the two. One of the things that has happened of course is that we've seen, through the development of communication technology, that politicians don't have to do that. They don't need the political party any more because they can sit on Richard and Judy's sofa and talk to the public by a television and so the political party as it was is no longer quite the mechanism that it once was.

So mass political parties were invented in the 19th Century as a direct result of the extended franchise. I often remind my children that my Grandpa didn't have a vote, it wasn't just my Granny that didn't have the vote as a woman; my Grandfather didn't because he was not a property owner. We've got to remember that it was only at the beginning of the 20th Century that working men who didn't own property, who rented their places for their families and so on, they didn't have the vote either. The extending of the franchise started happening in the 19th Century into the early 20th Century and that was what made political parties develop at that time. The public needed parties at that time so their individual voices took on more volume and they had a way of having an effect on policy and the political parties in an industrialised age were largely configured around class, but what has happened is we've seen a change in all of that. Those allegiances to party which were very tribal have now broken down. Attachment to a party was retained by people for most of their lives and they rarely changed, and even with changed circumstances people would say "Oh we've always been Labour, or we've always been Conservative." That's not happening any more. What has happened is society has changed and so have people. The vision of the good life, and I come from a background where my family were Labour people, because my parents idea of the good life that brought them into the Labour party was that they wanted to have a home with hot water and a bathroom in the 50s; they wanted secure employment because of course they'd seen their parents go through the depression and they had been young people during the 30s and had seen the effects of the depression. They wanted a steady income, they wanted the security of that, but they also wanted the aspiration of education for their children and that was what they wanted from a political party. Many of their basic hopes have been fulfilled; I mean a lot of the things that people struggled around have come to exist for people. Very few people live in places that don't have a bathroom, very few people don't have those sorts of opportunities – however we shouldn't forget that there are still many people living in impoverished existences. The poverty of aspiration, the poverty of experience and the divide between rich and poor is growing all the time. Somehow that section of our community that is poorest does not feel it has people who speak for them.

Now one of the things that has happened of course is that we've seen a much greater individualisation or an atomisation of our society. You know there are as many ideas of what the good life might be as there are people, because people have their very individualised ideas of how they want their life to be and they tend not to get together collectively to say what it is that they want. Someone told me that they tried to organise something, in the area in which they live, around the absence of certain provision. They felt there wasn't a good enough bus service, particularly for the elderly to get to things. They felt there wasn't enough play areas for children. So they called a community meeting and some of the people came to the meeting and said "I don't want you to raise these issues because if they're in the local newspaper it will bring our house prices down." So the idea of getting together collectively to deal with the absences/gaps in provision, they didn't want to do because that would have an effect on them in a personal way that they didn't want. So the collective has somehow, the idea of community, the idea of working together for things that might better the lives of us all, that has been breaking down. So we've seen political parties having a problem about how to make, if you like, a vision that inspires the public because of the way in which individuality/individualism has become so much the name of today's game.

Politics, of course, has to change to accommodate changed lives and changed dreams. One of the great shifts has been the relationship between the citizen and state. People are much more conscious of themselves as citizens who've got rights and there has been a growth of consumerism and people are in perpetual demand of faster and more efficient services and they see Government as being the people who have to deliver that and if they don't deliver it then they get cross, in the same way that they get cross if the queue is too long in Safeways. So this idea that everything is about consumption and that we all see ourselves as consumers has fed into our society and of course Government has played into that because the whole business of the market. There isn't a part of our lives where the drives of the market aren't seen to be the best way of delivering everything. The desire to introduce market disciplines and private sector dynamism into the public sector then, of course, has had certain kinds of strange consequences. One of them has been the spread of quangos, people who make decisions about our lives, and it's very difficult to work out who you complain to. This is one of the things that people often say to me "You can't get to find out who it is that is responsible for something." So people are becoming very disorientated by the sheer complexity of decision making hierarchies and the convolution of relationships because the trust are running this and the hospital trust is in charge of that, or the regional thing is in charge of this and so on. It is all made so complicated because everything's been farmed out in a way as if you were de-politicising politics. Nobody appears able to answer the simple question "Who's in charge?" "Where does the buck stop?" "Who resigns when things go belly up?" The answer is of course that usually nobody resigns and while we the citizens are being lectured about rights and responsibilities, responsibility seems to be shifted away from politicians and the result is that citizens' confidence in the system is being eroded more and more.

Now the parties are trying to re-invent themselves and I think that often it's in ways that are not successful and the public are not fooled. One of the great shifts was the one that I mentioned at the beginning, which is about communication. It has driven a new presidential style of campaigning, new arts are borrowed from the corporate world such as marketing and direct polling and focus groups, combined with the new technologies and call centres and the internet and e-mailing. Of course it has challenged the mass political party because you don't need a political party if you pay a call centre to phone people up and say "Have you been to the polling booth today and who are you thinking of voting for?" You don't have people going knocking on doors any more, less and less of that. Basically the bill for the call centre to make the phone calls is picked up by one of your rich benefactors who on the whole tends not to do these things unless there's some benefit going to accrue. We may see the obvious things of honours and seats in the House of Lords and so on, but actually, and much more insidious in some ways, are the policy shifts that may be taking place that you or I are not aware of but are the results of those connections and arrangements.

