

*Abortion*

What is going to happen to whatever comes out of this deliberation? If this resolution is passed, what will happen to it? Is the Government going to introduce legislation before the end of this Parliament? I do not think there is anyone in this country who seriously believes that there will not be an election before this matter is resolved. Therefore, why bother?

The only appropriate action for which the Government had plenty of time was to introduce legislation, to take responsibility, to take the knocks of having acted as a Government should, and bring forth legislation which could be discussed in detail and which would provide Canadians with an understanding of where they stood. Most important, the Government should have attempted to reconcile the divergent views in this country which must be reconciled.

We have basically two quite polarized, divergent positions on abortion which have been clearly identified in debate. There is, on the one hand, the pro-life position and, on the other, the pro-choice position. The Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) indicated that virtually all Canadians are on one side or the other and, indeed, must be on one side or the other.

His experience indicates that that is so. My experience indicates the contrary. My experience indicates that the great majority of Canadians would like to see a position somewhere in between those two extremes, because they are extremes.

As I have said before, this matter divides Canadians on the basis of deeply held religious and philosophical convictions. Our task is to resolve this problem, to produce legislation which is permissive, and to produce legislation which does not compel anyone to act counter to their religious or philosophical beliefs.

Let us examine those two sets of beliefs. On the one hand we have the pro-life position, most clearly, but not exclusively, articulated by the Catholic Church. It is beautiful in its consistency and not open to attack, and I am not here to attack it. That position is that we have, at every period of gestation, from the moment of conception, a human life itself.

That position argues that there really is no distinction between the potential for human life and human life. That is not a position which St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Aristotle, or even the Catholic Church until a little over 100 years ago, accepted. It was clear to the philosophers in that church, and to others, that there was a biological distinction to be made between an embryo, an early foetus, and a fully developed human being. Separate from such considerations, as an almost life-long biologist, I am convinced, because the evidence is clear, that there is a distinction between an embryo and an infant that has the characteristics of a human being defined by St. Thomas Aquinas as a rational being, a being which can exist independently and is capable of thought.

However, that is the position of the pro-lifers, that life in its potential is equivalent to human life and that its consistency extends, not only to the point of conception but beyond

because it accords to the egg and the sperm equivalent respect. That is the basis for opposition to artificial methods of birth control. This is a belief deeply held by many Canadians and they are offended, as their beliefs would have them be offended, by any attack on that which they define as human life.

On the other hand, we have those who represent the pro-choice position. They are conscious of the many instances in which women have been driven to have abortions and the very many situations in which such abortions are justified, and cognizant of the imposition, mainly by males, upon the abilities of women to make decisions. This is the position which has been described as abortion on demand. It has been interpreted far too much on the basis that that kind of position means the trivialization of life.

I have difficulty with the pure pro-choice point of view when it is expressed exclusively in terms of the need of a woman to have complete control over her body. Surely it is possible to argue that in certain circumstances and over a period of time during gestation that can be true, as the Supreme Court at least recognized in terms of the judgment of Justice Bertha Wilson who pointed out that there ought to be increasing restrictions depending upon the stages of development. What is offensive to me in the free-choice position, justified exclusively on the basis of a woman's control of her own body, is that the question of reproduction is not simply a question of the decision of an individual at all stages. It cannot be.

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Reproduction of humankind is not just a question for the individual; it is a question for humanity. As Justice Wilson recognized, it must include some consideration of the interest of society in general as it is expressed by the state. Therefore, neither position is acceptable to me.

However, a rational position can be taken and it is, at least in some measure, recognized in this resolution as it was in the judgment of Justice Bertha Wilson. It is to recognize that as development occurs, certainly in the early stages it is appropriate that the decision to abort a foetus be made between a woman and her doctor. It is not abortion on demand; it is abortion on the basis of choice, with full consideration of the health of the woman in consultation with appropriate medical practitioners. That is as it should be during the early period.

Surely it ought to be evident to all that in the later stages of pregnancy there is a fully viable human being, an entity that would be fully viable if born at that stage. Recently, one of my assistants gave birth prematurely to an infant at six and one-half months. Surely it must be clear at that stage that we are dealing with something other than the abortion of a foetus, other than the termination of a pregnancy that does not entail larger values and considerations than abortion normally would in the context of the appropriateness of freedom of choice.