

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Tuesday 18 May 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 18 May 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:29*]

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):

Before the meeting begins, I take this opportunity to inform members that I am to chair the Commonwealth observer group to the elections in the Republic of South Africa, which are being held on Wednesday 2 June. I shall be out of the country from Monday 24 May until Friday 4 June and accordingly I trust that members will grant me leave of absence.

Law Officers

The Presiding Officer: I must inform Parliament that there is an error in the business bulletin. The meeting tomorrow will begin at 10 am and not at 9.30 am as was stated.

I begin the proceedings this afternoon by informing members that Her Majesty has appointed the Parliament's nominee, the right hon Donald Dewar, as First Minister.

The first business is a debate on a motion of the First Minister concerning the appointment of the law officers. Notice of the motion was given on Monday and was published in today's business bulletin.

Mr John Swinney (North Tayside) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Could you give me some guidance on the process following the election of the First Minister? I collected a copy of the document "Partnership for Scotland" from the document office earlier today. It contains the agreement that underpins the appointments that we will be asked to approve in Parliament tomorrow. Will we have the opportunity to debate the contents of that document and its proximity to the election manifestos of the two parties that have supported this agreement before we are asked at tomorrow's meeting to support the nominees who will be put before us in the motion that has been tabled by the right hon Donald Dewar?

The Presiding Officer: I am certain that any such reference would be in order in tomorrow's debate and I would be surprised if there were not references to the document that you mentioned.

Consideration of the First Minister's motion will take place in a moment and I will put the question on that motion no later than 30 minutes after it has been moved. That debate will be followed by a

debate on the motion of Mr Alex Fergusson on the subject of prayers. The text of that motion was printed in today's business bulletin and I intend to put the question on it no later than one hour after it has been moved.

In accordance with section 48(1) of the Scotland Act 1998 it is for the First Minister to recommend to Her Majesty the appointment of persons to be the Lord Advocate and Solicitor General for Scotland. Before doing so the First Minister must have the agreement of Parliament.

14:32

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I do not regard this as a routine motion in any sense, but I hope that it is reasonably uncontentious—we will discover whether it is in the next few minutes. I am conscious of the fact that this is a short debate and that therefore it would be wrong of me to take too much time. However, I want to make it clear that the motion—which I have pleasure in moving—is to seek the agreement of the Parliament to the appointment of Andrew Hardie as Lord Advocate and Colin Boyd as Solicitor General for Scotland. If members agree to the motion, as First Minister I will recommend to Her Majesty that those appointments should be made.

The Lord Advocate and Solicitor General for Scotland are currently the Scottish law officers in the United Kingdom Government but on 20 May—which is imminent—they will cease to be members of the UK Government and the offices will transfer to the Scottish Executive. That fact dictates the timing of this motion.

The Scottish law officers will become members of the Scottish Executive on 20 May—before other Scottish ministers—because they have to be in place so that they can offer legal advice to the Executive in the run-up to 1 July, which is the day on which Parliament assumes its full powers. Arrangements have been made to ensure an appropriate distribution of the Lord Advocate's functions during the transitional period from 20 May to 1 July.

As most members will know, the offices of Lord Advocate and Solicitor General have been with us for a long time. The office of Lord Advocate has existed since at least the 15th century. I think that the Solicitor General arrived late—somewhere around the 17th century—but the positions have been important parts of the administration of justice and of politics in Scotland for many years. They have been the power base; in fact, the office of Lord Advocate ran Scotland on many occasions and the Lord Advocate was very much the man of affairs for the government of the day.

The offices are still central—in a different way—to the government of Scotland. They will continue

to be the principal Scottish law officers—the Lord Advocate in particular, with the Solicitor General continuing to be his deputy—and they will work as a team.

The functions conferred on the Scottish ministers generally can be exercised by any of them, but there are exceptions, the most important of which is the Lord Advocate, who will retain those functions that he exercises immediately before he ceases to be a minister of the Crown. Those retained functions, which are retained in statute, are functions that he will continue to exercise as a member of the Scottish Executive; they can be exercised only by the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General. In other words, the functions cannot be passed around or swapped around—they remain firmly with the holders of those offices.

That is significant in particular areas. The Lord Advocate will be the law officer to the Scottish Executive. His functions as law officer will be retained functions and will, as I said, include providing legal advice to the Scottish Executive and representing the Scottish Executive in legal proceedings.

The Lord Advocate's role as the independent head of the systems of criminal prosecution and investigation of deaths in Scotland will also be a retained function. As most members will know, the independence of the Lord Advocate in that role is entrenched in the Scotland Act 1998. Section 48(5) confirms that the Lord Advocate's decisions as head of those systems must be taken independently. Section 29 provides that it is outwith the legislative competence of the Parliament to remove the Lord Advocate from his important independent position as head of the system of criminal prosecution.

The Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General have to shoulder an onerous role, which is a bulwark of our justice system. That is the order of the day in the courts of Scotland—although, as we all know, there are sometimes spectaculars, such as the events that will shortly take place in Holland. However, I suspect that the Lockerbie trial will cease to be quite so contentious in parliamentary terms because we do not have Tam Dalyell with us—at least not in this forum.

I stress to members that the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General have full powers to serve on committees, to speak in debates and to answer questions in this Parliament. They lack one important power—the right to vote. Apart from that, they will, as I understand it, have a full sweep of activity—when it is judged appropriate and when their services are required.

