

Capital Punishment

degree murder rate up 29 per cent since 1967 and up two and a half times since 1962, the last year of any executions in Canada, while the total population has increased by only 11 per cent. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, the annual incidence of crimes of violence rose by 498 per cent since 1962. Over the same period of time, the annual incidence of attempted murder rose from 83 to 890, an increase of 1,012 per cent. Additionally, according to Metropolitan Toronto Police Officer, Staff Sergeant Frank Craddock, the murders he has investigated since 1982 were the most violent and vicious he had ever seen. Recent evidence also suggests that the number of victims who are total strangers to the murderer is on the rise.

Therefore, I support capital punishment as one means of restoring harmony within society and in order to re-establish respect for life, by requiring the life of the murderer who ignored the sanctity of life.

● (1340)

My conviction is based upon the assumption that society has the God given responsibility to protect the sanctity of life, to establish clear boundaries for human behaviour, and to maintain justice, peace, law and order.

Historically, Mr. Speaker, we have portrayed justice as a blindfolded lady, seated and holding a pair of balance scales in exact equilibrium. Premeditated murder does violence to that equilibrium, throwing it off balance. The death penalty restores that equilibrium and offers society the assurance, at least to a degree, that harmony and balance will be restored.

I shall vote in favour of the resolution because there are occasions when capital punishment is the only just response to the premeditated murder of another human being.

Permit me to conclude, Mr. Speaker, with a quotation from Carl F. Henry's book entitled *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society*, at page 134, as follows:

Legislation that professes to be humanitarian while it lightens the seriousness of criminal offenses is a service neither to God nor to man. The primary purpose of punishment is not the reform of the offender but the vindication of the right and the peace and safety of society. A society that finds no basis for capital punishment retains only a shadow of biblical sensitivities to the worth of human life and readily elevates the value of the survival of criminals above that of their victims.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ferland: Mr. Speaker, my colleague the Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer) has mentioned the Bible, and he relies heavily on the Holy Scriptures to justify his arguments in favour of capital punishment. Let me read for him this statement of the Canadian Episcopate. "We feel that it is improper to use biblical quotations, especially from the Old Testament, as justifications for upholding the death penalty. Those biblical texts, which support death penalty, should be considered against the background of historical conditions when they were written. They cannot be transposed literally to the present situation in Canada". This quotation, Mr.

Speaker, is taken from the Bishop's Council, volume 6, no. 3, page 67, dated February 26 1973.

My Hon. colleague for Kitchener mentioned the Marshall case, and we say: The Marshall case has nothing to do with it. In that case, whether he was condemned for second or first degree murder, there was a miscarriage of justice. Justice is not infallible. What he implies is that because it is a first degree murder, we will always be assured that no mistake is to be made in sentencing the individual because the judges handing the sentence as well as the jurors in the case will be infallible and because he himself is infallible in deciding in this House that no mistake could possibly be made.

I would like to have his views on these words written by Victor Hugo, and I quote: "Three things belong to God and not to man: the irrevocable, the irreparable, and the indissoluble". Irreparable punishment implies an infallible judge. And I would like to know if my hon. colleague agrees with me that for a judge to be able to sentence a human being, however dreadful his crime, whether he agrees with me that that individual, that judge, that jury have to be infallible.

[*English*]

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to try to respond, through you, to my colleague's questions.

The first point he makes is that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has made the statement that, during the course of this debate, we should not be making as much reference to the Old Testament as we are.

If my colleague will check the notes of my speech later, he will find that my references to the Old Testament comprise only about ten lines, with my references to the New Testament comprising about two pages.

So, I submit that I have not over-emphasized the Old Testament.

The Hon. Member went on to speak of the administration of justice and the possibility of error. I agree that there is the possibility of error. We are fallible human beings. I accept that possibility of error. However, I make the point that we have to look at what might cause an error. Some of the cause of the problem is in the administration of justice. That is something that we have to work at improving. We always have, and we always will.

That is one of the responses. It is a problem more for the administration of justice as opposed to what the penalty should or should not be.

I readily agree that there is the possibility of error; but, I point out that since Confederation there is no record of any innocent Canadian ever being executed for first-degree murder. So, thus far we have had no such error, though I do admit that the possibility exists. The need to uphold the sanctity of life demands that the option of capital punishment be available. With all of the safeguards built into the system, it is something that I would support.