Now if the mass party is about accessing huge numbers of voters and providing a channel for them to be able to say to those who might govern "This is what we want", the thing is that television has created a short cut and so have the other technologies. If the parties were in the business of competing for the votes of individuals, suddenly people started thinking "Well it's not very much different from selling products on a supermarket shelf". It was rather like how retail might work and so the commodity might be different, but how different was the selling of a politician or a party from the selling of a soap powder and we have kind of gone down that road, with the concept of the citizen becoming confused with the

concept of the consumer. I refuse to be a consumer I'm a citizen when it comes to politics and I think that most of us feel that, that in our politics we are citizens and citizens are different.

The de-stabilising of our democracy is rooted in a number of social changes and one of them, of course, is that people are better education and they are much less deferential and they don't feel as prepared to let decisions be made by their supposed 'betters', as well as developments which I think have been taken over from the business world. They see through that and so people are much cannier than perhaps we might have understood. The business of the advertising agent's role now for political parties is a very serious one. David Puttnam, who is one of the people in the House of Lords, gave me a video to watch which was about a whole set of people who all worked together in a very big advertising agency in the 60s, and in fact they have all gone on to great and grand things. There's Charles and Maurice Saatchi and Tim Bell, who is in the House of Lords on the Conservative benches, and there's David Puttnam who is on the Labour benches. All these people who were in this advertising agency went onto other things, but what was interesting was that they changed advertising in the 60s and then they went to politicians and said "We can do this for you." There's the great story told of Tim Bell doing that and going to Margaret Thatcher and Mrs. Thatcher being rather cynical and wasn't convinced that this was something she wanted to get her hands involved in, but they came up with that campaign of 'Labour isn't working' – you remember that advert with the great queue of Labour. Then people thought "Well actually perhaps this is not such a bad thing after all." Of course Labour had had the experience in the 70s and 80s of the parties being hijacked by far left groups and so they too wanted to say "How do we manage all of this." So they didn't want the canvassers and the people who might be taking over local parties, they didn't want that, what they wanted was another way of reaching the public.

So the other thing that has really poisoned politics in my view, and our democracy, is something that I think is worth our having a think about. It's the business of triangulation. Triangulation is democracy by mathematical formula. The formulation identified by pollsters in the United States was that basically elections are won in marginal seats. So what they did was they, and it all happened over a period of time this learning, was that basically if you go to the swing States and concentrate your efforts there, that will decide who wins the Presidential elections. So we took that notion and then did the same thing here. Looked at the marginal constituencies and so you worked there and you actually abandon the constituencies you think are the safe seats which you can count on, or the ones where you will never win, the places where other parties have always got in. You concentrate on the ones where you are capable of creating a shift. Then what you do is through polling and focus groups, you ask the voters in the marginals, not "What can we do for you?", what you ask is "Why would you vote for that other guy?" So when they say "Well it's because the other guy's much better on law and order", what you do is you steal the other guy's clothes. That's what triangulation is and this colonising of the other parties' policies is the secret of triangulation, but what it means is politics without principle. Politics without a belief system and let me assure you this is not talking about one party or another, this is talking about, I'm afraid, certainly the two major parties. Politics without a belief system has been the name of the game since the early 90s. In the 90s Labour asked voters what made them fearful of a Labour Government and the answer was that people were worried if Labour could run an economy - were they not in the grip of the Trade Unions? They were asked could Labour defend the nation, could they be trusted - weren't they full of peaceniks and folk that were all members of CND? Could they deal with crime, law and order – weren't they all social workers who were all weak on that kind of thing? So what Labour then did was on those three major issues, they had to prove that they were not the Labour party of old, and so what you had was a serious shift in relation to economic policy, a serious shift – we've had more wars in the last 10 years than in fact, or military interventions of one sort or another, than in the previous 30 years. Also in terms of law and order policies, it is very hard for the Conservatives to find a space to the right of the Labour party. So that was triangulation for you.

You are now seeing the same thing happening with David Cameron, exactly the same thing and he's going out to the marginals and he's saying "What would make you think of still voting for Labour, despite all this and that?" and they're still saying "Well they are nicer on..., they do care about the poor in the third world and what's happening on poverty issues and they are better about work/life balance and how women should be able to have better arrangements in work, and they are better on social justice stuff." So you now have David Cameron, his bit of the Conservative party, wooing people with shifts on all those fronts. The problem is the rest of your party gets very pissed off. So he's having to deal now with the problem that many people in his own party are very angry and upset about what they see as being a move to the centre, which means abandoning issues like Europe and so on. You also have the same

thing happening in the Labour party, where there is a great deal of unhappiness from people who were traditionally Labour all their lives, feeling that they've been abandoned because there isn't enough concern for those who are disadvantaged; not enough concern for the working man and woman; not enough care about some of the issues like Trident and nuclear and so on, on many issues. Plus of course great unhappiness over the Iraq war.

So what you get is a hollowing out of democracy because the people who used to vote for a particular party then say "What's the point?" So you get huge numbers of people not voting, but the truth is it doesn't make any difference. In a strong Labour constituency if a third of the Labour voters, or a quarter of them, or even more, decide not to go out, Labour will probably still win. The same thing will happen in a Conservative constituency. You know you can alienate half your regular folk but if it's a strong Conservative constituency you'll still get a Conservative MP. That's the problem, you can win elections and you can still have huge numbers of MPs winning the day for you, but large numbers of the public feeling that it had nothing to do with them. I'm afraid that's why our democracy is, I think, suffering and why people are feeling so alienated and so put off.

