

Criminal Code

In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord said: "Ye have heard that it hath been said 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also . . ." and, in Mathew 5:17: "I am not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it."

The first murderer was Cain. Did God take his life for having killed his brother? He cursed and banished him, but he marked him so that no one would hit him.

Is it not a basic principle of Christianity that God does not want the death of the sinner but his conversion?

The human being slowly progressed from the cave to the tribe and to society. It also progressed from the club to the stake to hanging. Must it now stop at the rope or the electric chair? Or must it not find a civilized solution in keeping with its level of civilization?

Of course, the abolition of capital punishment must not mean that society will no longer be protected.

In general terms, life imprisonment will have to be substituted for capital punishment.

Our penitentiaries will also have to be completely reformed to give prisoners modern and adequate psychiatric and psychological care in order to rehabilitate them.

It will be necessary to find ways of making prisoners useful and productive so that their work may compensate the state for its expenditure.

Perhaps we should study the possibility of prisoners working outside penitentiaries and contributing to the development of our natural resources in certain parts of the country such as the North, where escape is practically impossible.

If our system of rehabilitation and discharge is sufficiently improved, the day may come when some definitely rehabilitated and repentant criminals will be able to resume normal life and pay their debt to society by their contribution.

I think that a decision in favour of the abolition of capital punishment would be a positive gesture worthy of the high reputation of this house and would provide a magnificent ending to a memorable debate of which we may justly be proud.

[Mr. Dubé.]

• (9:40 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Colin Cameron (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I do not propose to enter into the debate on whether or not capital punishment is a deterrent, beyond pointing out the fact that those in this house who have advanced the idea that capital punishment is no deterrent have been able to bring forward statistical proof, or statistical evidence, shall I say, and sociological studies that appear to bear out their position, while those who are convinced that capital punishment is a deterrent have been completely unable to advance any statistical or sociological studies that would bear out their position.

I think one of our problems in a case like this is the question of what lies at the back of our thinking and attitudes. This is one of the most difficult things for human beings to discover. We have to, as it were, sneak up on ourselves to find out just what makes us behave as we do, just what makes us take the positions that we take; and all of us, of course, have a tendency to rationalize our position and assure ourselves and others that we take this position from at least a logical point of view, and perhaps from considerations of nobility.

I suggest that our attitude toward murder is based on terror and fear, because murder is a fearful and a terrible thing. It drives home to us suddenly the very thin shell of civilization that protects us from violence and a relapse into savagery. As a consequence we have very strong emotional reactions against murder. But I would suggest that fear and terror are poor counsellors.

I have also noticed in the course of this debate a strange confusion between personal, individual indignation and rage and outrage, and public policy. I do not suggest there is anyone here—I would hope there is not—who coming across a murderer in the process of committing his crime would not do his best perhaps to kill that murderer with his bare hands. In some circumstances he certainly would, without any consideration of what led the man to take this step, without any consideration of the various factors involved, but merely immediately to try and destroy that man in rage and fury. However, Mr. Speaker, I submit that is a very different thing from agreeing to have somebody else later, many months later, destroy this life, on our behalf, in cold blood.