

(By all accounts, the North-South debate between the Rev. Steve Wilkins, representing the South, and the Rev. Peter Marshall, representing the North, at the Cobb County, Georgia, Civic Center for the 'American Vision' fund-raiser in February 1998, was a real classic. Rev. Wilkins is a Presbyterian minister in the PCA (Presbyterian Church in America). Rev. Marshall, is a Presbyterian minister in the liberal Presbyterian Church, USA. The below essay is Rev. Wilkins' closing statement, which received a standing ovation from the audience.)

A Fresh Look at The Cause of the South

By the Rev. Steve Wilkins

People ask me, "Do you want the South to rise again?" And I reply, "That might not be a bad idea." But what I really desire to see is not only the South but our entire country rise again. I want to see the day come when this entire country cares more about the glory of God and true liberty than it does about its own well-being or what the stock market did today or who won the Super Bowl or whether or not Seinfeld is ever going to come back on the air. God's glory and true liberty were what guided the majority of Southerners in the last century and that is what I want to see again.

But with the defeat of the South, true liberty, liberty in the historic and Biblical sense, was lost to this land. James McPherson has remarked, "the Civil War changed the United States as thoroughly as the French Revolution changed that country. . . The United States went to war in 1861 to preserve the Union; it emerged from war in 1865 having created a nation." (Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution, p. viii) The War for Southern Independence was indeed the American equivalent of the French Revolution.

It is little wonder that a young man named Karl Marx who was living in London at the time working as a correspondent for the New York Tribune, followed the War with great interest and excitement. He saw the implications of the War for the world and wrote gleefully to his friend Friedrich Engels that the War would be the beginning of a "world transforming . . . revolutionary movement."

Slavery, so far from being the cause of the war, was merely the pretext for revolution. As Prussian military theorist, Carl Von Clausewitz once stated, "War is the pursuit of political goals by other means." We have seldom seen a more successful revolution. The old Constitutional Republic was destroyed and an octopus-like centralized government took its place.

James McPherson has noted, "The war marked the transition of the United States to a singular noun. The 'Union' became the nation, and Americans now rarely speak of their Union except in an historical sense." This is a significant change. We are no longer a union of confederated states, but a nation where the individual integrity and political sovereignty of the states is denied.

Thus, the old federal republic in which the national government rarely touched the average citizen except through the post-office is now dead and has been replaced by centralized bureaucracy which seeks to control every action. What we call liberty, our forefathers called slavery.

This was precisely what Dr. James H. Thornwell and others had feared. In a tract entitled "Our Danger and Our Duty" Dr. Thornwell stated in regard to the consequences of a Northern victory, "If they prevail, the whole character of the Government will be changed, and, instead of a federal republic, the common agent of sovereign and independent States, we shall have a central despotism, with the notion of States for ever abolished, deriving its powers from the will, and shaping its policy according to the wishes, of a numerical majority of the people; we shall have, in other words, a supreme, irresponsible democracy. . . The avowed end of the present War is, to make the Government a government of force."

The 14th amendment was particularly notorious in this regard. It has been interpreted so as to apply the Bill of Rights to the individual States. Section 1 says, "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States. . ." This has had the effect

of changing the nature of our government in two ways:

1) It changed the intent of the Bill of Rights which were originally intended to limit the Federal government's powers, to restrictions upon the particular states. Thus, whereas before this amendment, the states had protection against the intrusions of the Federal government, now the Federal government has become the watch-dog of the states. The states became "subsidiaries" of the nation rather than "parties" to the Union. The central government became the master rather than the servant of the states.

2) This shift has transferred immense power to the Federal government to restrict the internal actions of states. Senator Lot Morrill of Maine stated quite bluntly the purpose of the 14th amendment: "We must see to it, that hereafter, personal liberty and personal rights are placed in the keeping of the nation...against State authority and State interpretations...The great object of this amendment is, therefore, to restrain the power of the States and compel them at all times to respect these great fundamental guaranties." (Abraham Lincoln and The Second American Revolution, p. 143)

Within five years after its ratification, the Supreme Court in the Slaughter-House cases began to redefine "privileges and immunities." The Court rejected the historic view of these things as biblically or religiously based and declared that privileges and immunities owed their existence to the grace of the Federal Government. Liberty in short, did not come from God, but was a gift of the Federal Government.

