

### *Capital Punishment*

weigh upon my conscience as it must surely weigh upon the conscience of the Prime Minister.

Closure has now been introduced, depriving a large number of Members of this House the opportunity to speak their views on the question of capital punishment. As I do so I will not go the route of an extensive citation or exegesis of scripture, or I hope too extensive a quotation from other authorities.

● (1350)

Virtually every authority that I am familiar with has been cited already, and been cited by people who have a better knowledge, a better understanding, and a better ability to present those authorities than I do.

I should not pretend to be profoundly acquainted with the scriptures, and certainly not as profoundly as one who proclaims a Christian faith should be; nor should I claim that I am aware of the other non-Christian authorities on the subject. But, I shall hinge my argument on four quotations from scripture that speak powerfully to me in judging this question. They are, an eye for an eye, thou shalt not kill, vengeance is mine saith the Lord, and, behold, I give you a new law.

It is no accident, Madam Speaker, that *ojo por ojo*, an eye for an eye, is the name of the most dreaded death squad in El Salvador, because that is the law of vengeance.

Those who cite the New Testament in support of their argument cannot overcome the authority of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" no matter how hard they try, because there are no qualifiers; there is nothing appended or added to that commandment. It says, and it says simply, "Thou shalt not kill."

"Vengeance is mine", saith the Lord, and that places in the status of blasphemer everybody who would abrogate unto themselves, or unto any organization in which they may take part, the ability to exercise vengeance.

And finally, the words of the Saviour, "Behold, I give you a new law", and indeed he did, and that law was to love.

The significance of the Bible usage and citation on the pro side of this question, I think, is unarguable. They depend far too heavily on the Old Testament over the New Testament, and they can produce only the most tangential relevance and connection between any words of the Saviour and the position that they seek to propound in this debate. They use scripture, as it was once said a drunk uses a lamp-post, not for illumination, but for support. They use scripture, citing always the authority, but not touching or yielding to the inspiration, which is after all the central difference between Christian scriptures and the scriptures of other religions. The significant difference is that the Bible is not merely a codification of the rules under which we should live, but an inspiration above all; it is a source of inspiration for those who believe, and the aspect of authority is, I believe, undeniably secondary.

Some people have said, Madam Speaker, that elected representatives are duty-bound to support measures such as the reintroduction of state killing because the majority of Canadians appears to favour it. To me, it is not the role of the Member of Parliament to become merely a mechanical device for producing, regurgitating, and onward transmission of the views of constituents. I know, and I know full well, that such a system would repel and would deter three-quarters of the Hon. Members of this House from taking up a duty under conditions which they could not exercise the moral judgment that they possess as free beings.

I believe, of course, that it is my duty to seriously consider the representations of all of my constituents, but they must be honoured in a way that reflects not only their need to be heard but the fact that they elected me to judge, to apply my own conscience, to weigh in the balance the arguments, and to make decisions.

Our country is a representative democracy. It is not a direct democracy like an early New England village or ancient Greek town, where, of course, slaves and women were excluded from consideration. While the ordinary citizen in a representative democracy may in some way feel disenfranchised on some issues, in a direct democracy they are completely at the mercy of those who put the question. Plebiscites and referenda are the traditional tools of the demagogue, the tyrant, and the skilled authoritarian, and they have no place in our parliamentary system.

In the 1979, 1980 and 1984 election campaigns, I—and the same is true of the gentleman I replaced—consistently stated my opposition to capital punishment. Even though some of my constituents may disagree with my stand on this issue, I believe they expect, above all, that I will be true to the positions I adopted during those election campaigns.

The power of this debate is such, Madam Speaker, that during its course, and before it got started, we have seen a gradual shift, not only in the mood of the Members of this House, but in the country. We have seen support for capital punishment slipping away. The surveys, one after the other, of Members of Parliament have consistently shown an increase in the forces of support for abolition and a decrease in those who seek to kill.

Capital punishment, as an act of revenge, is morally unjustifiable. All of Canada's major churches have spoken out against it. Theologians, who after all are the most expert interpreters of scriptural authorities, are almost unanimously against it.

Our justice system cannot be based on a simple retributive equity, measure for measure. We do not steal from thieves; we do not rape rapists. I do not believe that vengeance can play any part in a civilized system of criminal justice. The compassion of those who have seen their own relatives victimized by murder and who yet speak out against capital punishment cries out to be honoured in the record of this nation.