Now if both parties are hovering around the same things and don't talk about principle, don't come from some kind of principle value driven - you know we can debate the values but if they aren't talking about things from a perspective of values, of things they believe in, then people know it. They have a sense of smell, they know. So what we are seeing, of course, is that hollowing out. Also, in an arrangement where the parties end up in what they are offering the public having very little difference between them, what then happens is that the media take on the role of being the opposition; they seize more power to themselves. So when everybody says "Isn't the real problem, the Press?" one of the answers to that is, we get the Press that we deserve and the Press is the result of some of these things that have been happening politically. So the media then set themselves up as being the people who are going to put light into dark corners. You have huge power exercised by Rupert Murdoch who declares that he can determine how an election goes. You will remember that famous business in 1992 of him saying that the lights would go out on the nation if Kinnock were elected. It was Rupert Murdoch who was able to decide there should be a Referendum on the proposed European Convention, you remember with Tony Blair. So incredible power exercised by a media owning mogul.

Of course as we know incredible power is exercised by the media around policy because of the hoops that are put forward by the Daily Mail and by The Sun. Every Home Secretary jumps through them and you get policy made very much as a knee jerk response to that. We had Tony Blair frequently saying "Get me an attention grabbing initiative; make sure that tomorrow's headlines are going to be OK." That business of being driven by tomorrow's headlines has really poisoned decent politics in this country. Of course what the Press then also do is, you end up with this cult of personality, with annihilation of certain characters one day, some on a pedestal and then we have to drag them down. The search for scandal. Replacing the political analysis and an exhaustive preoccupation with the sex lives of everybody and the bad fashion sense of politicians' wives and the drug habits of their children. In many ways it is a replacement of activity, or displacement activity, because of the failure to talk about things seriously that concern us all.

One of the things, for example, that I'm always so interested to see is the call to have more and more super-sized prisons and to jail more people - that's what Ministers think the public want. Every time I go to speak at a gathering and I talk with people about prisons and about what people want to see happening and we talk in some detail, more than just a superficial discussion; we talk about the kind of people who by and large are coming through the Courts whose lives are falling apart and how we might be better able to divert them from those activities and so on. The majority of people don't think just mass locking up is the answer. You have to have a proper nuanced debate with the public if you want to have sensible policies and you have to as a Politician, in my view, make the weather. You have to be the person coming with ideas and then persuade people to come in behind you, instead of the business of saying "What do you want?", like a salesman giving people back what they seem to be asking for.

So what is the answer to all of this because it's all a depressing vista I know that I am presenting to you, and so we want to put our head in a bag and just get under the duvet and not go out. I think we have to go back to some of the things that are great about our democracy. Cabinet Government you know do things in a way that has always traditionally worked, having people coming together to work out policy. The business of taking responsibility together, because you put the policy together and the Prime

Minister is the 'first amongst equals', that hasn't been going on I'm afraid for quite some time and it even pre-dates Labour in Government. I'm a believer in a written constitution because I think that the old way of having an un-written constitution - because our society has become so complex I think we now need some of this be written down. I'm prepared to go with, if you like, the British way of doing things which is incrementally and so what I put into the Power Enquiry's submissions at the end and into the report, was that what we do is, instead of having everything written out (a fully fledged bells and whistles constitution), you start with a number of vertebrae - it's rather like the spinal column in our body politics. There are 3 that I think you start with which are essential. One of them is that you put down the respective roles of Government and Parliament, the Executive and Parliament because we've forgotten that Parliament is there to hold Government to account and not just to be run through lobbies to vote for them. I would like to see that set down as one of the vertebrae in that spinal column.

The other is that we have to make clear the independence of the judiciary so that there cannot be influence brought to be on the judiciary by the Executive. The third thing, and this is the starting point, is to lay down the distinction between the local and central and what we have to see is a devolving of more power back to the local, to people in communities. You cannot do that by just pretending and talking about it, money has to follow it and you have to have money going into the communities for people locally to decide how their money will be spent, in ways that are democratically resolved.

So those concordats would create a spinal column and we would start there and it may be that we would add others to it as we thought necessary, but we would do it in that British incremental way. What it would provide us with, like our spines, is a degree of flexibility which I think is not present in the constitutions of some other nations, you know where they get set in stone. The business in the United States where "Our Constitution said we could bear arms and we'll bear arms until we drop." You know you have to be prepared to change when you see the terrible affects that gun owning has in a society. We also need to change the franchise into a tool for citizens, so that they can be part of making the rules of the game. So, for example, just now when we were talking about reforming the House of Lords, it seems to me that it shouldn't be the people who are in there who get to decide, where there are so many vested interests; either those of us who are in there already and who rather like it, or the House of Commons who say "Let's just keep them all appointed and that means their powers are very limited", so they get to decide how it should be reformed. It seems to me that this is something where we do want a much bigger input from the general public.

