

RELIGION

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PERSONALITY

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Abraham Lincoln's Personality

Religion

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

See also files titled “Abraham Lincoln and Religion”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was born in 1809. That is one hundred and eleven years ago, and it takes us back to within ten years of the death of George Washington. So it was that the lives of these illustrious statesmen spanned the greater part of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Washington never knew Lincoln, of course, but his influence upon Lincoln was very great.

THERE is a charming little story of a backwoods boy, dressed in homespun, with deerskin leggings, a coonskin cap upon his head, and clumsy moccasins of bearskin on his feet, hurrying across the fields to his home clutching something very precious in his hand. This was a book—a real printed book—a book that told about real people and the big world. A neighbor had told the boy that he would lend him this book and that he might take it home and read it. Little Abe's heart beat fast. It was almost too good to be true.

It is a pathetic story: the eagerness of the starving mind of the frontier child; the long day's work that summoned him with the morning light and prevented him from reading his beloved book; the hours stolen from sleep; the precious volume hidden away in a crevice between the logs of his cabin; the snow-storm that came in the night, covering his little bed with its white blanket and soaking the book from cover to cover; the sorrowful journey to the house of the neighbor and the sad story of the injury; the three days' toil in the cornfield to pay for the book, and the happiness at the end of that period that drove away all thoughts of his own aches and weariness in the acquisition of that wonderful book to be his very own.

This book was the life of George Washington, by Parson Weems. There are multitudes of stories about the influence of books upon boys and girls, and this is one of the best of them all. Long years afterward, when the little boy with the honest blue eyes had come to be President of the United States, he told this story of his first book and said: "That book, the life of George Washington, helped to make me president of the United States."

So Lincoln's life was the sequence of Washington's, moral as well as temporal. It is another case of Elijah's mantle falling upon Elisha.

THESE great men were different in many ways. Washington was the gift of wealth to his country; Lincoln was the gift of poverty. Washington's family owned a large estate; Lincoln's father sold his little scrubby farm in Kentucky for a few dollars and started down the Ohio River in a flatboat for his new home in Spencer County, Indiana. The boat struck a snag, the household goods slid into the muddy stream, and the Lincoln family was left penniless.

Dr. Hallock tells us that when Washington was elected president he was called the richest man in the United States; Lincoln was hard up for money all his life. Washington wore silk stockings; Lincoln never had a pair of stockings on his feet until he was grown. Washington wore costly shoes with silver buckles; Lincoln wore shoes only in snow time, and those were rude ones made by his father's hands. Washington was clothed literally in purple

profoundly religious men. Their broad philanthropy and intense patriotism were the outgrowth of their faith in God and their knowledge of his inspired Word.

Captain Gilbert J. Greene, who was a life-long friend of Lincoln, was once asked by Dr. Iglerhart concerning Lincoln's religious life. To this he bore strong testimony. He said that to his certain knowledge Lincoln was a faithful student of the Bible. There was a copy of the New Testament which constantly lay on his table. Its flexible cover was worn almost through by the rail-splitter's fingers. Mr. Greene said that Lincoln once recited to him Christ's Sermon on the Mount throughout without making a mistake. He told him that he considered Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill the ablest and most eloquent literary production ever spoken by mortal lips or recorded by human hand.

ONE day Lincoln said to him, "Gilbert, there is a woman dangerously sick, living fifteen miles out in the country, who has sent for me to come and write her will. I should like to have you go along with me; I would enjoy your company and the trip would be a little recreation for you." Mr. Greene cheerfully accepted the invitation. They found the woman worse than they expected. She evidently had only a few hours to live. When Lincoln had written the will and it had been signed and witnessed, the woman said to him: "Now I have my affairs for this world arranged satisfactorily. I am thankful to say that long before this I have made preparation for the other life I am so soon to enter. I sought and found Christ as my Saviour, who has been my stay and comfort through the years, and who is now near to carry me over the river of death. I do not fear death."

Lincoln said to her: "Your faith in Christ is wise and strong, your hope of a future life is blessed. You are to be congratulated on passing through this life so usefully and into the future so happily."

