

*Abortion*

Canadians. There is definitely a lack of consensus supporting any major change in abortion law. Because of the opposing views held by many Canadians, I believe that it would be premature to bring forth such an amendment.

I would like to spend a few moments putting forward my reasons on this very sensitive and divisive issue. A therapeutic abortion is a matter of fundamental concern since it involves human life. Attitudes to human life inevitably affect all society and each of us individually. Some consider that this is one of the many changes in social attitude and must be considered dispassionately. However, many of us stand firmly against abortion; but we must remember to be charitable in our attitudes to those who hold opposing views. All too often we see deep divisions develop, particularly in areas that involve controversy, and we become rather hostile toward those who have differing views. A free discussion rather than polarization of opinions would seem to be the preferred approach.

Consideration of the matter of abortion can be made from differing aspects including moral, legal, and medical aspects. I wish to touch on some of the points in the area of morals. From the moral standpoint, I feel that since a human conceptus is a human being from the moment of conception, it should receive the same respect as any other human being. Therefore, direct therapeutic abortion which removes it from its environment and therefore causes its death should not be contemplated except for the most serious reason.

That reason was stated a few moments ago by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Belsher) when he stated that only in the event of the death of the mother could one even consider an abortion. I would certainly support that position.

The conceptus contains all the genetic material which will constitute his or her person to the end of his or her days from the very moment of formation, that is, when the sperm unites with the ovum. He then has the indelible imprint of his individuality with the determination of such things as his skin and eye colour, approximate height and body build, ability in athletics and intellectual pursuits. He is a human being with potential from the moment of conception. He is not simply a potential human being, as some would lead us to believe.

During this discussion regarding the time of the actual beginning of human life, we consider the newborn baby to be human and by his nature have all the rights of a human person. Similarly, just before delivery the foetus, or the unborn baby, which is not essentially changed by the process of delivery, really has all the same rights to life. As we trace the development of that foetus day by day back to the time of its conception, there is no time at which we can say that today he is a human, yesterday he was not. Therefore, complete respect for his life must be maintained at all times.

• (1740)

Some would say that true human life does not begin before the time of implantation in the uterus, about six days after

conception. Others would say that it cannot be said to exist until the possibility of twinning has passed which may occur until as late as day 20. These matters may be settled in the future, but possibly no definite decision will ever be made. Regardless of this decision, the point remains that abortions which are covered by the law, are performed at a much later date, and almost certainly are dealing with human life in the form of the conceptus. It is an accepted scientific fact that the conceptus is human with its unique genetic structure and is living as a distinct individual. Understanding this fact is fundamental to the whole discussion.

We have heard a good deal during the debate today and also in the unending debate that goes on regarding abortion concerning the pro-choice and the freedom of choice which individuals must have. With choice and with freedom comes responsibility. Any time that we are in any way diminishing that respect for life, and it certainly is done through abortions, then we, as a human race, are losing something.

Respect for life is one of the cornerstones of our civilization. Any assaults on humans who are already born result in severe penalties on the perpetrators. Yet many in our society condone the barbaric acts inflicted on unborn human beings. I invite anyone who doubts this to view some of the films that are available today—I will not go into naming them—dealing with abortion and watch the horror of abortion recorded in living colour. If a person can watch that film and maintain that there is no human being involved, then I think that person's mind is already closed to the facts. We cannot have a double standard. Either life is accepted as sacred for all society or society runs the risk of cheapening the value of human life.

There are some other very interesting arguments that have been brought forward. I would like to refer directly to some information made available from the Surgeon-General in the United States dealing with the post-abortion syndrome in that country. For years it has been thought that the unborn child was the only victim of abortion. We are finding out now from recent studies released that women who have abortions are also victims. There is an increasing body of evidence that now shows the post-abortion syndrome is fast becoming the most serious mental health issue facing women. The symptoms of post-abortion syndrome include denial, anger, guilt and depression. These problems in turn can lead to substance abuse, sexual dysfunction, relationship dysfunction and a general decrease in coping skills. Research has shown that up to 82 per cent of American women suffer from acute symptoms of post-abortion syndrome for up to three years following the abortion. Latent symptoms can manifest themselves five to 10 years following the abortion.

The Surgeon-General of the United States has recently authorized a study of post-abortion syndrome in the U.S. In Britain, the effects of abortion on women will be studied by a bipartisan Conservative-Labour committee. This is a new area about which we are only beginning to hear and it is one with which we must deal.