

Capital Punishment

● (1250)

I have attempted to establish a communality among writers from the Christian and non-Christian perspectives in relation to the duties and functions of government, and I have attempted to show that under the law of Moses it was the function and the duty of the state to carry out the capital sentence in violation of the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. Furthermore, I have attempted to show, by relating that to the New Testament doctrine, Romans 13, that it is not inconsistent with the New Testament in relation to the duties and functions of government to maintain civil order. Because if, in fact, the primary function of the government is to maintain law and order, to prosecute evil and to uphold righteousness and justice, and if capital punishment is a moral question, then we must look at the consistency of the scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments. We cannot deny what is written in Romans, chapter 13, in view of the fact that it is certainly not inconsistent with the Old Testament teachings and the fact that the sixth commandment predated the Hebrew law from which Christ freed us.

So I suppose that the quality of government or civilization has historically been judged by what we do with the poor, the dispossessed and the defenceless. The question is whether their life is worth as much as the lives of those who can find recourse in protection or retribution. I cannot but conclude that the principle of government applies to all and not just to policemen and prison guards. I suggest that justice dictates that the capital sentence must be applied to all those found guilty of premeditated murder or paid murder.

Furthermore, I believe it is sound statesmanship that in considering capital punishment we take into account the concrete reality of today. We must take into account the lifestyles of the people. There is no such thing as static legislation for all times. We must look at the reality of the mandate of the people. What is the real situation confronting the government and the real situation of Canadians today? From the theological point of view, sin abounds, there is lawlessness, murder, rape and wrongdoing of all kinds. That is the reality. Generally, it appears that the will of the people is that the government get tough, a term that is often used here. People want protection against those who would destroy, plunder and murder without regard for the rights, property or life of others.

People are fed-up with the overemphasis on the rights of the convicted. I would point to the remarks made by my colleague, the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Friesen), with reference to the fact that there is overemphasis today on the rights of the convicted as opposed to the responsibilities of the government to the victims. I believe it is irresponsible on the part of the government to disregard those who are victimized. Governments are only addressing themselves to the rights of the convicted. However, the fact must be recognized that those who feel as I do do not lack compassion or love. We have a yearning for justice, as do others; but we simply place our emphasis not only on those who have been victimized, but also on those who are the potential victims, which by and large is the rest of the body politic.

I reject the views of the environmentalists and behaviourists such as B.F. Skinner, who recognize no human

[Mr. Whiteway.]

responsibility and who reduce all human action as the mere product of previous experience. They suggest that all that it takes to rehabilitate a person is to modify his behaviour and that, in a sense, it is society that is wrong, not the individual who transgresses the law. I reject that approach which disregards human responsibility. I believe in the biblical position that we are created in the image of God and with the knowledge of good and evil, and that we have the choice to do right or wrong. Because this is a moral question, to discuss capital punishment apart from morality is to miss the point entirely. How should the government react, in light of the reality and the will of the people and in light of the biblical mandate in Romans 13?

Mr. Speaker, the adjournment time is approaching, but I ask for the indulgence of the House to allow me to complete my remarks in a couple of minutes.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Whiteway: In conclusion, I should like to quote briefly as follows:

The state is clothed with power for the sake of justice. Through God's preserving care the law for created life is still known to us even after the Fall (Romans I and II). In virtue of God's unchangeable Counsel that law has never been revoked. Everything is under the obligating force of the law, and nothing is indifferent. To wish to gain knowledge from the scriptures about the law is not arbitrarily to have the living, divine word at one's command; it is simply the obedience of faith. It is true that the will of God is infinitely wider and deeper than what has been revealed to us, but God's veracity guarantees to us that the revelation permitted us regarding it is trustworthy. When one places love higher than justice one contradicts the Cross of Golgotha where the Lord revealed his love and his justice. Zion is redeemed through justice. It is not even permissible to imagine a tension or opposition between love and justice in God. That would be in conflict with the simplicity of his being. In God love and justice are one. In our time-conditioned (temporal) existence, however, life branches out from the concentrated religious fullness of meaning of the love of Christ into distinct streams in its temporal orders or modes (ways) of being. Thus there is an order for the exercise of justice and also an order for the love of the neighbour. No true love toward our neighbour however is possible without justice (Ps.85:9-13). He who asserts that the maintaining of justice by the government is of a lower order than the love of the neighbour forgets that it is exactly through the existence of justice in society that the love of the neighbour can flourish. In a chaos of injustice and violence the love of the neighbour will be choked to death.

Mr. Speaker, as I live, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way of life, as stated in Ezek 33:11. I want to see a Canada where our people are free from the terror of those who would violate the very freedoms they espouse in their own defence. I want to be part of a government that recognizes and acts upon the will of the people and its Biblical mandate. The very stones cry out for justice. We must maintain and re-establish the death penalty. We must strive for consistency with New Testament Biblical concepts. We have not the liberty to do otherwise.

[Translation]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the special order passed by the House on Monday June 7, it being one o'clock, I do now leave the Chair until the House resumes its proceedings at two o'clock.

At one o'clock, the House took recess.