

Capital Punishment

understand and explain that capital punishment is not acceptable. So do all the organizations of social workers. So do most lawyers working with criminals because they know of the fallibility of the trial system. So do all human rights organizations here and throughout the world.

Of course, there are other reasons to reject the death penalty other than that religious communities are against it. I would very rapidly like to cite just a few of them.

First, we know that juries and judges are less likely to convict a person if they know that the consequence is to condemn that person to death. They would hesitate because they would not be completely and totally certain that their decision would be entirely and certainly right. So they might withhold what might normally be a judgment to imprison the person because it looks as if he has committed a crime, and rather than condemn that person, they might dismiss that person if we have capital punishment. One danger of bringing back capital punishment is that there will be a failure to bring about what would normally be a correct conviction.

Second, we know that the tragedy of torturing a prisoner on death row with a verdict of death which is often delayed, sometimes commuted and even reversed by acquittal sometimes on the basis of new evidence, is another reason we should be very strongly hesitating to pass a motion for the return of capital punishment. We also know that the poor are more likely to be executed than are the rich. The visible minorities are more likely to be executed than are others.

Because of these and many other reasons we know that the only use capital punishment serves is to provide a scapegoat and a distraction from dealing with the real problems in our society, in our country and in our world, problems that are crying out for difficult and soul-searching solutions.

As one who is working in the field of human rights, I want to remind Hon. Members as effectively as I can that only in nations such as the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and certain other non-democratic African and Asian countries does the death penalty still survive. The one anomaly in democratic countries is the United States where some states still have capital punishment.

Because the death penalty is still used for purposes in the world other than murder in those nations, such as theft, adultery, black marketing and disagreeing with the government, every effort is being made, with some success, by human rights organizations and by the United Nations to eradicate the death penalty. Canada's example until now has been salutary and most helpful.

In the name of God and for the credibility of human rights abroad as well as at home, let us vote against capital punishment. Let us strengthen Canada's hand in bringing justice to other countries, rededicating ourselves to dealing with the real issues that lead to violence and murder.

Jesus Christ taught: "You have heard that it hath been said 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' but I say unto you

that you resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also". Saint Paul said: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord'."

• (1940)

To my fellow Christians I say, please look upon the face of a man who was charged, properly and legally tried, and executed; look at the face of Jesus and look at the Cross; think of what it might mean if you vote for capital punishment because He from the Cross asks us, as we risk again and again the execution of an innocent person, "Would you crucify me again because inasmuch as you do it unto the least of these my brethren you do it unto me".

I would maintain that the only excuse for taking a life is self-defence for oneself or on behalf of others about to be killed. That is the usual justification for war—self-defence on behalf of one's nation or of others in another nation.

It seems strange to me that some who would advocate capital punishment would demand of our soldiers a higher discipline during war than they would of themselves in our country in peacetime.

For this reason I should like to conclude by reading part of a letter written by a 53-year old Dutch Canadian, living in Guelph, Ontario, whose name is H. J. Dyckman. Mr. Dyckman recounts September of 1949 when the Netherlands was liberated and says:

I was 11 years old when Canadian infantry men stormed the house I lived in on April 4, 1945, after a three day battle. It has been a tremendous pleasure for me over the last two years to locate, to meet with and to talk to those members of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders Regiment, who liberated us. Sharing stories has brought us close. I have gained a much better picture of the life of a foot soldier in war time through them. How much they suffered!

One of the hardest things for the men who had to deal with the enemy face to face was to accept that as soon as a Nazi soldier dropped his rifle and raised his hands, he had to be spared, no matter what had happened minutes or even seconds before that. No soldier was allowed to shoot or torture a prisoner of war, an unarmed man, no matter how cruel an enemy he had been.

I was told of an infantry man being spat in the face by a young Nazi fanatic. I was told of a soldier taking captive a gun crew, which had just blown up his own brother.

Even in times of war, in such horrendous times of anger and pain, the law was strict: no unarmed man was to be killed! How strange, now, in peacetime, it might happen again, sanctioned by the law. Something is going wrong.

Canadians fought and died, that democracy might be maintained and civilization restored in the Netherlands, in Canada, in the world. Are we remembering our soldiers well, if we return to the practice of deliberately killing defenceless human beings, in the name of justice?

"But those people are not human beings", I hear some people say. "They are monsters, to kill them is justice".

I do believe I understand the rage we all feel when monstrous atrocities are committed. It is that helpless, powerless rage we experience when confronted with a senseless and brutal act of violence. As a child I lived in a nation that was ruled by monsters. Yet I am firmly convinced that it is not justice, to put such a so-called monster to death because by doing that I would commit a senseless and brutal act and I would become a monster also.