For the record, I should mention that there is now a new office of Advocate General for

Scotland, which has been created by the Scotland Act 1998. The Prime Minister announced yesterday that Dr Lynda Clark would be the first Advocate General. I take this opportunity to offer her my congratulations—and I hope those of all members—on her appointment. The UK Government will require advice on Scots law—fairly frequently, I imagine—and it is not possible for the law officers who are answerable to the Scottish Executive to give advice to the United Kingdom Government. That is why this post has been created.

I hope that this Parliament will confirm the law officers and that those law officers will add a great deal to our debates. I mentioned their sweep of responsibilities and their ability to contribute to our debates, but I should add that, under section 27(3) of the Scotland Act 1998,

“The Lord Advocate or the Solicitor General for Scotland may, in any proceedings of the Parliament, decline to answer any question or produce any document relating to the operation of the system of criminal prosecution in any particular case if he considers that answering the question or producing the document—

(a) might prejudice criminal proceedings in that case, or

(b) would be contrary to the public interest.”

It is as well to put that on record, in case there is frustration later because it is not recognised and not known.

I have tried to be brief and to set out the structure of the argument. I have put the case rather impersonally, so perhaps before asking members to endorse the motion I should remind them that it relates to the appointment of two colleagues whom I know well and whom I like immensely. Their qualities have been tried and tested over two years in office, and I have been happy—fortunate, indeed—to be able to rely on their judgment, integrity and wise counsel during that period. I very much hope that my confidence will be shared by colleagues in every part of the chamber, that the motion will be passed and that Andrew Hardie and Colin Boyd will be recommended to Her Majesty for appointment.

I move,

That this Parliament agrees that it be recommended to Her Majesty that The Right Honourable The Lord Hardie QC be appointed as the Lord Advocate and that Colin Boyd QC be appointed as Solicitor General for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Before I allow amendments to be moved, I should remind members that under rule 4.3 of the standing orders there are only two permissible amendments to this motion—to delete one or other part of the motion that relates to these two appointments.

Although amendments can be moved without notice, members will be aware from the business bulletin that I have encouraged them to lodge

notice of amendments and to intimate when they wish to speak in this debate. I took the view that that would help to ensure a sensible and orderly structure to the debate. Only one member has given notice that he wishes to speak. If any other members wish to speak, they should press their microphone button now and their names will come up on my screen.

14:40

David McLetchie (Lothians) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives do not object on a personal basis to the appointment of Lord Hardie and Mr Boyd to the offices of Lord Advocate and Solicitor General; indeed, we wish them well in fulfilling their important roles.

It is worth emphasising—as the First Minister did in his opening remarks—the importance of preserving the independence of the two offices. That independence should be respected by all parties in this Parliament and we should resolve that it should not in any way be undermined by the actions of the Executive.

From observation, it seems that there have been at least two fairly high-profile cases in the past year that have, at the very least, raised doubts about whether there has been political interference in the judgment of the Lord Advocate on prosecution matters and appeals against sentences. I do not wish to comment on the specifics of those cases; I simply want to say that doubts have been raised, as members will be aware.

To maintain public confidence in our system of independent prosecutors, it is important that there is not the slightest hint of political influence being brought to bear on future judgments. As the First Minister said, that independence is an important part of our justice system. It is also an important bulwark of this country's system of civil liberties and we would abandon it at our peril.

There are also areas in the remit of the law officers that are, I think, of concern to MSPs. We look forward to the opportunity of questioning the law officers on their roles—in a general sense if not on specific cases. As we said at the election, the Scottish Conservatives have real concerns about the increasing use of fiscal fines as a means of disposing of cases, and about the fact that a number of cases are being prosecuted in lower courts in the interests of saving money rather than of ensuring that justice is done.

We give notice to our new law officers that, in the months ahead, we will be questioning them and the new minister for justice closely on those matters. The public must have confidence in all aspects of our criminal justice system. As a party, we will seek to ensure that confidence is

maintained and enhanced.

14:42

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): I support the appointment of Andrew Hardie and Colin Boyd as Lord Advocate and Solicitor General respectively. I wonder whether the First Minister or, if it is allowed, the Lord Advocate designate could explain how frequently the two law officers will appear in this Parliament to answer questions and to make statements.

It has been a long time since the House of Commons had the opportunity of questioning either a Lord Advocate or a Solicitor General. I accept what was said about the independence of the Lord Advocate as public prosecutor but, as law officer for the Scottish Executive, he must have some accountability to this Parliament. Can the First Minister give us some indication of how often we can expect to see the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor General to put questions to them on behalf of our constituents and the people of Scotland generally?

Andrew Hardie is a member of another Parliament; like you, Sir David, he is a member of the House of Lords. Could we have some assurance that his prime responsibility and first allegiance will be to this Parliament rather than to the House of Lords?

The Presiding Officer: I will ask the First Minister to respond to that but I preface his remarks by saying that a timetable for questions has yet to be discussed by the Parliamentary Bureau. The law officers will obviously be included in that rota. Does the First Minister wish to add anything?

The First Minister: As Sir David said, there is to be discussion about the arrangements for question time. The consultative steering group report envisaged that there would be questions to the First Minister but that he would come to question time with a team of ministers—the questions would be answered as appropriate. I assure colleagues that—assuming that the business of the courts permits it—the law officers will deal in Parliament with the appropriate questions that have been lodged. The matter of the House of Lords is for Lord Hardie to determine, but he is very determined and, with the transfer that I hope will be agreed in the next few minutes, he has committed himself to serving in Scotland and this Parliament.

I do not wish to tempt Mr McLetchie into further details but I do not recognise the examples to which he referred. I say quite definitively that there has been a fine tradition under all Administrations of ensuring that the prosecution policy followed by the law officers is independent of the political wing

of the Government. We have endeavoured to adhere to that very strictly, as have all Administrations that I have known. I would be sorry if dark suspicions were harboured in the mind of the leader of the Conservative party. Perhaps he will take that up with me privately.