We looked around democracies in the world, and I'm talking about mature democracies, to see how were they engaging citizens better. One of the things that happened in Canada was they wanted to change their voting system, or they wanted to debate it and lots of people were saying they wanted to have proportional representation and others wanted 'first past the post'. In the State of Ontario what they did was, or it was British Columbia first of all, was they had a sort of commission where off the electoral register they drew in a 'jury' of several hundred people. Basically evidence was presented to them of the different electoral systems, how they would work and so on, in detail, because I don't know about you but I find it very hard to follow the arguments on all the different bits of electoral reform because it can be so complicated. They ran through all the different things and this Citizens Assembly decided on what they thought should be put to a Referendum and so a number of things were put simply to the Referendum and the general public then voted on it. The evidence was heard and people could tune in watching the television to see the Assembly sitting and to see the evidence being given and so on and it was about, not the politicians getting to decide, the rules were being made by the people. That's now being replicated in other States in Canada around changing the voting system.

I'm a believer in changing the voting system because I think that it is a way of regenerating our democracy. I think that what would happen is that people would have to go back out onto doorsteps. One of the things that some of our work showed was that in areas where the British National Party (BNP) won Council seats it was because people often said they were the only people who turned up on the doorstep. One of the reasons why is that big parties don't have the time and bother to do it, but they would if they thought it was proportional representation and that the Greens were going to be involved and other parties would be encouraged to develop around issues that were particularly important to particular regions and so on. I think it's a way of again bringing new life, new blood into our system.

The other thing we felt should be happening is in order to empower Parliament again; some of the power of the Whips had to disappear. This business of using people as voting fodder is just not good enough.

You see the Whips are the people who get to appoint people to Select Committees and so if there's to be a Parliamentary delegation to go to Sweden or to go to some junket, it's the Whips who decide who does it. If you're a bad person and you don't vote on the right side, you don't get any of those nice little extra things and so what happens is that these are ways of taming your MPs. Those powers should be taken from the Whips and other democratic forms should be found of people getting onto Select Committees and so forth.

The other thing that seemed to us was some of the appointments to major positions should be going before Select Committees. We should draw, not Judges, not where it could have a corrupting affect as in the United States, but for example where you're appointing somebody who is going to be running the BBC, you might want to see them in front of a Select Committee as to why they might be the right person to be appointed and that those appointments should be much more transparent and open when they are involving important public institutions in which we have to have trust.

One of the final things that I wanted to mention was that we also looked at something that is happening for example in Scotland and it's the business of citizens' initiative. In Scotland now when they created the Scottish Parliament they introduced two things that I think are rather interesting. One was that there is post-legislative scrutiny. When they pass a Bill through their Parliament for something that's particularly Scottish, they then for a period afterwards are allowed to go back to Parliament and say "We didn't think of the fact that it hits on old people in a detrimental way." Then you can have a corrective to it put into the legislation, within I think 12 months, if a flaw is seen. You know those consequences that you didn't intend to happen when you pass legislation and you can change it when you see that it's flawed. They have that in place.

The other thing that they have is this citizens right to initiative which they got from other places and it happens in other democracies too. If enough people get together they have a power to actually initiate, for example a review of legislation, or they can advocate that a piece of legislation is considered by Parliament. So for example there were a number of these things happening, not very many it doesn't happen very often, but there were some people living in a small town on the coast. They found that their beach area was absolutely covered in sewage and it was because some tidal shift had taken place and where the ships dumped their sewage it brought the sewage onto their beach. So they did not like it. So what they did was, they had a piece of legislation put through quite quickly that would put the boundary of dumping 5 miles further out and they did that by petitioning their Parliament to get it done.

So that thinking of engaging citizens to think that you could be in power is something I think we should be looking at more creatively ourselves, that there should be some circumstances where when a certain percentage of the population are concerned about something, that they should be able to raise it and say "We want Parliament to debate this." You don't usurp the powers of our elected representatives but you can initiate something to make sure that it is properly debated, that there might be an encouragement to legislate on something that's never been thought about before. I will give you examples of those. People did feel very frustrated over the Iraq War; you can have a demonstration of 1.3 million people but that was only part of the general public who were against the War. In fact if you had been able to somehow have a process that didn't involve having to go down to London and walk through the streets but was somehow a way; or of having a proper enquiry afterwards as to what happened. Like now there's a call to enquiry into how we got to that position and never thought seriously about the after invasion consequences. So ways in which you can meet demands of your Government.

For example just now there's a growing concern about identity cards, I happen to be one of the people who's very much against them; some people think they're terrific. We've never had the right kind of debate, it was just one part of a piece of legislation going through Parliament, but to have it as a major thing where people could actually sign in to say "We want our Parliament to reconsider this, to look at this again, or to persuade us, really convince us as to how this is going to work in a way that's going to protect our privacy". There are lots of reasons why people may feel very uncomfortable about the fact that more and more of these computers can talk to each other, for example the computer that collects all of our medical information, the new computerised system that is very practical and sensible. The problem is we're finding that the information can be very easily shared. The whole idea is that if you go up to Glasgow and have a heart attack they will be able to get hold of your records very quickly and that's a good thing, but the problem about it is, so too can an awful lot of other folk. Your medical record

might have all kinds of things in it - about the fact that you had a mental breakdown at some point in your life, that a woman is infertile and she doesn't want the world to know that. There may be things that you don't want people to know, that if your employer knew you would be unhappy about, because you know that it may affect your opportunities in employment. Insurers might want to know. So people are concerned about what these computers might be able to expose them to in terms of discrimination and I think that debate has not been held in a public way that should have taken place.

