

retentionists say that abolitionists are misguided do-gooders. I am sure all of us appreciate the approach hon. members are taking during the debate and the respect that we have for each other's views.

I am opposed to capital punishment for five specific reasons. First, capital punishment is incompatible with my moral and spiritual concepts of reverence for life. Second, capital punishment is not a deterrent. Third, capital punishment presents the awful possibility of putting an innocent man to death. Fourth, capital punishment eliminates the purpose of punishment which is for the person to make amends, reform and rehabilitate. Fifth, capital punishment would be a backward step in the development of our system of justice.

I have said that capital punishment is incompatible with my moral and spiritual concepts of reverence for life. We have developed a system of values regarding human life, human dignity, and human worth, from religious considerations, experiences of others, and our own. The Bible contains five key words: vengeance, justice, mercy, love and forgiveness. In Genesis the Lord said "vengeance is mine", but man said "no", and imposed death for the taking of another life, for adultery, and for the blaspheming of God. Then we find Amos, seeing the poor being ground into poverty, shouting from the hilltops, "Let justice roll down like a mighty river and righteousness like an everlasting stream". We also find Hosea who saw his wife committing adultery and spoke of showing mercy toward others. Finally we find Jesus who thought and demonstrated redemptive love and forgiveness, even in death.

We are in the process of developing a heightened and enlightened awareness of human life, human worth and human dignity, and we must not allow ourselves to return to the dark ages of revenge and retribution. That is why I am proud of the Canadian Council of Churches, which represents many religious persuasions, for giving their leadership and their convictions, and for setting the moral tone in teaching this important subject.

● (2050)

I was rather proud yesterday to hear the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald), a former United Church minister, set a very high tone in this debate and give his reasons which were mighty persuasive.

Sir Edmund Burke has been quoted many times and I think he has the core of the thinking of most of us—that we have a responsibility to our constituents to study the matter of capital punishment, and other social and economic issues, and to exercise our good judgment and our conscience. I am sure most of us are attempting to do so.

The second reason why I am opposed to capital punishment is that it is not a deterrent. If it were a supreme deterrent, murder would have stopped in Biblical times. Surely it would have stopped in the eighteenth century in England where they had 350 capital offences which called for a sentence of hanging. But I am persuaded by the statement of Britain's Royal Commission on Crime in 1952 which stated:

... the general conclusion we have reached is that there is no clear evidence in any of the figures we have examined that the abolition of capital punishment has led to an increase in the homicide rate or that its introduction has led to a fall in homicide rates.

Capital Punishment

This conclusion has been confirmed by the studies of Professor Sellin, and studies in the United Nations. I think they have reached the simple conclusion that the evidence with regard to capital punishment as a deterrent is not clear either way.

I was rather impressed with the opening argument of the hon. member for the Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), leading spokesman in the debate for the Conservative party. He said the reason that most of us do not commit murder is fear of death. If that were so there would not be any murders today. I think the reason that you and I do not commit murder is because of our moral values, because of our spiritual values, because of our social values, because of our fiscal and physical well-being, and because of the exercise of our self-control and self-discipline. These are the main reasons why you and I are deterred from committing murder, Mr. Speaker.

It seems to me that we should be looking at the causes and cures of crime rather than at the penalties. I was very impressed with the evidence given by Professor Cyril Greenland of McMaster University who has studied in depth the problem of violence in our society today, and who made a particular study of criminal violence. After studying approximately 400 persons who had been involved in crimes of violence he came to four conclusions why we have violence today—first, a severe deprivation in social and economic well-being; second, poor housing and unemployment; third, alcohol and drug problems; and fourth, no attention paid when help was sought.

It seems to me that we have to direct our attention and our resources to solving these problems of violence by creating a society where we do not have wide gaps in economic and social well-being but where we have a decent housing scheme, full employment, some control with regard to alcohol and drugs, and where, when attention to a problem is sought, it is given.

The third reason why I am opposed to capital punishment is that it permits the awful possibility of putting an innocent man to death. May I say, once he has been put to death it is irreversible. In fairness, there has been no conclusive evidence in Canada that an innocent person has been put to death. We have had shadows cast in at least three cases I know of, however. One was the Wilbert Coffin case in the Gaspé in 1956, when he was charged with the murder of three American hunters. Before he was put to death he was subjected to six reprieves. There was the Steven Truscott case, with a dissenting judgment by Mr. Justice Emmett Hall of the Supreme Court of Canada who expressed serious doubts with regard to the guilt of Steven Truscott. Now there is the Raymond Cook case in Alberta.

In the United States between 1893 and 1971 there were eight definite cases where innocent persons were put to death. In Great Britain between 1945 and 1968 there were at least three cases. The most dramatic of these was the case of John Christie, who was hanged for the murder of his wife and child on the evidence of his neighbour, Evans, who later admitted to the crime. The bodies were found in Evans' home along with the bodies of five or six other women. That case brought to stark reality the possibility of putting an innocent person to death.