

Capital Punishment

There are also police officers who, obviously, have to face criminals and who would like to have more arguments to convince them not to kill.

From another angle, religionwise, I would quote the Bible where it says many times that whosoever kills a fellow human being be punished likewise.

Mr. Speaker, history has shown that in certain countries there was a rise followed by a fall of civilization. When civilization was on the rise, there was discipline in the schools as well as in other fields. Pride and honour also prevailed. Those are things which tend to disappear today. In ancient times there used to be vigour, a form of virility and devotion to work which made the citizens in their respective fields lead the country toward a higher form of civilization.

History has also witnessed, whether it be in Greece, in Rome, or in France, declines brought about quite often by the thoughtlessness of people.

It was often the great philosophers who misled the people by thrusting their dubious theories on them.

There was also decline after legalization of homosexuality, drugs and sloth. Indeed the latter replaced pride. In addition, the social climate was allowed to deteriorate and anarchy hit society. Certain groups of citizens were allowed to ridicule the laws, policemen and law makers. Finally, murder was allowed to serve as an instrument of power, as was seen in history, power accompanied by violence, fraudulent bankruptcies, exploitation of the worker and the farmer. Pride was also left to be annihilated by overly stringent succession duties and direct taxes which brought about situations like that of Louis XVI which led to the Revolution.

We must set specific objectives. Do we want the country to continue its upward march and protect itself against criminals, or do we want to start going downhill through indifference and lack of concern?

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Terry O'Connor (Halton): Mr. Speaker, many people, including many members of this House, have spoken many words on this most personal of subjects. I rise knowing that few, if any, members are likely to alter their thinking as a result of my remarks or other remarks made during the course of this debate. I also recognize that my views probably do not coincide with a significant number, perhaps even a majority, of the people in my riding.

With respect to the question whether members of this House should vote according to their conscience, according to their own wishes or according to the wishes, the dictates, as expressed—if they are able to be expressed adequately—of the people in their ridings, the argument was perhaps put best by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) when he spoke in this chamber yesterday. If I might be permitted to quote briefly from his remarks, as reported at page 785 of *Hansard* he said:

How can you take a stand in your heart in favour of something and then vote the other way? On a free vote everyone should let his conscience be his guide.

[Mr. Boisvert.]

A little further on, as reported at page 786 he said:

Each one of you in this House has the conscientious responsibility of voting according to your conscience and for no other reason.

I cannot make the argument any better than that. However, I should like to assure my constituents, through you, Mr. Speaker, that I have read every letter, telegram, brief and petition they have taken the time to send me. I have replied to each one individually. There was no form letter nor evading of the question. I have unequivocally stated my views to them, whether we have agreed or disagreed.

The matter before us is one of primary importance and interest to every Canadian. The question of taking human life, either by the premeditated, cold-blooded act of one person in the name of revenge, passion or greed, or by the equally premeditated, cold-blooded act of all of us in the name of justice, in my judgment is decidedly wrong in each case. I emphasize that I feel it is wrong to eliminate a human life in either of these circumstances. In fact, there is no justification save self-defence for the taking of a human life under any circumstances.

• (1720)

Although I feel it should be incumbent upon those propounding the use of capital punishment to justify its necessity, the onus all too often falls on the abolitionist to justify his stand. So be it, Mr. Speaker, for I feel that the abolitionist stand can be supported.

In this debate we must ask ourselves whether our desire to either retain or abolish the death penalty is based more on objective, empirical reasons or more on emotional, instinctive reactions. No doubt because the matter is of such an emotional nature in which we are all able to see ourselves as victims, as friends or relatives of victims, or even as murderers, it is difficult to view the matter totally objectively. But as lawmakers it is our duty to act reasonably and rationally as far as possible, eliminating decisions based on feeling or basic human instincts.

One of the questions most frequently put to me during this argument asks me to imagine the brutal slaying of a loved one, usually a daughter, by a rapist-murderer. They try to make it as heinous and as gory as possible. They then ask, "How would you feel then?" Under those circumstances I would probably want to see the monster suffer a slow, agonizing death. During the agony, anguish and anger immediately following the event I might well attempt to carry out that slow, agonizing execution myself. But is this a valid argument for capital punishment? Hardly. We all feel revenge, even hatred at times. But these are debasing human emotions. It is unbecoming of us either individually or collectively to experience them, let alone use them as a basis for supporting the argument in favour of taking a human life.

This basic argument, that of need to avenge a death, is put in many forms. We are told that if a man takes a life he gives up the right to his own life. It is put in the form of the "eye for an eye" cliché from the Old Testament. But do these arguments not really beg a further question? The very large-looming query "Why?" still remains unanswered. Why an eye for an eye, and why a life for a life? Is it because the Bible says so, as some would argue? Surely the God and Christ, whose life is portrayed in the Bible as