

Right of Life

by everybody that what we are really talking about is a question of whether we, as the Parliament of Canada, wish to see changes in the abortion law.

I suggest that a resolution that on the one hand would, if amended, refer to the right of the unborn human being to life, liberty and security, and then on the other hand say that you cannot take that away except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice, would create enormous contradictions. What about the rights of the woman who bears the child, who is also a human being with 20, 25, 35 years of life on this planet, and who maybe has to consider her obligations to earn a living, or to other children already born, or to a deformed or crippled child whom she is devoting a great deal of energy to maintaining here on this planet?

I feel that the injection of this word would further complicate a resolution which in the first place I find complex and rather difficult to accept. Therefore, I conclude by asking in a very serious way the Hon. Member to stand up and withdraw his amendment. I am sure he would be allowed to do that on a point of order and with the consent of his seconder, and to indicate that he would perhaps like that to be proposed as an amendment in committee, and that it is the intention of the Hon. Member for Grey—Simcoe to propose such an amendment, if this matter goes to committee, but not to confound and confuse the debate on this difficult and sensitive issue in the House of Commons by having further debate on this particular amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): We are debating on the amendment. Is the Hon. Member for Erie (Mr. Fretz) ready to debate on the amendment?

Mr. Girve Fretz (Erie): Madam Speaker, I am certainly pleased to speak today to the amendment to the motion that was put forth by my colleagues from Grey—Simcoe and Peterborough. I want to draw to the attention of the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) that I understand the Bill would not go to committee.

• (1740)

I welcome this opportunity because it brings to the foreground an especially sad and complex issue. It is an issue that should stir and upset the conscience of every male or female who would ever think of taking away a life, with never a chance to live.

I want to backtrack a moment and speak briefly about the history of legalized abortion. In 1969 parliamentarians were dealing with the idea of competing rights, the rights of what were thought to be only a clump of cells versus the rights of a woman. Some parliamentarians at that time thought they were being asked to legalize what was already taking place in the hospitals, in other words, to make legal a few hundred abortions a year for serious medical reasons.

Are we prepared to recognize that our laws must accord intrinsic worth and equal value to the life of every human

being, regardless of its stage of development or condition? It is surely a specious argument to say that a foetus in any stage of development is not a person. What then is it? Science is slowly but inevitably providing the evidence to support the long held view of many people today that the separate identity and unique humanity of the foetus can only lead us to the conclusion that any foetus is a little human being who, given half a chance to grow and prosper, will some day be an adult dressed as you and I in this chamber today.

I have always believed that the humanness of the unborn child is the key issue in the abortion question. Instead of a few hundreds abortions to save the lives of women, we have the shame of our present day and age with 70,000 to 80,000 abortions a year, done for the sake of convenience in our local hospitals.

As a parliamentarian I am deeply disturbed, disappointed and distressed that compassionate people in just about every walk of life today turn a blind eye to the rights of the unborn. The Charter of Rights states that everyone has the right to life, to liberty, the right to security of the person, and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

I mentioned in a speech a number of years ago in the House that if the development of the treatment of babies in the womb moved further into the earlier stages of pregnancy, the argument over the point at which the foetus becomes human would diminish in relevancy. I believe my thoughts have to be substantiated. With foetal treatment already taking place in the fourth month of gestation, we have moved back beyond the point at which even very recently the supporters of abortion had argued that the foetus could not be considered human. Except in situations which are clearly life threatening to the mother, the taking of the life of the unborn child will be increasingly difficult to justify, regardless of the stage of development.

Medical research has now revealed that despite the fact that most pregnancies are not detected until the sixth week, even by then the baby's heart has been beating for three weeks and brain waves can be read, the nervous system has been complete, and he or she is about to begin moving although the mother will not feel it for three and a half months more.

Recently, in the middle of October, I read of a procedure that allowed surgery to be performed on a foetus outside its mother's body. The baby, Michael, had a birth defect. He would have died without this operation. A team of surgeons successfully operated to correct a blocked urinary tract and then returned him to the uterus and sewed up the womb.

At the time of the operation, the foetus was only 23 weeks old, just under six months. Certainly it was a living being then and happily a living being now.

What further medical advances await us? I stated that the conscience of all must be alerted to those who disrespect and hold little value for life. I am particularly appalled at the