

heard stories about the wrongs and suffering experienced by the families of victims. I also share the profound concern of Canadians and of my constituents about the increasing number of violent murders being committed today.

Mr. Speaker, I was rather ambivalent about the subject for quite some time. I consulted, I listened, I read many letters and I read many papers on the subject. I prayed, I examined with my conscience, and after much thought and reflection, I have now decided to speak out against the death penalty.

I am now very comfortable with my decision, but I want to explain my change of heart.

Several serious considerations were a factor in bringing about my decision. One of the most important was a passage in a statement by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on the death penalty. The statement appeared under the heading: *Escalating Violence*. In this document, the author asked: Who is the master of life? He gave the following answer, and I quote: "If as citizens we recognize the sacred character of human life, and if, according to our faith, we believe we were created in the image and likeness of God and that God is the sole master of life, we must realize we can hardly dispose of another person's life."

I have been an active member of the Pro-Life movement for many years. I believe in the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception. How could I speak out today in favour of destroying human life through the death penalty, when I demand that we respect and protect the right of the foetus to be born? I firmly believe that human life is a gift of God and that we have a responsibility to protect it from its inception until its end. I believe violence breeds violence. How can we, as a society, claim that to avenge unlawful murder, the State should resort to a second, lawful murder?

The debate on the death penalty is part of a problem we inherited from the past. In former times, the death penalty was applied without any problem. At the time, the principle of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, was strictly adhered to. And to better camouflage this act of collective retribution, the death penalty was said to fulfil a four-fold purpose. The first purpose is atonement for the crime; the second purpose is social example; the third purpose is deterrence; and the fourth one is the protection of society. Nowadays, we acknowledge that those aims can no longer be the basis of a moral judgement. We know that in some corners of the world, there are still people and individuals who perpetrate ancient acts of cruelty and have barbarian behaviours. However, we note that throughout the centuries and more especially since the Second World War, there is a deeper understanding of the dignity of the human being. This leads us to say as a society that behaviours who used to be considered as humane, natural and fair and even necessary to the social order have now been proven to be entirely unfair and inhuman.

It is obvious that the idea of retribution easily comes to the mind of each and everyone of us. We all have a strong urge which drives us not only to defend ourselves but also to avenge

ourselves. We have to consider realistically our present problems, the problems experienced in 1987 to find effective solutions for 1987 and develop preventive measures which will give greater hope to the community in the year 2000.

I should like to examine one by one the four purposes aimed at in previous centuries and which justified the death penalty. The first was the atonement for crime. I should like to remind the House the generous gesture of Our Holy Father John Paul II who, as you will remember, forgave his assailant and even visited him in jail. More recently, when she was in Ottawa, Mrs. Coretta King, the widow of the lamented Martin Luther King spoke in strong terms against the death penalty. I quote her comments before the Standing Committee on Human Rights.

[*English*]

"I just don't see how people can say they're Christian and murder people".

In answer to a question from the Hon. Member for Eglinton—Lawrence (Mr. de Corneille) Mrs. King said that she regrets her fellow Americans are moving backward, rather than forward on the issue. She also said: "I certainly think it's barbaric for a civilized nation such as the United States. I certainly hope Canada won't fall into that".

Like many other Members of Parliament I have received a letter from Lesley C. Parrott of Summerhill Avenue in Toronto who is begging us to consider her deeply-felt views and vote no to the return of the death penalty. Hon. Members will recall that although her own lovely 11-year-old daughter, Alison, was murdered at the hands of a criminal, Mrs. Parrott states in her letter:

I do not want to be part of a society that brings up future generations with the belief that killing can be legitimized under certain circumstances. Let the message be clear and unconditional: human life is sacred; killing is always wrong.

This letter weighs heavily in my decision to vote against capital punishment. I want to publicly commend Mrs. Parrott for her courage and her forgiveness.

[*Translation*]

The second purpose was the social example. The people who demand capital penalty believe that violent crime is worse than it actually is.

In a recent study by the Department of Justice of Canada, it was found that Canadians believed that violent crime was seven times as frequent as it actually is. According to a study by the Centre of Criminology of the University of Toronto carried out in 1982, almost 75 per cent of Canadians believed that at least 30 per cent of all crimes were of a violent nature. Actually, Mr. Speaker, only 5.7 per cent fall into that category.

Another erroneous perception of the problem is the following: Two-thirds of Canadians believe that the murder rate in Canada has increased since the death penalty was abolished,