I just wanted finally to say that the thing about our communities, one of the things about Britain is in fact that we have incredible social capital. By that I mean the people do lots of good things, they care about their neighbour, they actually participate in many, many things, but it is disappearing and we have to keep hold of it. That is about democracy the things that happen at the bottom end of all of this great structure that we've been discussing. People need to be supported in that and have to be given credit for it and their voices have to matter. We have to find ways of enriching it again. I have to say that the public in my experience want a voice and they're saying that they're tired of spin and sleaze. They want honesty in politics and they want politicians who are prepared to say "We got that wrong, we've made a terrible mistake and we're going to get rid of that policy", instead of just doing it by slight of hand. The public are nauseated by 'short termism', this business of tomorrow's headline. They are tired of the extent of regulation and bureaucracy and all those meaningless targets. They are sick of Tsars, I certainly am sick of Tsars. I saw that somehow quietly they got rid of the Tsar for respect and the idea that you needed a Tsar for respect and I thought the public will respect politicians if the politicians respect the public and we'll all respect each other if we start creating the spaces in which we listen to each other and hear the things that are happening in people's lives. I am also sick of 'blue sky thinkers' who never seem to see beyond the end of their own noses and I'm tired, as I'm sure you are of 'shallow charisma'. What is needed, and I think we all would agree, is we want to have politicians of substance and we want them to believe in something and to bring us into that sharing of believing in something; about making our society a place in which people can live and fulfil themselves whoever they may be. What people are saying is they want a new way of doing politics, we're tired of what's been happening – I think we deserve it, but much more importantly our children deserve it.

So it's a moment that we shouldn't let pass and so I am really honoured that such a number of you came out tonight in this wind and in this cold to talk about our democracy and that's what warms my heart because I believe that up and down our country there could be halls like this where people say "We want something different."

Questions and Answers

I suppose the relevant part of who I am is I do some voluntary work for Greenpeace. Something very topical, is whenever there's a question of political corruption, the villains turn this to their advantage by proposing public funding of political parties. Would you, could you, couple the idea of public funding of political parties with the condition that we have a fair system of proportional representation and fixed terms. To my mind the 'three line whip' is the issue which destroys the integrity of politicians. People who go into politics with fine aspirations and lose it under that pressure. The of chamber of proportional representation in the light of political fixed terms does seem to get rid of that to some extent in other countries.

I used to chair Charter 88 from the early 90s until 1997 and Charter 88 was the constitutional reform organisation and indeed the North East Chair of Charter 88 is here tonight. We were arguing for constitutional change and proportional representation was part of that and I have signed up for proportional representation ever since the 80s. I believe it is one of the ways of refreshing politics. I think that it's interesting that you think they're tied together. We say to our politicians "If you want public funding then the bargain has to be that there's proportional representation." You see the major two political parties don't want it, as you know. One of the things that I think we should be arguing for is that we should certainly – if we're talking about going local - the whole business of the new localism which both the major political parties, the Liberal Democrats have always argued for it, but the new localism is becoming a great by-word and I think if they want to talk about that money has to follow it and it should be on a proportional representation basis, so that you get that kind of enrichment at the bottom end.

One of the things that we suggested in the Power Report was that we knew that to say to the general public just now when we're all so disillusioned with what we see happening to money, the business of the peerages scandal, the business of politicians seeming to be on a gravy-train, that kind of thing. People are not going to want to see the public purse paying for political parties, but at the end of the day we have to decide whether we think our democracy matters. What we suggested was that there had to be a limit on spending for elections; a limit on individual donations, that it had to be limited to £10/£20,000, it shouldn't be more and that parties then have to work hard to go out there to get individual donations from all of us. Also, we did think that there could be a sort of way of engaging us in the business of party funding which is that when we went to vote, there would be a square on the election paper where we could say "I'm happy for £5 to be given to this political party." Not necessarily the one that you voted for because some people might say "Well I'm going to vote Labour because I want to see Labour in Government but I'd like to see the money given to the Green Party because I want to see environmental issues taken up." If anything will put them on their toes it will be seeing money going in that direction. We also specified that the money given in that way wouldn't be spent on big bill boards but should go to local political initiatives, local politics to encourage politics to come up from the local. If you don't bring it up then I'm afraid we end up with this business of professional politicians, we're not putting down the seeds of new politics to come through and new politicians because we're not creating opportunities for people to get that experience at the ground floor level. So I think there is going to become a crisis for us, if we care about our democracy I suspect that we're going to have to pay for it, but I think we have to make strings attached to our preparedness to pay for it. I don't want to see the rich being the people who pay for our political parties because if they do what ends up is corruption. We've seen it.

I'm working as a Community Neighbourhood Manager on Mental Health and I'm used to working with people who feel very unrepresented and don't participate very much. When I was a student we always had an option on our ballot papers to vote but to specify that we weren't happy with any of the candidates.

Lots of people would like to say that bit "None of the above."

It was called RON because it was Re-Open Nominations and it seems to me that it's a small point but I think that there are many people who want to vote but don't feel that on a particular ballot paper there are people they would want to vote for and I think that might then encourage, not only people to go to the box who don't now, but also other people to think well there's a point in standing because it's not just about those people on the list, there's a kind of vacancy that exists and maybe I would be the person or maybe someone else I knew would be the person.