By this definition, the Federal Government has taken the place of God. It has arrogated to itself the privilege of defining what is right and wrong, good and evil. When God is not acknowledged, man becomes the sovereign. When man becomes the definer of liberty, liberty is lost.

Thus we find that we have lost what our forefathers called liberty. We have grown up in a world where no one truly "owns" property (you may think you own it, but try not paying your property taxes one year and you will see who really owns your land).

Further, we do not have liberty to use our property in lawful ways. "Environmental" laws limit the freedom of use as well. We can kill our unborn children, but are forbidden to cut down a tree on our own property without a permit. The Federal Government as if it was God, asserts a pre-eminent claim on the earth and the fullness thereof. One peculiarly blatant expression of this is "eminent domain." Whatever and whenever the Government desires the use of your land, it claims the prerogative to it. God destroyed Ahab for doing what the modern Government does every year.

We are no longer free to exercise our gifts and talents. More and more the Federal Government limits how and when and where we may labor. Licensing laws, labor regulations, minimum wage legislation, unemployment taxes, social security taxes, union standards, federal health and safety regulations, racial quotas, anti-discrimination legislation, environmental regulations, and a well-nigh endless host of others laws, fees, prohibitions, limitations, regulations, and specifications, severely restrict the exercise of God-given gifts and abilities.

Need I mention that by means of the income tax, the Federal Government has claimed the right to the fruit of our labors. By it, the Federal government exalts itself over God (by claiming more than God does in the tithe).

In recent years we have seen how this is in fact a claim on all the livelihood of an individual. Tax exemptions are now viewed as "subsidies." The argument is, to be granted a tax exemption is the same as being given a subsidy. The implication is that all your income belongs to the National Government and the Government could take it all should it so desire, but by means of tax exemptions, it graciously allows you to keep some of your earnings.

In education: certification, accreditation, and educational standards set by Federal bureaucrats continue

to limit educational freedom. The Government continues to view the children as belonging to itself by asserting a "compelling interest" in this or that aspect of our children's upbringing.

Freedom of religion has come to mean "freedom to believe whatever you want, so long as you do not act in a way contrary to public policy." Practically this means, our freedom of religion has been confined to the space between our ears.

We have now lived to see what our Founding Fathers thought impossible in this land. The Congress regularly legislates immorality, lines its own pockets, makes decisions based upon self-interest rather than upon what is right and best and then brags about its public-spirited generosity and compassion. We live in a country where the Constitution has no more real authority than the Royal Family in England. We like to be able to refer to it and trot it out on patriotic occasions, but we have no desire to take it seriously and find those who would suggest that we should, fearfully flatheaded.

We live in a land in which the people expect the government to protect them and provide for them and secure their futures. We have not freed the slaves, we have simply extended the plantation. Now, we are all slaves, captives to our liberators. We think we are free only because we have never known true freedom.

Like it or not, all this is the legacy of the South's defeat. Thus, the question of who was right in the old struggle is not so hard to answer after all. Look around you. Do you like what you see? If not, you have answered the question in my favor.

A. H. Stephens, in speaking about the future for this nation and the consequences of the Reconstruction policies, once said that the only hope for our country was that the people would one day realize what had happened to them as a result of this war and that a cry would go up akin to that which filled the land prior to the first War for Independence (the cry then was "The cause of Boston is the cause of us all"). Now, said Stephens, the only hope left for the preservation and maintenance [of Constitutional liberty] on this continent is, that another like cry shall hereafter be raised, and go forth from hill-top to valley, from the Coast to the Lakes, from the Atlantic to the Pacific: "The Cause of the South is the Cause of us all!"

I appeal to you to consider afresh the consequences of the War for Southern Independence. The defeat of the South spelled the defeat of constitutional liberty in our land. If you long for constitutional order, legislative integrity, limited government, and true freedom under law - then you, my friend, agree with me that the South was right.

The time is passed due for us to think for ourselves and quit allowing the media and the educational establishment and the current orthodoxy to do our thinking for us. It is time to repent of our sins and beg for God's mercy. It is time, in short, to take up afresh the cause of the South.