She asked him if he would read a few verses out of the Bible to her. They offered the book to him; he did not take it, but began to recite from memory the twenty-third Psalm. Then, without the book, he took up the first part of the fourteenth of John. After he had given these and other quotations from the Scriptures he recited several hymns, closing with "Rock of Ages, cleft for me."

Mr. Greene says about the incident: "I thought at the time I never heard any elocutionist speak with such ease and power as he did. I am an old man now, but my heart melts as it did then in that death chamber when I remember how, with almost divine pathos, he spoke the last stanza. A little while after, the woman passed to her reward. As we rode home in the buggy I expressed surprise that he should have acted the pastor as well as the attorney so perfectly, and Lincoln replied: "God and eternity were very near me today."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN's faith in God is the faith that saved this nation in the dark hours of the Civil War. There is a great lesson in this for the rulers of our own day, and for us all, as we wonder in the midst of our country's troubles what the end will be.

have my heart."

A tall pioneer in buckskin stood in the doorway. He saw the shadow of death in the cabin, but he wished to cheer his wife, and he said: "But he can't sing, Nancy."

This was true. The mother was a sweet singer. She replied feebly: "The heart sings in many ways. Some hearts make other hearts sing. Abraham may not have my voice, but he has my heart and he may make others sing. I am going now."

The pioneer and the boy watched her. She moved slightly from time to time. Nervously her fingers twitched the coverlid. Once she opened her eyes. "Abraham!" she said softly, "My Abraham!" Once she tried to lift herself to see him. Then she trembled and lay still.

"She is gone, Abra'm," said Thomas Lincoln.

Father and son made her coffin with their own hands and buried her under the trees. It was a rude grave when it was finished. But since then, the people of Indiana have honored the memory of its occupant. A monument lifts its marble whiteness toward the sky, and pilgrims kneel at its base with prayers and thanksgiving. But long before her motherhood became sacred to the great Nation, a ragged, hatless boy sat on the grass-green mound and dreamed and listened in memory to the songs she had sung.

IN THE dying testimony of Lincoln's mother we have the answer to our question: "Abraham Lincoln, you have my heart." What his friends observed Lincoln confirmed many a time with his own testimony. It was the heart of his mother that inspired him all through his life. In the crises of the Civil War, when he had to sustain and to direct the fortunes of this great nation, it was his mother's faith that made his own and that strengthened him for his superhuman task.

When the war was over and the great victory was won, there were great crowds serenading the President one day at the White House. There were shouting multitudes all over the green lawn and the broad avenues. Old Glory rippled in the breeze, and far away the cannon of victory shook the hills and echoed over the broad river. Lincoln looked out upon the sea of humanity. The multitude hushed their cheering. His first words were:

"I sincerely thank God for the occasion of this call."

None but he heard in these words the tones of that mother who was looking on him from the home of the angels. It was the same tone that he had heard so often in the shack cabin beneath the flaming maples.

The Liberator
July 7 1820

Lincoln a Pastor's Subject.

"The Religion of Abraham Lincoln
Was He Atheist or Christian?" will be

the subject of an address by the Rev.
L. M. Birkhead at All Souls Unitarian
church, 3425 Baltimore avenue, Sunday
morning.

Lincoln Postman
August 1942

Published monthly since 1928
2408 Medford Street, Los Angeles, California

Defending Those Principles For Which Lincoln Stood

"Take all the Bible upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith and you will live and die a better man." Lincoln

We should adhere strictly to that American principle of separation of church and state. While sectarianism should be kept out of all of our public institutions, the Bible should not be excluded from any. The California Constitution properly prohibits sectarian literature in the public school library or the teaching of sectarianism, directly or indirectly in the classroom.

Those who opposed Bible reading in the public school figured that if they could get some court to rule that the King James Bible was a sectarian book, that their victory would be won. Accordingly in 1922 they got an Appellate Court to so rule and for two years the Bible was outlawed from both the public school library and classroom. In 1924 the Trustees of the Selma Union High School district (Fresno County) going against that appellate court ruling and against the advice of the Attorney General, ordered the purchase of twelve King James Bibles for the school library. The case was appealed to the State Supreme Court which, God bless them, handed down this favorable ruling. "For reference and library purposes in the public schools, the Bible in the King James version is not a book of the class prohibited by the statutes." As regards Bible reading in the classroom, the Honorable Court specifically stated, "We are not required in this case to decide."

