

Right to Life

just spoken that it would be useful to see what the courts finally determine on this issue.

I would like to refer to the Reverend Tom Harpur who, as I think all Members will know, writes a regular column in *The Toronto Star*. I wish to refer to an article he wrote on April 26, 1987, in which he refers to "the oft-repeated slander that abortion is murder." He also states:

It is time to challenge directly the sloppy thinking that jumps from saying a fetus is a potential human being or a human-being-in-process to saying it is *already* a human being or a person.

Potentialities are indeed important, but they emphatically do not have the same value as actualities.

In our Western morality, people have an ultimate value. Fetuses have value but not an equal value with actual persons.

Specifically, they do not have the ultimate value of the pregnant woman.

Mr. Harpur then goes on to quote, surprisingly, a conservative fundamentalist scholar, W. A. Criswell, in this matter of emphasizing the relative value of the foetus as contrasted with the ultimate value of the woman. Professor Criswell wrote:

I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had life separate from its mother that it became an individual person. And it has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and the future should be allowed.

Finally, Mr. Harpur's article points out that according to the Bible what makes us persons is:

—our God-like ability and responsibility to make hard choices, our capacity for relationships, and our powers of self-transcendence and self-awareness.

This description is applicable to the pregnant woman in a way and in a depth that is simply not true of the fetus.

There must be good reasons for terminating a pregnancy. But it is part of our freedom and responsibility as persons to make the ultimate decision about these ourselves.

To compel a woman to bear a child against her will or to force her to abide by what others define as adequate or inadequate reasons for an abortion, is a form of naked, authoritarian violence.

It is a denial of God's call to her to be a fully adult person taking responsibility for what is best for her own life and that of her family.

In practice, we are rapidly coming to a position of denying access to women to therapeutic abortions. It is shocking that in Prince Edward Island it is not possible to get a therapeutic abortion, and it is practically impossible in Newfoundland. In a letter received from a Dr. R. C. Gustafson of Kamloops, he points out that it is becoming clear that women in the whole of the southern interior of British Columbia are going to be denied equal access to safe therapeutic abortions. I only wish that there were time to read his full letter—

Mr. Scowen: Go ahead.

Ms. Jewett: If Hon. Members will give me unanimous consent I will read the whole letter.

The main point he makes in his letter is that the attempts by hospital boards to abolish therapeutic abortion committees are actually contrary to the requirements of both the Criminal Code and the Canada Health Act. They are allowing the relevant section of the Criminal Code to be restricted by lesser

jurisdictions and the intent of the Canada Health Act to be flagrantly violated.

The Canada Health Act, as Hon. Members will recall since we passed it unanimously, forcefully promoted the principle of unimpeded and equitable access to health care free from constraints such as user fees or extra billing. Obliging a woman to go from the southern interior of British Columbia to Vancouver or to Washington State is the equivalent of user fees or extra billing, as Dr. Gustafson points out.

He ends his letter, a letter he sent to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp), with these words: "No less an issue than the humane and equitable provision of health care to women is at stake."

Ultimately, then, the matter is for a woman and her physician to determine. It is interesting that this was so fully recognized in a recent poll in British Columbia. Indeed, if one considers the poll carefully one will see that should this motion pass and should the Government take it up and should there be an attempt to amend the Constitution to abolish abortion, then I do not think the amendment will get very far in British Columbia.

The poll to which I refer is the first conducted in five years in B.C. by United Communications Research on Lower Mainland. The results of the poll were aired on B.C. TV on the evening of May 21, 1987. With respect to the question about the decision on abortion being up to a woman and her doctor, 87 per cent agreed while only 12 per cent disagreed. Some 87 per cent of British Columbians in the Lower Mainland said that abortion was a matter to be determined by a woman and her doctor. There was hardly any difference between the two major political Parties. Members of the Social Credit Party were 82 per cent agreed while 17 per cent disagreed. In the New Democratic Party 91 per cent agreed while 8 per cent disagreed.

I would like to conclude my comments by reading from a letter from the Vancouver branch of the YWCA which reflects not only the views of the Young Women's Christian Association in British Columbia but throughout Canada. The letter states in part:

The YWCA membership reflects our multicultural pluralistic society with its wide variety of accepted religions, political beliefs and life styles. Our purpose impels us to openness and understanding of the principles and values of others. As an organization we support the individual right to freedom of choice for women on a large range of issues affecting our lives.

This freedom of choice extends to our position on reproductive rights and the right of a woman to self determination regarding unwanted pregnancies. We believe that the discussion of pregnancy and its continuation or cessation should be a private matter of individual conscience decided by a woman and her physician.

● (1720)

Let us not return to abortion on the back streets. Let us think again of Tom Harpur's words:

To compel a woman to bear a child against her will or to force her to abide by what others define as adequate or inadequate reasons for an abortion, is a form of naked, authoritarian violence.