That's one of those things that also goes alongside this Australian thing of people having to vote and then what people often do is, there is a space where they can say I don't want any of the above people. I'm not very keen on the idea of compulsory voting, but I do quite like the idea that you could say "I don't want to vote", and there should be a space for you to be able to do that. What's interesting is that by and large when you said to people "What do you think of your own local MP", usually people felt the person was a decent person. People who go into politics are decent people and it goes back to what our friend who volunteers to Greenpeace was saying, is that the problem is something happens along the way. What happens along the way is that business of seeing Government up close and it's very good actually, those of us who are from outside, come in and seeing it up close is a pretty unsatisfactory thing. In the House of Lords it's not so bad but you see also that people end up, and you know that they are speaking to things that they couldn't possibly in their hearts support. To see people who have spent their lives in the law being prepared to take the rights of appeal away from asylum seekers. I remember one day when we were doing the Children's Bill. I had this most horrible experience of going into the House thinking there was a Children's Bill going through, and I thought this is terrific the Labour Government's doing something that I really approve of, which was about greater protection for children and it was after the Victoria Climbié thing and it was so horrible the business of violence towards children and I've seen it so much in the Courts. I had read the Bill and I thought this is great and then I went in one day and sat at the back to listen and I thought this a Bill where I can vote with the Government and not have to oppose my own party, which I'm afraid I do more often than they like. What I heard, it was the Bishops who were standing up to speak to say this Bill, an amendment has been put in by the Government, to their own Bill, to exclude the children of asylum seekers from the protections of this Bill, which was to say that the interests of children and the well being of children

should always be paramount, and it was not to be provided to children of asylum seekers. My stomach turned that we were doing that and it was the Bishops who had taken it up. To hear people whose whole lives, they couldn't be saying that believing it, but they were saying it because the Home Office had sent them a missive saying "This is going to have terrible effects on the numbers of people who might be able to stay because if parents of children who have got problems or whatever, or are ill, they will be able to stay and we'll have a problem on our hands and it won't look good in the Daily Mail.

For the purposes of my question I suppose I'm a citizen of the United Kingdom. Can I ask you citizen Kennedy to what extent is a true parliamentary democracy possible within the structure which ultimately derives its authority from an un-democratic authority, which is namely the crown.

If you'd asked me when I was 22 I'd have said "I'm a fierce republican and why do we need to have all this Royal family and so on", but actually seeing it in operation I've now come to believe that..... you end up having to have a head of state of some kind and I look around and I think how do you find such a person. In some ways it's as easy to do it whether it's the House of Windsor and I actually think that the Queen has done a rather remarkable job over those years and I suspect that Prince Charles will do it just as well when his turn comes and I think it's a way in which we take out of it, we actually take the politics out of it, and create somebody who is emblematic, who's a figurehead of Britain. They can then do all that diplomatic stuff and meet and greet with visiting dignitaries and who can basically preside over national events, at which we're particularly good. So I now don't have a problem with that.

What I do have a problem with is our House. I do believe that the Upper Chamber should be an elected Chamber and I'm very unhappy that's it's now.... you know Tony Blair's thing was that he wanted it all appointed, now we're getting to the stage where they're talking about half appointed and half elected. I'm not at all anxious about their being a small cohort of Nobel Prize winners, wonderful scientists that we have, you wouldn't probably get them otherwise, they wouldn't probably stand for election, but really great people to hear on difficult issues like the embryo Bill that we were just doing. To hear from someone like Bishop Martin. I'm happy enough to have 10 or 20% made up of people who are appointed, but I think the majority of it should be elected and it should not be elected on the party list system. With the party list system, which they're advocating just now, gives the parties the power to do what they're doing anyway which is that they just choose the patsies who will walk through the lobbies. So I don't want to see that happening. You know the great thing about the House of Lords as it is, is that people were put in because they seemed to be likely to be very malleable to the political parties, suddenly find their spine and don't do what they're supposed to do. That's one of the great things about being a peerage for a lifetime. I do think that you find the formulation, which is that the Upper House has people who are in it for maybe 10 years, to give them that sense that they don't have a constituency and they don't have people looking over their shoulder demanding that they take the populous position. I don't want the Prime Minister to make it something that's in his gift.

Just to take issue on the business of identity cards, my mother's German and for decades, 50 years, they've all had identity cards and everyone's perfectly happy. Why don't people look at their system, see what they do, it may make the difference between life and death if someone's lying on the road injured if you know what their identity is and they can contact the doctor.

