

Criminal Code

(b) substituting a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment in those cases where the death penalty is now mandatory; and

(c) providing that no person upon whom a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment is imposed shall be released from imprisonment without the prior approval of the governor in council.

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, as we resume consideration of the motion concerning the abolition of capital punishment, I want to say that it is an honour and privilege to take part in this debate. The question of capital punishment has been brought to the attention of the nation as never before, and as a result the eyes of Canadians across the nation are focussed on this debate.

It is no light matter for any one of us to be part of a decision which involves the lives of other human beings. Life moves forward constantly, and with it progress. The famous Danish critic, Kierkegaard said "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

● (3:20 p.m.)

Therefore we must seek to learn from the past in order that we may live safely and justly in the future. The spirit of the times is for change. Change is imperative if we would survive. The pattern of living things is for change. However, acknowledging that, I do not believe it means that we should reject those basic moral principles which have been the warp and woof of our heritage. I believe it is our duty to be progressive enough to understand the inevitability of change but conservative enough to accept the need for the continuity of basic principles particularly as they relate to fixed values and standards.

The question of capital punishment is one which arouses emotion in each of us. I am grateful for this non-partisan debate on the basis of personal conviction. I believe it has been of a very high standard and a credit to the house. Abolitionists and retentionists both claim evidence to support their arguments. Conflicting evidence confuses the picture. In my opinion the reason there is no convincing evidence on the subject is that it is difficult to measure man's mind. Therefore what we say is basically for the record as we explain the reason for our personal votes.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but conversations are taking place in the chamber which make it very difficult to follow the hon. member.

Mr. Thompson: Before proceeding further with the reasons for my own stand I must

state that I cannot support the motion before us because I am convinced that it would be wrong to abolish the death penalty completely. It is interesting to note that while this motion would provide, if passed, for the abolition of the death penalty under the Criminal Code, it does not have this effect with regard to the death penalty as provided in other statutes. I am thinking specifically of the National Defence Act, sections 66,67,68,69, 70 and 71. It is a fact that section 66 of the National Defence Act makes the death penalty mandatory for certain offences against the state.

I cannot accept the statement repeated by several in this debate that to retain the death penalty is to cling to a hangover from the barbaric past. In my Christian faith I believe that human life is most sacred. Man was created in the image of God. In the commandments of Moses I am told by God not to kill. When others in my society accept this command with me, then I have personal safety of life as do my family and neighbours.

The sanctity of human life cannot be questioned. Christ has told us to love our neighbours. Murder, the taking of life, is not to be condoned. It is therefore the continuing responsibility of the Christian to interpret to those about us that every human being must have as his basic right not only justice before the law but also our personal understanding, respect and concern because he, like me, is a human being and our brother under one God, Creator of us all.

However, in determining my own stand on the question of abolition versus retention I cannot rely entirely on my own judgment. There are still those old-fashioned enough, and I am one of them, who believe that God has provided in His Word guidance to meet every problem which may confront us. In James 1:5 we read:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

To me, at the root of every question the Scriptures must be our final authority, not my opinion or someone else's. It is not the reasoning of one who differs with me which must be my final guide. It is not the norm of what is considered the lowest common denominator of custom or current practice. It is not even what the church itself teaches, for again it is the Bible, not the church, which is the final authority. In my understanding of Scripture I find that capital punishment was