

# Scrap the Bishops' Bench

We campaign for a secular upper house (House of Lords) with no specific religious representation whether *ex-officio* or appointed, whether of Christian denominations or any other faiths. In a secular state no religion or its leaders should have a privileged role in the legislature.

## What's the problem?

The United Kingdom is unique among Western democracies in giving representatives of religious groups automatic seats in its legislature.

Two archbishops and 24 bishops of the Church of England currently have seats as of right in the House of Lords. This is unfair, undemocratic and undesirable.

In addition, the presence of religious leaders amounts to double representation of religious interests as many temporal peers already identify themselves as being religiously motivated, and many retired religious leaders are appointed as peers.

Any serious proposals to reform the House of Lords must address the unjustified privilege of the Bishops' Bench.

After over a century of decline in religious attendance in Britain, the claim that Bishops — or any other religious representatives — speak for any significant constituency is clearly far off the mark. Less than 2% of the British population now attend Anglican services on the average Sunday. By 2050 this figure is forecast to drop to just 0.3% of the population. The current set of bishops have been described by the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby as the "most orthodox" since WW2.

In an increasingly secular society the role of religious representatives in our legislature has become increasingly irrelevant, and has in fact stood in the way of progressive legislation.

The NSS also rejects the implication that the bishops somehow provide special moral insights denied to other members of the House. The idea that bishops or any other 'religious leaders' have any monopoly on issues of morality is offensive to many non-religious UK citizens. The NSS contends that those who profess no religion are no less capable of making moral and ethical judgements. Bishops do not have any "special moral insight" unavailable to everybody else.

We also believe that neither [prayers](#) nor religious oaths should form any part of the proceedings in a reformed House of Lords.

## What are we doing?

- We're backing a [private member's bill](#), presented by our honorary associate Dick Taverne, which would end the automatic right of Church of England bishops to sit in the House of Lords.
- In 2017 we recommended the removal of the Bishops' Bench to a parliamentary inquiry into how to reduce the size of the bloated House of Lords.
- We also submitted a [response to a Consultation on the House of Lords Reform Draft Bill](#) undertaken before another attempt at Lords reform collapsed in acrimony within the

Conservative / Lib-Dem coalition Government in August 2012.

- In 2016 we also contributed towards '[A Secularist Response](#)' to a report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life which advocated for religious representation in the House of Lords to be extended to representatives of other faiths and denominations. Our response argued that no religious organisation should have an automatic right to representation in Parliament. We reiterated these points our '[Manifesto for Change](#)' which has been sent to all serving MPs.

## What you can do:

## Take action

Please consider supporting our petition to scrap the Bishops' Bench and writing to your MP, asking them to end this historical anachronism.

- [Petition](#)
- [Letter to MP](#)

[26 CofE bishops have seats as of right in the House of Lords. This is unfair, undemocratic and undesirable. Let's scrap the #BishopsBench.](#)

[Click to tweet](#)

## More information

- [Bishops in the House of Lords: FAQ](#)

Your questions answered about reforming the House of Lords and removing the 'Lords Spiritual.'

[Read More](#)

- [Briefing: The Bishops' Bench Bill](#) (PDF, 837 Kb)

We're backing a private member's bill which would end the automatic right of Church of England bishops to sit in the House of Lords. Find out more.

- [Response To The Consultation On The House Of Lords Reform Draft Bill](#) (PDF, 477 Kb)
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## While you're here

Please consider a donation to enable us campaign for the separation of religion and government. Together we can make a fairer more secular state.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)