I frequently hear this from friends who will say "Have you ever tried going down to get yourself onto the video shop's list and they want 3 forms of identification to prove that you live at the address." How convenient it would be instead of having to carry a whole number of cards. It's not the card, it's not the business of having a card. In the United States people are asked often for their insurance number. What it is, is the computer. It's the fact that there's so much information on the computer, it's not just that you're asked like your driving licence just to have your picture and a number. It's the computer and you only have to hear evidence from someone like Ross Anderson, who's the expert on encryption from Cambridge University, and he says there's no system that isn't impenetrable. I can see that you're not going to be persuaded but all I can tell you is, and this is no insult to your mother, let me assure you. Let me just tell you why I feel this is about the relationship between the citizen and the state. Our common law system, which I happen to believe is a wonderful system of law, was based on struggle over generations and over centuries and it was based on the idea that we have to contain power. One of the things that we as citizens are entitled to do in Britain is to always say – if somebody wants to enter your house you can say "Where's your warrant." In fact if you were stopped in the street, although I understand that our parties are about to remove this right, you were able to say "Why is it you want to

search me, what is it you think I've done wrong?" You are entitled as a citizen to actually say "Show me what it is that you want of me." The reason for that is we've always said the State is there at our behest, we're not here at the behest of the State and so I don't want to be somebody who's required to carry papers. I actually do carry my driving licence with me, I'm in and out of prisons and it makes it very convenient, but let me tell you I don't want a Policeman to stop me and say "Give me your identification papers", or card as it would be. I don't want to be required to do that because I don't want that shift that takes place in the relationship between the citizen and the state, which is disempowering of citizens. If you're talking about national psyche's, I actually think that it's that kind of thing that makes British people much more independent minded and so, this is where I make apologies to your mother, but I do think it is very interesting that Britain has never gone down the road of totalitarianism and one of the reason is because the folk early on don't stand for things when it comes to abuse of power. They start spotting it and it's because we have required the State to explain itself to us and not the other way round. I want it to continue

Do you think there's a sharper role, a lead role for faith communities to identify what might be called the building blocks of a coherent social strategy. Like most regions of the country we have an economic strategy, broadly speaking it's cornered by the money people again, but I just wondered whether we need a coherent social strategy and the role that faith communities might play, just identify the building blocks.....

I meant to say that, I sort of edited my thing as I was going because I suddenly realised it was going to take too long. One of the things that I really wanted to say was that our political institutions no longer have representatives that give voice to the poorest in our society, and the reality is that it's the churches that do that. It was Faith in the City, it has been the churches and I have to say church people who frequently are the people who speak for those who are in prisons, speak for what's happening to children and speak for what's happening to the poorest people in our society. It's been the faith communities that have done most on the whole business of asylum seekers and so the role of faith communities can't be lauded enough and I think we have to now find better avenues for that mediation of the faith communities with our politicians. I think that in local areas usually the MPs do meet with the faith groups and so on, but I think there has to be better structures for their voices to be heard. When you talk about building blocks those are the values that I think we have to kind of engender and speak to more and I have to say that it's been the churches that have been the voices of the most disenfranchised in our society and I'm afraid not so much our politicians.

My question is about the rule of law, which is the fundamental underpinning of a great democracy. I was powerfully impacted by 'Just Law' and given the corrosive effects of the Iraq War, where I think we spent something like 7 hours debating it seriously in the house as against 70 hours on fox hunting, which perhaps tells us something. Given the ongoing corrosive effects of the war when do you think you will be able to write a book which is describing the advance of the rule of law?

Oh golly. I'd like to be able to do it, but it is interesting because there was a moment, and I mention it in the book 'Just Law', as we were about to turn into the millennium, I thought people were talking more about human rights and we were talking about the idea, and we had just had the whole business of the Pinochet thing, which was to say we're not going to have people being able to swan around and come and have tea at Fortnum and Masons and stay at fancy hotels and be invited to Downing Street who have tortured their own people and so on. We're going to stop doing that kind of thing. We're going to ostracise people who behave like that and we're going to let them know that they're going to end up being prosecuted, and in the end he wasn't prosecuted because he was too old and that's fine, but we made a declaration of intent. I kept hearing that Soeharto wasn't going to travel because he was frightened to leave Indonesia because he knew that he was at risk of prosecution before an international tribunal for crimes against his own people. So I had a feeling that there was a move towards a greater sense of the outreaches that are happening in our world and I remember writing something when I said that while the 20th Century had been the Century of democratic rights, where we'd seen from the beginning of the 20th Century to the end of the 20th Century, the number of nations that became democracies just burgeoned. Of course in that 100 years my grandparents had got the vote, women had got the vote, this change had taken place, the idea that women wouldn't have the vote just seemed so extraordinary by the end of the 20th Century. I thought the 21st Century would be the Century in which human rights would flourish in that way and I have to say at the moment I'm not feeling very heartened about what's happening around the world and the horrors that are happening around the world.

Globalisation brings with it terrible fears and those fears make people I think retreat into all sorts of conflicts that are so disruptive and fearful of what a globalised world means and fearful of the foreigner, the other, of difference. So I do feel anxious about what's happening in the world but I am an optimist and so I never give up hope and so perhaps before I go to my grave I will be able to write that book.

I lived in the United States during the build up to the Iraq War and I was watching what happened on both sides. I think what frightened me was both the separation of powers, so called, and our Parliamentary democracy did not work, and that really frightened me, that the maturity of our system - and we keep pointing the finger at Africa who have also.....and who are we to point the finger. And I wonder about those politicians you mention, the good people who are in there doing their best for people, in a sense they would keep power within their system, and I wonder what it's like given your contact with these people, do they feel defeated, is there any movement within them to change the system for the conservative..... my being here tonight or does something have to happen outside of that system for some kind of change to happen. I think we disenfranchise young people especially where there is a concern for our democracy.

