

Capital Punishment

personal feelings, and in making them I shall try not to be judgmental of others.

In considering this issue on religious grounds, one has to make certain assumptions, the first being that one believes in the Bible and in the significance of the life of Jesus Christ. If one believes in the Bible and in Jesus Christ, one should consider the issue of capital punishment in the light of the message of Jesus Christ, namely, the message of love.

Normally if one looks up to someone, one tries to imitate the life of that individual. In the case of Jesus Christ, of course, that is an impossibility. One could not even come close to imitating the life of Jesus Christ. However, one should do one's best to try to imitate the life of the individual to whom one looks up to. To do that, one needs to learn as much as one can about the life of that particular person. In the case of Jesus Christ, we read the Bible. An individual then, in one's own life, tries to show as much love, compassion and understanding in caring for one's fellow human beings as possible.

Of course, as I have already mentioned, in the case of trying to imitate the life of Jesus Christ, we will never succeed, nor do I think we were ever meant to succeed; but perhaps through studying His life, and our reflecting on His life and His character, we may be able to stretch ourselves toward His aims. By striving to imitate Him, we will become better human beings.

A good example of what can be achieved by imitating the life of Jesus Christ is the work and life of Mother Theresa.

In any event, if the life and message of Jesus Christ is the basis upon which one bases one's thoughts, then one has to ask how Jesus Christ would have dealt with this particular issue, or any other issue, and specifically how He would have voted were He here in Parliament casting a vote on capital punishment.

I believe that Jesus saw some good in every human being. It was His belief that every person had the potential to be rehabilitated, and had the right to be loved and to be cared for. No matter what a person had done, He would not wish to give up on them and simply turn them over to the state to be executed.

While there are passages in the Bible that seem to support the use of the death penalty, they are, in my opinion, at odds with the over-all emphasis on the sanctity of life that is expressed in the Bible. The message in the Bible is one of redemption, one of forgiveness. It is not one of vengeance.

The issue of capital punishment is, for me, a deeply moral and religious one. I could not vote in favour of capital punishment. Were I to do so, I could not live with myself and my beliefs.

The third argument against capital punishment is the ever-present possibility of a mistake being made. In our legal system, human error is inevitable. We all know that. While we may not want to admit it, we know that mistakes are inevitable. Usually a mistake made as part of the judicial process

can be revoked completely or in part. That is not so when an innocent person has been executed.

We can all name names and quote the well-known stories that serve to illustrate that particular point.

Capital punishment, being ultimate, being final, being irrevocable, is different from all other penalties. The death penalty has been set aside in nearly all of the forward-thinking countries of the world. Canada would be taking a step backwards if it were to reinstate capital punishment.

For all of the reasons I have enunciated, Mr. Speaker, I shall be voting against the resolution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member for Erie (Mr. Fretz), on a question or comment.

Mr. Fretz: Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the contribution of the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta), for whom I have the utmost respect. On this issue, however, we do part company.

I wish to first make a comment, and then pose a couple of questions to the Hon. Member.

While attending a meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General this morning on behalf of another Member, I heard a statement made by the Commissioner of the Correctional Services of Canada to the effect that the protection of society is our primary objective. I wish to draw that statement to the Hon. Member's attention this morning; that is, that the protection of society is our primary objective in considering the correctional services of Canada.

If I recall correctly, the Hon. Member made the assertion in his remarks that capital punishment constitutes an act of violence, and he went on to question whether governments, in imposing capital punishment, are acting morally right or morally correct.

With that background, I should like to pose two questions to the Hon. Member.

First of all, does the Hon. Member believe that peace officers have a responsibility to protect our citizens, to protect society; and if so, I would ask him to outline for me why it is our peace officers carry firearms and the circumstances under which a peace officer would discharge a firearm in the line of duty?

And secondly, does he believe that governments have the right to protect their citizens with the use of armed forces, and do the members of our Armed Forces, acting for us, have the moral imperative to use weapons; and if so, under what circumstances?

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Erie (Mr. Fretz) has asked whether governments have a duty to use weapons to protect society, and by that I take him to mean the armed forces of a country—and of course, I agree that they do.

I do not really draw the parallel between that and the issue of the death penalty. I do not see how the protection of society