

We Will Have Either Awakening or Civil War in America Over Abortion

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) was one of the most prominent evangelists in 19th-century America as well as a staunch opponent of slavery. As a pastor, he would not serve communion to Christians involved in the slave trade. And Oberlin College, where Finney served as president, became part of the “underground railroad” for escaping slaves. Yet Finney’s priorities were clear, and his prediction was that if a spiritual awakening did not come first, the battle over slavery would end with a bloody war. It did.

That does not mean Finney underestimated the evils of slavery.

In his sermon on “Hindrances to Revival,” Finney said, “Revivals are hindered when ministers and churches take wrong ground in regard to any question involving human rights. Take the subject of SLAVERY, for instance.”

Finney acknowledged that there were true Christians involved in slavery. But he said it was “because the sinfulness of it was not apparent to their minds. So ministers and churches, to a great extent throughout the land, have held their peace, and borne no testimony against this abominable abomination, existing in the church and in the nation.”

That, however, could continue no more.

He explained: “Light is now shed upon this subject, as it has been upon the cause of temperance. Facts are exhibited, and principles established, and light thrown in upon the minds of men, and this monster is dragged from his horrid den, and exhibited before the church, and it is demanded of them, ‘IS THIS SIN?’”

As ministers (and as Christians in general), they were duty bound to tell the truth. What, then, would they say?

"It is impossible," Finney said, "that their testimony should not be given, on one side or the other. Their silence can no longer be accounted for upon the principle of ignorance, and that they have never had their attention turned to the subject. Consequently, the silence of Christians upon the subject is virtually saying that they do not consider slavery as a sin. The truth is, it is a subject upon which they cannot be silent without guilt. The time has come, in the providence of God, when every Southern breeze is loaded down with the cries of lamentation, mourning and woe. Two millions of degraded heathen in our own land stretch their hands, all shackled and bleeding, and send forth to the church of God the agonizing cry for help. And shall the church, in her efforts to reclaim and save the world, deafen her ears to this voice of agony and despair? God forbid. The church cannot turn away from this question. It is a question for the church and for the nation to decide, and God will push it to a decision."

Indeed, in the eyes of Finney, "It is doubtless true that one of the reasons for the low state of religion at the present time is that many churches have taken the wrong side on the subject of slavery, have suffered prejudice to prevail over principle, and have feared to call this abomination by its true name." (My appreciation to Joshua Charles for bringing these quotes to my attention.)

Yet for all this, Finney felt strongly that the minister's first priority was revival and evangelism—awakening believers in the church and then reaching unbelievers with the gospel. The fight against slavery came second.

Put another way, without changing hearts and minds on a massive, national scale, America would suffer a terrible bloodbath because of slavery.

And even though there was a powerful revival that swept America in 1857-58, not enough hearts and minds were changed, and the Civil War ensued.

What does this say to us today? Recently, John Zmirak declared, "Abortion in America Will End Badly, as Slavery Did."

His article is sobering, and rightly so. Yet Zmirak was not without hope, ending his article with this: "Of course, a Great Awakening and movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds could rouse us to do much better. To embrace life from its beginning, and abandon the sexual ethics of Margaret Sanger and the Marquis de Sade. But at this point, that's what it would take—something akin to and on the scale of the conversion of pagan Europe.

"With God, all things are possible."

But if we are to have hope, we must do it with sobriety and the fear of God.

Our nation is being torn up by abortion. States are polarizing over it. The political parties are splitting over it. And with every positive, pro-life step that is taken, the militant abortionists are crying for more blood.

How does this end, without divine intervention? Will it mean the fracturing of our union, with some states free of legalized abortion and other states havens of baby-killing? Will the overturning of Roe v. Wade lead to a wholesale rebellion, with violence in the streets?

Speaking more broadly, Buck Jacobs stated that, "There is only one possibility that could turn the tide. It won't be found through politics or politicians, economics or education. National repentance and the restoration of God and His ways as our moral base in Christ is the only hope for our nation."

He is absolutely right.

And so, while we continue to fight for life on every front—on the streets and in the homes and in politics and in the media and beyond—we must put first things first.

There must be massive repentance and renewal in the church, coupled with massive, effective evangelism in the society, and with that, the changing of hearts and minds about abortion.

Anything less than this, as Finney and Zmirak have warned in different contexts many years apart, will end badly.

May God stir our hearts with the urgency of the hour.