

Capital Punishment

whether or not he was quoting from *The United Church Observer*—

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Yes.

Mr. Lewis: I would like to ask the Hon. Member to comment as to whether or not he was quoting from *The United Church Observer*. Perhaps in framing the answer he can tell us if he feels that the recent second-year-in-a-row drop in membership in the United Church is in any way connected with the fact that the church in many cases is taking an adversarial role, has completely eliminated the very basic and fundamental separation between church and state, and is completely out of touch with its congregations on issues such as free trade, refugee laws and fiscal matters, and that this is a case for the church to take a stand on a moral issue.

Is the Hon. Member prepared to support why the church would take a stand on a moral issue and at the same time confuse the issue so greatly on areas in which a great many of us who support that faith believe that it has absolutely no business being mixed into, such matters as refugee laws, immigration and free trade, issues on which the leadership of the church is completely out of touch with its congregations? In places such as Orillia there is absolutely no support for the positions taken by the leadership of the United Church. I appreciate that this is a moral issue. I think there is a place for the church to be involved in this issue. My friend has very ably quoted from what I thought was *The United Church Observer* and I just want him to comment on that point.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, it is customary to thank Members of the House for asking questions. So I follow the convention here.

Without meaning to reflect on the Parliamentary Secretary unduly, I had indicated what I was quoting from. It was an article by the Reverend Victor Shepherd in the May issue of *The United Church Observer* which has a kind of text, if not picture, that moves me, entitled: "Do Justice and Love Mercy". It is a marvellous injunction from the Old Testament prophets for us to follow. It is one I want to be moved by since the message of the prophets, no less than the message of Jesus, dealt with everyday life. It was certainly not designed for the after-life only or for some distant place. It was designed to take people where they were, to liberate them and to set them free to live full lives. That is what the church is about.

If the Parliamentary Secretary thinks that the stance taken by the United Church on some of these questions does not have support in the congregations, then I guess that is an open question. Some congregations are more supportive than others. The church is never involved in playing to the gallery. The church is never involved in trying to be a majoritarian movement. The Conservative Party in the last election campaign under its Leader, the present Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), played that kind of game with a vengeance. We all see the consequences of that lack of principle.

The United Church of Canada, like the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and those other churches that do more than just think about the salvation of souls, considers the lives of people in their time and in their society. They dare to question what governments put forward as the best route, the best policies for the country to be following. Those churches follow what has always been an inspiring and fertilizing path in their time.

As far as the possibility that capital punishment might have had some immediate effect on the United Church membership, as my good friend the reverend from Winnipeg—Birds Hill has observed quietly, the United Church of Canada has taken this particular stand for many a decade. I am sure that it has had no effect now.

Perhaps I could say as one last observation, which the Parliamentary Secretary needed to be here when I got into this to understand, that I am speaking to the constituency that the Hon. Member for Kitchener and the Hon. Member for London East presumed to speak for. I speak to those people as people among whom I grew up, those who, whether one calls them fundamentalists or evangelical, think that Scripture points toward capital punishment.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Speaker, I would like to first make a comment and then ask a question of the Hon. Member for Thunder Bay—Nipigon (Mr. Epp).

Early in the speech of the Hon. Member he suggested that most Mennonites were opposed to capital punishment. I will just speak for one conference of Mennonites, the conference to which I belong, the Mennonite Brethren. I think Hon. Members would find that it is probably the other way around, that maybe 60-40 approximately support it as opposed to those who oppose it. However, I cannot speak for all the others. But the Hon. Member did not differentiate. This is a comment to at least make the statistics as close to accurate as we can.

• (2100)

The Hon. Member referred to one of the verses of Scripture out of the Book of Romans, Mr. Speaker, to the effect that vengeance is forbidden to the Christian but we were to leave room for God's wrath. I believe it is the nineteenth verse of the twelfth chapter of Romans. Then, five verses later there is a verse that says that the civil authority, which is there to maintain law and order in society, is called "God's servant, an agent of His wrath to bring punishment on the evil-doer".

Would the Hon. Member not agree that one of the ways that God exercises His wrath upon evil is through the civil authority that He placed in society? Does it not create a problem for the Hon. Member to simply say that that is not the case?

I would ask him to comment on that.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my good friend the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Birds Hill (Mr.