The Presiding Officer: If no other member wants to speak, it is time to put the question on the motion. Since it is the first time that we have voted on a motion, I will explain the procedure. In a moment, I shall put the question on the First Minister's motion. I will ask, first, whether we all agree to the question. Members should shout no at that point if they disagree to it. If there is no disagreement, the question is agreed to. If any member registers disagreement, we will move to an electronic vote.

Motion agreed to.

That this Parliament agrees that it be recommended to Her Majesty that The Right Honourable The Lord Hardie QC be appointed as the Lord Advocate and that Colin Boyd QC be appointed as Solicitor General for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: In view of the fact that the two gentlemen will become members of the Parliament, I believe that members will think it right that I should invite them to walk in and be recognised. I will congratulate them on their appointment—if they are here. [MEMBERS: "Yes, they are here."] I trust that they will be more timely in the courts.

Mr Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): They are coming. [Applause.]

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Send them down! [Laughter.]

Prayers

The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel): The next item of business is a debate on the principle of prayers being held at the start of meetings of the Parliament. Members will be aware that the standing orders provide for the Parliament to have a decision time at the end of each sitting day. A decision on Mr Fergusson's motion would normally be taken then. I have decided that the decision should not be delayed until 5 o'clock but will be taken at the close of the debate, which will be not later than one hour after the motion is moved.

Since this is the first debate we have had, I remind members that, if they wish to intervene in a speech, they should do so by pressing the microphone button, standing in their place and asking the member to give way. It is up to the member who has the floor to indicate to whom he or she wishes to give way, if at all.

14:48

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): In moving the motion, may I first clarify any confusion over its wording by stating quite clearly that my intention is to ensure that prayers are said, in one form or another, on a daily basis, at every meeting of the whole Parliament within this chamber.

Much has been made in the past week of the fact that during the inaugural meeting of the Parliament about one third of MSPs chose to make the affirmation rather than take the oath. It has not been pointed out as strongly that two thirds of us chose to take the oath. Some 86 of us preferred to swear our allegiance in the name of God.

I, like you, Sir David, am a son of the manse. I was, therefore, brought up in a Christian, God-fearing household, although I admit that for much of my early upbringing I tended to fear the wrath of my father on earth rather more than that of my father in heaven. None the less, throughout the years I have found the occasional moment of prayer or simply of quiet and reflective thought to be of great assistance in my daily business.

My motion today, however, is not born purely of personal preference or desire. Rather, that desire was reinforced during the build-up to the election on 6 May by the surprisingly large number of people who voiced their concern on this subject to me, having read the various rumours in the press, among them one that suggested that there would be no room for prayers at all in the daily business of this Parliament.

Great play has rightly been made of the concept of this Parliament, and its committees, being able to call on the help of others from outwith its ranks

for advice and guidance on any issue that falls within its remit. It seems entirely appropriate, therefore, that this Parliament, particularly as it meets in the assembly building of the Church of Scotland, should ask for a little daily advice and guidance from the greatest expert of all.

This is not a party political matter; it is a question of getting our priorities right. To my mind, a Parliament that meets without prayer is not respectful or complete. Therefore, as a matter of urgency, I move,

That this Parliament agrees in principle for Prayers to be held on a non-denominational basis, at the start of each plenary session of the Parliament, and remits to the Parliamentary Bureau to make arrangements therefor and to come forward to the Parliament with recommendations speedily.

14:52

Mr Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am sympathetic to the motion, but I start with a slight correction of Mr Fergusson's remarks. If someone decides to make an affirmation, it does not necessarily mean that they are not religious. There are a number of reasons why someone might wish to make an affirmation. A very religious person might choose the affirmation because they did not like the nature of the oath that they were asked to take. Perhaps Mr Fergusson will reflect on that point. I do not think that we should make assumptions about people's religious beliefs on the basis of whether they affirmed or swore an oath—and I speak as someone who swore the oath last week.

I have three points to make. The first is that I speak as an individual. This is a matter of conscience and should be the subject of a free vote for all parties and members. There are some aspects of the motion that I hope the mover will want to confirm. When Mr Fergusson talks about non-denominational, I think he means interfaith; in other words, relating not only to Christian denominations, but to the various other faiths in Scotland. It is important that this Parliament affirms that the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Jewish communities are important in the wider Scottish community and that, if we have some form of religious or other observance in our proceedings, it should encompass all the faiths of Scotland. I am sure that Mr Fergusson would not want to suggest that we are talking only about Christian denominations.

My second point relates to an experience that I had earlier this year when I wrote to members of all of the faiths in Scotland to make a suggestion. The Episcopalian Bishop of Edinburgh took the opportunity of "Thought for the Day" to suggest that he was not in favour of religious observance. I found that quite interesting. It was a bit like the

episode of "Yes, Prime Minister" when Jim Hacker was faced with appointing two Church of England bishops, neither of whom believed in God. I am not suggesting for a second that the Episcopalian Bishop of Edinburgh falls into that category, but I found it interesting that a cleric should take such a position. More interesting was that he took the opportunity of "Thought for the Day", as it is an opportunity allocated to representatives of all of the faiths by the BBC on the basis that it is important to have some sort of observance even among the various news topics of "Good Morning Scotland" and that there is a place for a minute or two's reflection. It was, therefore, interesting that the Bishop of Edinburgh chose that spot on BBC radio to deny that the concept of religious observance might have any validity in the proceedings of the Parliament.

