An etching of the U.S. Marine Corps attack on John Brown's defenses

Modern parallels

In the wake of several shootings at abortion clinics over the last two years and the use-of-force debate within the pro-life community, the uneasy name of John Brown has resurfaced. His name uneasy because the violence of John Brown's story unsettles pro-lifers while his firm, heroic determination to do what was right for the slave draws admiration.

But comparisons to, say, Paul Hill, are inapposite. In many ways, while some claim that Hill's actions were a "declaration of war against the United States," it is hard to imagine, if it were so, that the federal government prosecutors would have overlooked the opportunity to charge Hill with treason.

Brown, on the other hand, specifically attacked a federal installation and planned a secession from the Union.

The other comparison, however, is over the prophetic role that Hill (and Shannon and Griffin) may represent for the nation's future. Some have said that these shootings represent a "final call" for the nation to repent of abortion, just as Harper's Ferry was a "final call" to stop slavery before God's judgment fell.

Others speculate that the impending execution of Paul Hill, like that of John Brown, may mark the end of God's patience.

Questions

History shows that no nation—particularly one blessed by God—can survive massive bloodguilt. Our own nation's history shows that even the kidnapping and blood shed by the slaveholders did not go unpunished.

Abraham Lincoln acknowledged this saying, "... if God wills that [the Civil War] continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as it was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Does a similar judgment await us? Does the Fugitive Slave Act, so hated by Brown, which made it a federal crime to help an escaping slave, find its parallel in the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which makes a federal crime out of helping babies?

What kind of judgment will we face over the blood of 32 million dead innocents if the price of tolerating kidnapping and other injustices surrounding slavery wrought the horror of Civil War?

John Brown's actions won him a place on the lips of charging soldiers and a huge mural on the wall of the State House in "Bleeding" Kansas.

What will the names of Hill, Shannon, and Griffin mean in the future? ■

John Brown: Another view

by Franklin Sanders

A 30-foot high painting of John Brown in the Kansas State legislature Building.

No event in history so changed America as the War Between the States. No figure sums up the spirit and content of that change so fully as John Brown. Perhaps, however, pro-lifers who claim John Brown as their spiritual father should test that spirit.

The secular millennium

The Puritans viewed America as a "city set on a hill," a Christian commonwealth self-consciously covenanted to God as an example to the nations. That viewpoint was based solely on Scripture's promise that the gospel would eventually conquer the world.

Later New England generations, having lost their fathers' faith, blended Puritanism's victorious eschatology with Unitarianism or outright atheism. Fertilized by contemporary philosophies, this vestigial millennialism spawned the humanist doctrine of the inevitability of progress in history. At the center of that progress sovereign man replaced the sovereign God.

God's action was no longer ultimate, only man's. Revolution would usher in the Golden Age. Men and nations would no longer be sanctified by obedience to God's law, but by the cleansing of "holy violence" (cf. the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*). Science and reason replaced Scripture as axiomatic truth, and intellectuals became the new priests. Elite "philosopher kings" replaced the church as the chosen people, and America