

Capital Punishment

point of view, my own personal point of view. I did not try to put my religious point of view on to anyone else. A sad commentary about religion in the world is that we have had too many wars because of it, and I do not think we need another one on the whole question of capital punishment.

I hope the churches become more vocal. They have a major role to play. Certainly before the debate is over I suspect that they will all make their voices heard loud and clear.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Speaker, I commend the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) for the way in which he presented his opinions to us during this debate. It is a very personal issue. This is a debate on an issue of conscience. Of course, we will be carrying out a free vote. Each of us will be free to follow the dictates of our conscience as we see fit.

I also appreciate the way in which the Hon. Member was very sensitive to the fact that the Christian church is divided on the issue. There are Christians who are good friends and work together on other issues, as do we, but who are divided on the issue of capital punishment. I appreciate the Hon. Member's sensitivity to that and the fact that we are not trying to say necessarily that one person is better or worse than another because of it. We simply differ.

Also the Hon. Member mentioned that one of the responsibilities or obligations of a Christian is to mirror the mercy, compassion, and message of reconciliation of Jesus Christ. I agree with him. However, how do we take the other role which we have as Members of Parliament, that is, to write laws which protect society from the criminal element to the degree we can?

As Christians we could look, for example to Romans Chapter 13, with which I know the Hon. Member is familiar, and the fourth verse which indicates—and I am not quoting it exactly—that the civil authority is the minister or servant of God to act as God's agent, to execute his wrath upon the evil-doer.

We also have that role as Members of Parliament. We have chosen to be here. We have chosen that role. However, how do we bring together those two roles—the role to mirror the message of mercy, compassion, and reconciliation and the role to be His servants or agents to control evil within our society? How does the Hon. Member reconcile those two roles?

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer). He is a very sensitive individual. I know his questions come from a very deep understanding and searching soul in terms of trying to do good for the country.

Of course I have no pat solutions, but I can only comment on the way in which I try to deal with the question. I try to take the issues as they come up and deal with them *vis-à-vis* my own particular belief in how I interpret the Bible, my Christian belief and thoughts which I share and express with a small group of people as I move throughout the days and weeks around this particular institution.

We write laws to protect society. That is part of our job. It is the soul searching that goes into those particular laws with which we must grapple. I know the Hon. Member will agree with me when I say that in trying to be more Christ-like makes decision-making in this place much more difficult than I would have thought say five to eight years ago. It is a difficult process. You take every issue as an individual issue and you try to grapple with it. You fight with it, and you try to come out on the side of what you think is right from your own valued perspective. If you do not, that is when the rubber hits the road. You either stand up and be counted as an individual, or you go along with the group and live to fight another day, as they say. That, once again, is a decision for each of us to make.

● (1240)

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on perhaps one of the most fundamental questions to be studied by this House since I became a Member of Parliament in 1979. In answering the question before the House we will in many ways be explaining and shaping the kind of society we as a nation want to become; what kind of civilization we are in Canada. I believe we would be taking a giant step backward as a nation if we were to reinstate the death penalty in Canada.

I would like to quote the words of Winston Churchill who, in speaking in the British House of Commons many years ago, in 1910, said this:

The mood and temper of the public with regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country. These are the symbols which make and measure the stored up strength of a nation and are sign and proof of the living virtue in it.

A few years ago we in this Parliament adopted a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That Charter provided for the fundamental right to life and the right to be protected against cruel and unusual treatment and punishment. As the former Member for St. John's East, Mr. McGrath, said in speaking on this question:

—does Canada, with its new and enlightened Constitution, want to turn back the clock on progress and be one of the very few democracies to restore capital punishment?

The presence of the former Member for St. John's East is sorely missed in this House, particularly on this fundamental question of what kind of nation we in Canada want to be.

I want to join with my colleague, the Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom), in congratulating the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta), who in 1976 voted in favour of capital punishment as a Conservative Member of Parliament and today had the courage to stand in this House and say that he has examined the issue and is now opposed to capital punishment.

When looking around the House during the very eloquent remarks of the Member for Lisgar I regretfully noted an almost empty Chamber. I know there are still Members of this House whose minds are not made up on the issue, and I can only hope that those Members will take heed of the words of