My third point is that those of us who have experience of the Westminster Parliament would not want to reproduce the nature of prayers in that institution, where they have been described as a meaningless ritual. That is not altogether true, because prayers in the Westminster Parliament can be meaningful as a means for people to reserve their seats for the day. However, I am not certain that that is the best reason for people to take part in what should be a solemn observance of worship.

What I had in mind when I wrote to the various denominations and faiths was that there should be a time allocated within parliamentary proceedings, whether daily or weekly, when the religions and faiths in Scotland could be asked to provide a two- or three-minute thought for the day or for the week. That observation might go beyond the day-to-day events that we are debating, and might rise above some of the inter-party battles that we might get into, even in the new politics of this new Parliament. I thought that that would be a good thing, because it would show the strength of unity in diversity. It would be a good thing if the faiths of Scotland were to agree on such a formula.

The last point that I want to make in support of Alex Fergusson's motion is that, when he sums up, he could indicate that this is not a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau alone, but that the Parliament should be taking advice from representatives of the faiths of Scotland. If they could come to us with an agreed formula—something like the daily or weekly observation, spread round the faiths of Scotland—that would be something that this Parliament would do well to consider. Our affirmation of the key role of all of the religions of Scotland in contributing something above and beyond the smoke and battle of politics could be very important indeed to our proceedings.

14:57

Miss Annabel Goldie (West of Scotland) (Con): I listened with interest to what Mr Salmond said. It is important that all of us in the chamber do not get too bogged down by an apparent or deemed gravity. I have a lot of sympathy for what the motion proposes. My background is in no way remarkable in that respect; it is probably like that of several other members. I am a member of the Church of Scotland and an elder of the kirk. I have fruitlessly spent years trying to improve the political ways of the father of Ms Wendy Alexander, the member for Paisley North—without success.

It is important that those of us here who have some sense of belief or religious adherence should be given the opportunity to draw from that belief or adherence, whatever it may be, the very comfort to which Mr Fergusson alluded, in an informal and, I hope, relaxed manner. My preference would be for that to be possible on a daily basis. There is an old Russian proverb that says if the thunder is not loud, the peasant does not cross himself. I am not suggesting that, in this chamber, we should await claps of thunder. However, I feel very strongly that challenges may lie ahead—and there I am in sympathy with Mr Salmond's view.

I think that it is important for us to remember, as a fraternity, that we are people first and MSPs after that. While I am very much in sympathy with Mr Salmond's view on further consultation with the faiths, I believe that it is essential to keep the matter before us as simple as possible. To me, the simplicity is this: for those of us in this company who have a desire to seek some sort of comfort on a daily basis, it would be helpful, whatever our beliefs or adherences, to have that facility available within the Parliament.

I support the motion.

14:58

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I also would like to support the motion. It is a sign that there is more hope in this place than there is in Westminster that, when I raised the issue of having ecumenical prayers at Westminster, all I could do was table an early-day motion—which is neither early nor a motion, because nobody ever talks about it. However, I got 40 signatures. Here, Mr Fergusson can lodge a motion and we will debate it. That is a great step forward.

There is also quite a lot of agreement. I am speaking as an individual, and the fact that I take a similar line to that of Alex Salmond has no political significance whatsoever. I emphasise the fact that I think that the prayers should be inclusive, inter-faith and ecumenical. The prayers at Westminster

are, frankly, awful. They are exclusive, Church of England from 1660, and, in my view, they are ritual of the worst sort. There is a great place for ritual when it is well done, but that type of ritual sends out the wrong message: that the Parliament is part of a Church of England plot.

We must embrace all religions: all the Christian denominations and all the other faiths. As well as benefiting those members who wish to listen to prayers, it would send out to our fellow citizens the message that they are all welcomed and included, whatever their beliefs may be.

When I pursued this matter before, the figures that I got from the library at the House of Commons indicated that about 30 per cent of the inhabitants of Scotland over the age of 15 are considered to be members of one of the faiths. The views of many other people are influenced by Christianity and by other faiths.

Prayers would benefit those who come and enjoy them, if that is the right expression. The people who do not approve of prayers need not come, and will have two minutes more to drink some coffee. It does not benefit non-believers to deny believers the chance to benefit from their belief.

It will not surprise members to learn, therefore, that I am in favour of proportional praying. *[Laughter.]* Although I have figures from the library, statistics about membership of religions are almost as dubious as statistics about membership of political parties. However, although the figures may need to be refined, I suggest that prayers should be allocated roughly in proportion to the number of adherents to a religion, whether it be Christianity or another religion, and each faith should have a certain number of days of praying over us.

I do not think that we want a sort of bland, all-faith prayer; that would be awful. Each group should be allowed to have its say in its own style. For the benefit of many people who genuinely have no belief, there could be, on some days, a two-minute silence, when people could meditate.

I have served on four councils, and have found the prayers conducted there helpful. They make one view one's opponents, and sometimes even one's colleagues, with more charity. Sometimes, I have moderated the venom of an attack on my opponents because something in a prayer caught my attention and made me think that I should not go over the top. So I think that prayers do some good.

I reject the argument that, because the Parliament is a secular place of work, there should be no prayers. In the United States of America, there is a clear distinction between Church and state, but daily prayers are held in the Senate. In

fact, a Scot, Peter Marshall, who was the chaplain there for many years, even became the hero of a Hollywood film because he was such a major contributor to the American scene.

We must recognise our religious history. Much of that history is painful and some of it is disgraceful, but our Christian roots and the influence of other religions in Scotland have made us what we are.

