

Sex Slavery: What Would Abraham Lincoln Do?

Whenever I read such things as “Why the Founding Fathers Wouldn’t Have Been Anti-Vaxxers,” I cringe a bit. Not only are these rather desperate speculations, but they are supercilious: We know the things the Founders were for and against, and to infer from their stated convictions and known actions their allegiance to or antipathy toward a contemporary political issue trivializes these remarkable men and the causes for which they fought and, in some cases, died.

So, on this 150th anniversary of the death of Abraham Lincoln, we should be loath to claim this greatest of all Americans for causes near and dear to our own hearts. Lincoln, the tax-cutter; Lincoln, the defense hawk; Lincoln, the champion of litigation reform—these and a hundred other tinny appellations clank against the edifice of historical integrity.

And yet: How can we not assume that someone whose life became a testament to the fight for human dignity and the liberty attendant to it would be an active opponent of the trafficking of persons in our time? The man who wrote in 1864, “If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think, and feel,” surely would have been appalled by and actively opposed to the forcible commercialization of some human beings for the sexual and often perverse pleasure of others.

Attorney J. Robert Flores was a federal prosecutor in the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the U.S. Department of Justice for nearly eight years. In his FRC booklet, “Modern Slavery: How to Fight Trafficking in Your Community,” he drives home how profound and widespread human trafficking is in today’s United States:

“(M)any people have begun to understand and address the problem of human trafficking—in reality, a form of modern day slavery. Certain aspects of the problem have received a great deal of attention, but it is critical that Americans understand that modern day slavery is deeply entrenched in every major city, metropolitan area, and state in America. It is not merely a problem in foreign countries or for the impoverished. Human trafficking impacts all of us.”

Thankfully, there is “new (Christian) liberation movement” that is working actively to end this anti-human plague. Were he still with us, there’s little doubt the Emancipator would be part of it.

Similarly, how could a man who in 1858 is recorded to have said, “Nothing stamped with the divine image and likeness was sent into the world to be trodden on, and degraded, and imbruted by its fellows,” not also be opposed to elective abortion?

Human personhood begins at conception. This we know from science. And as Lincoln loved all scientific knowledge—he held regular consultations with the head of the Smithsonian Institution, Joseph Henry, and is the first president to have held a patent—it is not unreasonable to assume that this most rational of men would be pained by the roughly 2,700 abortions occurring in our country daily. It is not fanciful to argue that he would agree with Ronald Reagan that “We cannot diminish the value of one category of human life—the unborn—without diminishing the value of all human life.”

Whether we’re considering abortion coverage in Obamacare (copiously documented at the “Abortion in Obamacare” website, a joint project of FRC and the Charlotte Lozier Institute) or the grim fact of fetal pain, abortion remains a wound on America’s soul. Abortion is matter of the destruction of unborn children and the predation of their mothers. I agree with Peter Wehner of the Ethics and Public Policy Center that

“Unborn children are at the dawn of life, and they deserve the protection of government.” It is no stretch to argue that Abraham Lincoln would believe this too.

Lincoln, wrote the historian David McCullough, is someone of whom we can never know enough. Yet of the vast literature about Lincoln, there are relatively few books that have enduring value based both on their scholarship and their grasp of their subject. One of them is Douglas Wilson’s *Honor’s Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*. Wilson makes a persuasive, even conclusive case that Lincoln’s steadfast commitment to keeping his word was what Lincoln himself called “the chief gem of my character.” When decided to do something, he pursued it, prudently but unrelentingly.

This is relevant to the above discussion for one reason: Those of us engaged in advancing the cause of human dignity, whether in protecting the “yet unborn” and their mothers or delivering the trafficked from the grip of evil, must never lose heart, even as Lincoln never surrendered his commitment to liberty, the Constitution, and the Union.

“I could tell when Mr. Lincoln had decided a thing,” Mary Lincoln said after his death. “He was cheerful at first. Then he pressed, or compressed, his lips tightly—firmly. When these things showed themselves to me I fashioned myself”—accommodated herself to the fact she had lost the argument—and so all others had to do sooner or later—and the world found it out (as well).”

May none of us who work to defend and advance human dignity ever quit. Lincoln didn’t.

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