One of the things that is interesting, and it's true of all of us, it's very hard for us to say that you've got something terribly wrong, especially when the reasons for getting it wrong were perhaps ones that are shameful. I think that many people voted for the War because they knew that to vote against Tony Blair at that time, because it would have brought him down, would have created an absolute schism within the Labour party. I can only speak of my own party. I think that many people voted knowing it was wrong, but feeling that their loyalty to party had to be the thing that carried the day because of how far down the road they had gone. I think that when people are ashamed, and I know this from being a Lawyer who is in the court so often, is that people often can't retreat from the position they took. So almost the best you get from people is to say "It was not wrong to invade Iraq because Saddam Hussein was such a terrible person, but what was wrong was that we didn't explore enough what might happen afterwards." Why I find that such a frustrating response is that we could all probably have written the script ourselves. One of the reasons we opposed it wasn't just that we didn't like the idea, we all wanted Saddam to go as well, but we knew that it was going to be catastrophic in the consequences, that was what any sensible person I think knew. We didn't have to read those reports, we didn't have to be told by experts. So it's not good enough, but it's because people have a sense of shame over what they were part of. So what do people think in the House, do they feel disempowered, they wouldn't admit it to you yet, but as some point maybe they will be able to, maybe we'd have to have our own truth and reconciliation process for that to ever happen. It is interesting the denial that people have and how they say "I voted for it and I did it in principle, it wasn't just that I was doing it for....., I did it because I believed that it was the right thing to do." They don't want to say "I did it because I didn't know what the next guy might do and then I would have never have had a job in Government." You know they don't say what the truthful things are, you know our baser motives when we do things. So that's the problem and I think it goes back to the nature of our politics now and I think that we have to say that we want something different and we have to have more space for conscience to operate when we come to these big decisions.

I have one remark about the presentation.....of Austria since 1956 and it did not stop corruption and if you put it in here you have to really make sure that the ties and the values are very well specified otherwise any co-operation between two parties will be able to change these points which they have been doing in Austria for sometime. The second one is, I guess any party discipline which requires a single person to forget his own conscience is not in the interest of any nation. Thirdly, I would say that human rights, some people stop reading by paragraph 29 but there are 30 paragraphs and the last paragraph clearly states that no person should inflict any of the previous 29 on anybody else. In the Courts in England that paragraph has never been cited so far. I would feel that if the Parliament can start to listen to groups like this one here within the building, and those already established throughout the country, then we might get a much better democracy.

Thank you. Well I don't think that I really need to answer that I think that your points are right, that there are always problems around coalition Governments and PR sometimes can lead to that more, can also fail you and can also be corrupt, that's certainly true and you have to have the checks and balances that contain any kind of Government. You're other points, your point on the business of human rights, the thing that has saddened me perhaps most recently was the idea that we are having to argue about torture in the 21st Century. Of all the human rights, every human right is if you like, it's not absolute, you know the right to life, you're allowed to defend yourself, you're allowed in certain circumstances to go to

War. There are circumstances in which life might be taken, although it has to be in extreme circumstances. But all of the rights, the right to freedom of speech, is not absolute. The only right of all of them that is absolute is the torture, is the anti-torture thing, where we're saying "No torture is acceptable." The reason for that is not just of course the horror that it inflicts on somebody else, but because of what it does to us if we're inflicting it on someone else because of the way in which it dehumanises us. That's the thing that we have to keep remembering, is that it has that capacity to degrade all of us.

Anyway, I've loved being with you, thank you.

Bishop Martin

Friends it has indeed been both a pleasure and a privilege to listen to Baroness Kennedy tonight and I promised you someone who was a champion for human rights, who was passionate and warm and witty in her commitment to social justice and that we've heard. It's been a wonderful insight into the current state of political life in this country. There are several things that Baroness Kennedy said which struck many chords with me, and indeed with many of you from the questions that we've heard. For example, I worry about the disintegration of community, particularly in our cities, and that I think is something we all need to give our attention to. Perhaps indeed we double our attention to how we can actually enable communities to be communities of people where they wish to be and live and work among their neighbours and friends. The churches are ever so well placed to be key players in the development of community and I think that's one of the urgent tasks that we need address ourselves to, not least of which because we're still in those parts of the city where no-one else is and where everyone else has flown from.

I worry about the current state of the divide between rich and poor in our society and not least in this city. It's a shameful thing to say, and I don't say it very often because it just reinforces prejudices and stereotypes, but over 30% of the children attending state schools in this city are below the poverty line, over 30% of the children in this city are living below the poverty line. That's something that the Director of Children's Services for the City Council told me and was her greatest concern. What kind of opportunities and life chances and possibilities are we providing for the poorest in our midst.

Then I worry about destitution being a deliberate policy with regard to asylum seekers. Destitution is an element of policy I regret to say with regard to those whose appeals have been turned down.

Then there's the whole question of how we actually learn to live together and Baroness Kennedy towards the end started talking about living with difference. How do we begin really to start to learn together with difference in our city and our region and our society? How do we overcome some of the barriers there are and the fear there is and again I think churches and faith groups are the key players there and that's something we urgently need to give our attention to.

Thank you again Baroness Kennedy, it's been super to have you with us here in the north east, we're ever so grateful that you came. Thank you for giving us such a rich and wonderful time.