The good parts of religion, like the good parts of politics, harness the good parts of our life. We want a generous, all-embracing Scottish Parliament; not a mean-minded, petty and negative one. We would all gain from seeing other denominations and faiths in a positive light, and prayers in Parliament would give us the opportunity to do that.

15:04

Mr Tom McCabe (Hamilton South) (Lab): The sentiments that lie behind this motion are admirable ones. It is right that there should be a concern to establish the procedures and traditions for which this Parliament will become known.

Members of the Scottish Parliament are here to conduct business that will fashion and touch the lives of Scotland's people. The opportunity to engage in prayer is an important one, and I was glad that the consultative steering group considered the matter and recommended that the Parliament take an early view.

A time for prayer or reflection is a feature that can demonstrate the humility that should be attached to membership of this Parliament, and it would allow members to consider the great privilege of being a democratic representative.

Scotland's great strength is its diversity. Some members may choose a more private opportunity to express prayer. Some may prefer the opportunity for a more contemplative moment before the business of the Parliament begins, to consider again and again the burden of their responsibilities as well as the great possibilities that their position can create for the advancement of the common good. That strength of diversity is in the multiplicity of faiths and beliefs that encompass Scottish life, as well as the freedom not to have any formal beliefs. It is important that we recognise also the secular thread that runs through Scottish life.

The overwhelming hope for this Parliament is that our strength will come from an open, inclusive and consultative culture. In that spirit, Sir David, we hope that all parties can see the dangers of a rush to judgment, however well intentioned it may be.

We see considerable merit in a small, cross-

party group which can consult with the great range of faiths and beliefs and bring forward recommendations on how best to proceed. We recognise, of course, that on a matter of this nature members are free to exercise their own judgment. If the party moving the motion recognises that there is a will to proceed and a will to develop procedures that are broad-based, reflective and capable of standing the test of time, I would ask that it considers withdrawing the motion and allowing a cross-party approach to develop the most appropriate procedures.

Parliamentary officers have been appointed by most of the main Churches, and representatives of other faiths and cultures could, I am sure, be consulted without undue delay. Therefore, in a spirit of co-operation, which we have no doubt will be appreciated throughout Scotland, we would ask that we take a little more time to consider this important aspect of our Parliament's procedures.

15:07

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): Speaking as a poor sinner, which, of course, we all are, I would say that there should definitely be an element of spirituality in this Parliament. It is not just a matter of personal conscience. It is a matter of what the people of Scotland, of the majority of all faiths, want. That was very apparent to me in Glasgow Baillieston and in all parts of the city of Glasgow.

There is a shocking thing in this Parliament. Spot the window—up there in the gallery. That stained-glass window has been known to me all my life. When I sat in the front row, where Mr Dewar is now, as a reporter at Church of Scotland general assemblies, I used to look up at that window. What has happened? A blind has been drawn halfway down the window so that the figure of Christ is beheaded. That is not good enough. We should not start a Parliament with that, not in anyone's religion.

I call for multifaith prayers. The major religions of the world usually operate in units of 10 on the sin front. Some of the major religions of China, for instance, adhere to the 10 courts of hell. I do not recommend any of us trying those as a holiday destination. It is quite simple, however, to have a form of prayer that suits everyone. I strongly recommend that we have that touch of spirituality and that we do not descend entirely into the secular in this age. What is this age? We are approaching some form of a new age of darkness, of witchcraft, with all sorts of crackpots getting in on the scene. *[Laughter.]* Not just in this Parliament, ladies and gentlemen.

Seriously, we have weird forms of witchcraft affecting children in this age. It is not good

enough. It is not the Scottish way, and it is not the way of all the other people who have joined us in Scotland. Please, spare some time for a wee bit of spirituality before we all get stuck into each other.

15:09

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I am on record in *The Scotsman* as supporting Alex Salmond's view. Some months ago, I suggested that we have a period of contemplation preceded by a talk from a representative of a religion, or even of a group, in Scottish life. That would achieve several things.

First, the people of Scotland hope that this Parliament will be open and accessible. I cannot think of anything more accessible than for this Parliament to be addressed on a daily basis by somebody from outside, whether they be from different faiths or even from campaigning groups. People who wanted to perform that office would be queueing down to the Canongate Tolbooth within a few days of any announcement that that would happen.

Secondly, such a talk followed by a period of quiet contemplation would have the advantage of enabling us to listen to our faiths in public, and to address our gods in private in whatever way we prefer. My suggestion is not a negative to the motion, because the motion does not state whether the prayers should be spoken or should be private and quiet. If this motion is passed, we could proceed to a parliamentary committee. If I were to be on that committee, which I would like to be, I would repeat my idea and would support that of Mr Salmond.

15:11

Michael Russell (South of Scotland) (SNP): I thought that I should rise to defend the Anglican tradition that my colleagues have criticised. As an Episcopalian, "meaningless ritual" is not a term I recognise. It might be helpful for Mr Salmond to receive a little more instruction in the Episcopal faith. We should recognise the history and symbolism of the building that we are in and the area in which it is situated. I suspect that I am the only member of this Parliament who was a student in the faculty of theology here, and the only one who worked for the Church of Scotland in this very hall at assembly time.

The whole area is redolent of Church history in Scotland. This hall stands as a tribute to the disruption and to the faith of a whole community who went out with nothing at all in order to stand against arbitrary authority. Old St Paul's church, down the High Street, was closed in 1715 because of its resistance. Edinburgh has a strong Catholic tradition and a modern, dynamic living tradition of

other faiths, including Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Mr Harper is right to refer to those other groups as well.

I was a little alarmed by Mr McCabe's suggestion that we should already be taking this motion away and beginning to interfere with it in a bureaucratic fashion. Surely we should begin to build upon it, if the people who proposed it are prepared for the Parliamentary Bureau to take the best from it and, as Mr Harper has said, to interpret it in terms of other forms of event such as prayer or celebration. If we can build on the motion in terms of multifaith celebration—and I think that that is important—then the motion gives us an opportunity to start something happening rather than to stop and go backwards. I support the motion as one that will take this Parliament forward. It will recognise not only where we are, but who we are and how, as Annabel Goldie has said, we can be inspired, strengthened and perhaps directed as we do our work.

15:13

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): I hope that Mr Alex Fergusson will not feel it incumbent upon himself to withdraw this motion. He is entitled to test the opinion of the Parliament on an issue that is most certainly not party political. If the principle is accepted, the details can be sorted out by the Parliamentary Bureau.

I support what Donald Gorrie said. It is worth remembering that we would not be in this building if it were not for the good will of the Church of Scotland, for which we should express gratitude. No one is compelled to attend prayers in the House of Commons and no one would be forced to attend prayers here. As Mr McCabe said, it is a great privilege to be here, and perhaps it is no bad thing for parliamentarians to be reminded that they are here to be of service to others.

Some years ago, I discovered that a Church of Scotland minister had never read prayers in the House of Commons. I made strong representations to the Speaker at that time—Bernard Weatherill—who agreed that the minister of the Canongate could read prayers in the House of Commons, although such a thing had never been heard of before. Just as I was prepared to argue the case for the Church of Scotland in the House of Commons, so today we should sympathise with the case that has been advanced by Mr Alex Salmond and others, that other denominations should be fully considered in this matter. I hope that Mr Fergusson will press his motion to a division.

15:14

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have two questions for Mr Fergusson. First, what is a plenary session? Is it when the whole Parliament is here, or is it every time we are here? Perhaps we could have that cleared up. Secondly, does he accept that non-denominational includes interfaith? I agree with the interfaith proposal.

By all means let us rule out the House of Commons model. I was there for eight years. Lord James Douglas-Hamilton said that there was no compulsion to attend prayers, but I found that there was: if I wanted a seat, I had to pray. That was not a very dignified situation, but there were not enough seats to go around. We are blessed here—we all have a seat and a desk—so that will not happen.

There were some comic elements at the House of Commons, the first of which was that we were locked in to pray. The first time I went to a question time, I found everybody queueing. When I asked old Mr Emrys Hughes what was happening, he said that members had been locked in to pray. That sounded very strange.

The second comic element was that members turned their backs on one another during prayers, as if there was something shameful in praying. The third comic element was that the prayer was always the same:

“Let all the nations rejoice and be glad.”

I liked it, but it was the same every day.

We should have a new model and we should embrace all the cultures and religions that have chosen Scotland as their home.

15:17

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I have no objection in principle to those who are seeking divine guidance being able to do so in the Parliament, but I agree with Mr McCabe that there is a little more to it than the motion suggests.

I was pleased to hear from Lord James Douglas-Hamilton that prayers were not to be compulsory; none of us wants to be taken back to school and forced to sit in assembly. We have to consider what form the prayers would take; a lot of good points have been made on the interfaith nature of Scottish religious belief. We have also to consider the frequency of prayers and when they would take place. I am not in favour of our having prayers immediately before meeting. I suspect that, if we did, members might attend because they wanted to get a good seat in the range of the television cameras rather than because they were seeking divine guidance. That would be regrettable.

We need to consider this matter more carefully and must not rush into a decision.

15:18

Mr Kenneth Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I received some help on this matter yesterday morning, in the form of a letter from my aunt. She suggested a daily prayer for me and all other MSPs. It is very brief.

“Give me the gift of swift retort
And keep the public memory short.”

We should not be sending out the message that we are anti-Church or anti-religion. This is an inclusive Parliament and we should not be shutting out the Churches when they have a large contribution to make to our debate and to our society. We need to ensure that the Parliament recognises the spiritual, as well as the secular, needs of our community; we must also recognise that we live in a multicultural society and that our Parliament should reflect the different faiths in that society.

Churches of all denominations are particularly active in Eastwood and they made their views known during the election campaign. Eastwood also has a sizeable Jewish community and a growing Muslim community. It is vital that we make a conscious effort to represent the views of those two communities, as well as those of the Christian tradition. Whatever the Parliament agrees today, we need to reflect that diversity of belief.

15:19

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I, too, support the motion. One of the few things that I share with Mike Russell is an Episcopalian background. Indeed, we are two of only three Episcopalians for independence—a new movement that we started up earlier this year. As a Motherwell supporter as well, I think that St Jude must be my patron saint.

I support the motion and I appeal to the Government's business manager, Mr McCabe, not to set up a sub-committee to examine the issue of prayers. We have to decide today; we must start to get something moving.

If I am reading Mr Fergusson's gestures correctly, he seems quite open to some of the suggestions that have been made by Mr Salmond, Mr Russell and, importantly, Mr Gorrie. One of the key points to emerge from the debate is that prayers must be multifaith. As Mr Gorrie said, they must not be neutered. We must find a way to express the richness of each faith's diversity, not just find something that is acceptable to all. Every faith must be represented in the prayers, and the solution suggested by Mr Salmond—with whom I

have one or two things in common—is sensible.

I broadly support the motion and I hope that we can take advice from you, Sir David, and from Mr Fergusson, and find a solution now so that we can vote on the motion today and not allow it to disappear off the agenda into a sub-committee.

15:20

Mr John McAllion (Dundee East) (Lab): I was fascinated by Donald Gorrie's suggestion that interfaith prayers should be conducted on a proportional basis. Can we have an assurance that no two faiths would be able to form a coalition to impose their prayers on the rest of the faiths? [*Laughter.*]

I am neither an Episcopalian nor a son of the manse. Other traditions should be heard in this debate. I went to St Aloysius primary in Springburn and St Augustine's secondary in Glasgow, so members will get an idea of the angle that I am coming from. Of course, there are not just Protestants and Catholics; there are also humanists. I know that some people will say that that is not possible in Scotland—that they are either Protestant humanists or Catholic humanists—but humanists' beliefs and traditions must be kept in mind.

I would be reluctant to see a formal session of prayers start every meeting of the Parliament, in which all members were expected to take part, as happens in the House of Commons. That course leads to public displays of adherence to religion when, privately, many of the members who are present do not believe and are simply going through the motions. That would be a very bad way for this Parliament to start.

We have to recognise that not only is Scotland multifaith, it contains people who do not have any faith in God. They have every right to hold that principle and to have their views respected. I would not like their rights to be imposed upon by a majority, even if there is a religious majority in the chamber, in this very noble building. I hope that there will be discussions between the parties on this subject and that it will be recognised that in Scotland there are non-religious as well as religious people, and that there are non-Christian as well as Christian groups. Above all, I hope that this Parliament will respect the religious views of individual members and will not impose on them rituals that may mean nothing to them.

15:22

Brian Adam (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I was a little concerned by Mr McCabe's proposal, as it could lead to difficulties. There has been the occasional difficulty. We divide among ourselves, as do religious communities. If we consult as he

suggests, that may lead to division rather than people coming together. I support the motion, on the assumption that there will be a multifaith arrangement that will be inclusive and allow all those who wish to take part to do so. If the Bishop of Edinburgh does not wish to take part, we should not force him to do so.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Fergusson, do you wish to reply to the debate?

Alex Fergusson *rose*—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, the First Minister would like to speak.

15:23

The First Minister (Donald Dewar): I managed to press the wrong button. It was an administrative triumph in my panic at seeing this debate being brought to a conclusion.

On this occasion I speak as an individual and not in any other capacity. This has been an interesting debate. I have concerns about what we may be about to do. A large percentage of speakers have said that they do not want to recreate Westminster. There is a great danger that that is what we are going to do.

Great stress has been placed on the religious traditions of Scotland. I am very well aware of them and, in an academic sense, I probably have a wider grasp of them than do many people. I am also very aware that many people do not have a religious faith, although they may welcome the possibility of a period of contemplation or a quiet period at the start of the day. It would be improper of me to embarrass members by asking them to declare by a show of hands whether they go to church every Sunday. I suspect that members do not differ markedly from the population of Scotland, in which case the proportion of the gathering here that go to church every Sunday will be around 15 per cent—I may be wrong, but I suspect that that is so.

At Westminster, the vast majority of people who do not have a religious faith hang around in the corridor during prayers. As soon as prayers are over, there is an almighty rush to get into one's seat. There has to be a gap between the end of prayers and the start of business to allow the large majority of members—I suspect—to get to their seats. I raise that as a practical point as I think that that is what would emerge here.

I think that there is a possibility of securing a quiet period for contemplation and reflection. An alternative to prayer was mentioned by Mr Salmond. That might be reasonable.

My problem is that I cannot vote for the motion as I do not know what it means. I have been asked

to vote for it on the basis that it does not mean what it says. If we believe that we should have a period of quiet contemplation—several people, including Mr Harper, referred to that—we cannot vote for the motion. The motion, which will presumably be binding on the Parliament and the bureau, specifies prayer. It is clear that prayers and variations on them are meant, not a quiet talk or a humanist talking about his point of view—those are not prayers. We have been told that the prayers should be interfaith, not interdenominational, but the motion says “non-denominational”. I have some respect for motions and I believe that voting for a motion endorses the meaning of the words that the motion uses.

Mr Salmond: The motion also says “in principle” and remits the matter to the Parliamentary Bureau, which would make arrangements and come back to the Parliament. The motion is phrased loosely enough for the matter to come back to the chamber. A decision in principle is being sought today, not a decision in detail.

The First Minister: That is Mr Salmond’s interpretation of the motion. I do not intend to ask you to make a ruling, Sir David, but in the provisions to which I have referred the motion is very specific.

There is not necessarily a great difference of opinion between members. I accept that there is a mood in the chamber that some arrangement should be made, but I am not sure that there should be prayers before every meeting. We will have facilities in the new Parliament building for religious observance and worship. Some of us might think that those who wish to have that kind of experience, help and satisfaction might want to go to a place that has been set aside for the purpose. That has to be considered. I am not openly hostile to the idea of prayers, but we should vote for something that is clear. That means that we should discuss the issue first and make a considered judgment before we reach a conclusion.

We are all a little ambivalent about these matters. I was much entertained by Dr Ewing’s account of her experience of having to pray in order to get a seat in the House of Commons. The implication of that was that if she could have got a seat without praying, she would have done so, and yet she stresses the absolute necessity of having prayers before every meeting.

There is teasing out to be done—not as a delaying tactic. We should consider this matter further and sort out what we mean by prayers and non-denominational. Some thought should also be given to the location before we reach a final decision.

15:28

Alex Fergusson: I was tempted, for a moment, to withdraw the motion, but only on the ground that any religious service is likely to be drowned out by the sound of members’ pagers going off for most of the service, which would render any form of contemplation almost impossible.

I am not minded to withdraw the motion, however, for the simple reason that many members have spoken in favour of it. I accept, to a certain extent, what the First Minister said about its wording. I tried to make it plain and was advised by the clerks earlier today that, if I made my intention plain in my opening remarks, any misunderstanding of the wording would be made up for.

One misunderstanding was referred to by Dr Ewing. Coming from the deep south of Scotland, I thought that plenary was a splendid word to introduce to any motion but was rather horrified when a clerk pointed out to me that it would mean that prayers would take place once every four years. That would find 100 per cent approval in the chamber, no doubt. I made it plain in my opening remarks, however, that my sole intention is to ensure that prayers are said in one form or another, on a daily basis, at every meeting of the whole Parliament in the chamber.

Mr Salmond: I hope that, in going for the treble, Mr Fergusson will accept a point about an interfaith approach. I mentioned earlier that I had written to representatives of all the faiths in Scotland; I should have said that they all replied with enthusiasm. The Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway, wrote to me and said that, notwithstanding his personal views on the matter, his Church was in favour of some initiative in this regard.

Alex Fergusson: I am grateful for that comment. I am in complete agreement with the interfaith concept of the motion. It was perhaps naive to use the word non-denominational, but I have never been in any doubt that the interfaith aspect is the one that we should pursue.

I also have sympathy with the “Thought for the Day” angle—which I think Mr Salmond used—that I mentioned in several interviews this morning as presenting a model that could be considered. I cannot agree with Mr McCabe because I think that he is disputing the merits of prayer. We have been praying for almost 2,000 years and I think that it is more than time to take a stand.

I strongly believe that with the new Parliament we have a new beginning. I see no reason why we should not have a new all-embracing form of contemplative thought or prayer as part of our parliamentary procedure. I cannot agree with some members who think that everything that

comes from Westminster is bad. I believe that daily prayer would be enormously to our benefit and I commend the motion to members.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that the motion in the name of Mr Alex Fergusson be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

The motion is agreed to.

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: Members will have to be a bit quicker on the draw. I shall repeat the question. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, there will be a division.

Andrew Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Presiding Officer. Under the standing orders, is it feasible to accommodate some of the amendments that have been suggested, so that Mr Dewar's point can be included at this stage?

The Presiding Officer: No. Amendments to a substantive motion must be lodged beforehand. The First Minister was tempting me to rule on the interpretation of the words, which I hesitate to do, but I can say that the bureau is bound to take into account the words spoken in the debate. That lets me off the hook of trying to interpret them.

I have to put the question, because Mr Fergusson has not withdrawn the motion. Those who believe that it should be withdrawn or who do not want it to pass should shout no.

Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, there will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Campbell, Colin (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Davidson, Mr David (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Elder, Dorothy-Grace (Glasgow) (SNP)
Ewing, Dr Winnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Fergusson, Ms Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Fergusson, Alex (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Gray, Iain (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Lab)
Hamilton, Mr Duncan (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Harding, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Dr Sylvia (Stirling) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jenkins, Ian (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Johnstone, Alex (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Central Scotland) (SNP)
McAllion, Mr John (Dundee East) (Lab)
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McIntosh, Mrs Lyndsay (Central Scotland) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Lothians) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Munro, Mr John (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Paterson, Mr Gil (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Reid, Mr George (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mr Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Salmond, Mr Alex (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Simpson, Dr Richard (Ochil) (Lab)
Smith, Mrs Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Tosh, Mr Murray (South of Scotland) (Con)
Wallace, Ben (North-East Scotland) (Con)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Andrew (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
Gibson, Mr Kenneth (Glasgow) (SNP)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)

Lochhead, Richard (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
 MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 Mackay, Angus (Edinburgh South) (Lab)
 McLeod, Fiona (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahon, Mr Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Ms Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Quinan, Mr Lloyd (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Iain (North-East Fife) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Thomson, Elaine (Aberdeen North) (Lab)
 Ullrich, Kay (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Ian (Ayr) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
 Dewar, Donald (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Galbraith, Mr Sam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)
 Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 MacLean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
 McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McLeish, Henry (Central Fife) (Lab)
 Robison, Shona (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
 Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is as follows: For 69, Against 15, Abstentions 37.

Motion agreed to.

That this Parliament agrees in principle for Prayers to be held on a non-denominational basis, at the start of each plenary session of the Parliament, and remits to the Parliamentary Bureau to make arrangements therefor and to come forward to the Parliament with recommendations speedily.

The Presiding Officer: I anticipate that tomorrow's debate on the appointment of ministers may be slightly more contentious than the debates today. For that reason, I repeat the request of the bureau that members who want to speak should indicate that in the chamber office before 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

In the light of today's experience, that request is not just to help the Presiding Officer, but to help all members. We shall then be able to publish a list of the members who want to participate; everyone will know when they will be called and how many members want to speak.

From today's experience, I think that one of the problems with the system is that no one except the

occupant of the chair has any idea how many members are waiting to speak. I believe that it would be wise for members to adopt the bureau's procedure and to give notice of their wish to speak the day before. That does not exclude the right to speak during a debate—an important point—but, if everyone is to be called, it enables me to give guidance on the length of time for speeches.

I hope that members will be patient in respect of my only other problem, which is that I sit here gazing at photographs to try to identify everyone. Some members have adopted my motto that the old ones are the best; it is not always easy to identify everyone.

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Presiding Officer. I am sorry—and it is not your fault—but we cannot hear you from here.

The Presiding Officer: I will ensure that that problem is investigated tomorrow, as it is very important that members are able to hear me everywhere.

Meeting closed at 15:36.

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