Former Attorney General U. S. Webb gave as his opinion, that the Supreme Court, in its ruling, limited the Bible for library purposes only.

In the event of a test case we are confident that the Honorable Court would again come to the aid of the Bible. In fact there are some school districts in California in which the Bible is read more or less.

In Oceanside, (where each classroom is provided with a King James Bible), a goodly majority of the voters interviewed have signed the petition, addressed to the legislature, seeking a state law to place a King James Bible in every public school library, put on the teacher's desk, a book of suitable scripture portions, from which the teacher shall read without comment, to the pupils at the opening of every school day. This is known as the Lincoln Plan for Bible Reading in the Public Schools.

The Rialto school district adopted this plan in 1930. As there is no law to the contrary the Trustees of the Ocean-side Elementary schools have been asked by a local "Bible in the School Committee", to supplement the Bibles already in the classrooms with a Scripture book, as a reading guide for the teacher. If the Trustees deem it unwise to require the teacher to read the prescribed Scripture portions, they might give permission so to read.

LINCOLN AND THE SABBATH

On November 15, 1862, President Lincoln shows his deepening religious conviction, and his comprehensive faith in the fact that God rules in the affairs of nations as well as of individuals, by his famous "Sunday Rest Order".

The President, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, desires and enjoins the orderly observance of the Sabbath by the officers and men in the military and naval service. The importance for man and beast of the prescribed weekly rest, the sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors, a becoming deference to the best sentiments of a Christian people, and a due regard for the Divine Will, demand that Sunday Labor in the army and navy be reduced to the measure of strict necessity.

The discipline and character of the national forces should not suffer, nor the cause they defend be imperiled by the profanation of the day or name of the Most High. "At this time of public distress"--adopting the words of Washington in 1776--"men may find enough to do in the service of God and their Country without abandoning them-selves to vice and immorality." The first general order issued by the Father of his Country, indicates the spirit in which our institutions were founded and should ever be defended; "The General hopes and trusts that every officer and man will endeavor to live and act as becomes a Christian soldier defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country."

Truly this is a Christian Nation constitutionally.

Second National Fast-Day as follows in part:

March 30, 1863, President Lincoln issued a proclamation appointing another national fast-day. It reads like the deliverance of one of the ancient prophets, as follows: *part*

And whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God: to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon: and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only ~~are~~ blessed whose God is the Lord:

E. F. Rudeen

Lincoln to Be Honored in Churches

**Emancipator Called
Deeply Spiritual
Leader of People**

Los Angeles Times 2-12-55

BY DAN L. THRAPP
Times Religion Editor

Abraham Lincoln, probably as deeply spiritual in word and spirit as any White House resident, although he may never have professed himself a Christian, will be honored in a number of Southland services tomorrow.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church's weekly bulletin even drew on Comedian George Gobel for a phrase in estimation of the Great Emancipator:

"You can't hardly get them kind no more," it said this week, in a paragraph penned by Atty. Melvin MacKinnon, president of the congregation's Men's Council. Many a churchman would agree.

Attended Church

Although there is no proof that Lincoln joined any church, he regularly attended services at the New York Ave. Presbyterian Church of Washington, D.C., and the Rev. Phineas T. Gurley, its minister, was his close friend and pastor.

More church news on
Page 22, Part II.

He was at the President's bedside when he died and offered prayer, later conducting funeral services for the martyred executive at the White House.

In 1850, Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln took a pew in First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Ill., and occupied it frequently until they went to Washington for the first inaugural.

Records Kept

The State Library of Illinois, at Springfield, has records of First Church, showing Mrs. Lincoln's membership, Tad Lincoln's baptism and Mr. Lincoln's serving on a church committee to purchase an organ.

It would seem, therefore, that Lincoln's inclination was toward Presbyterianism, although his spiritual feeling was probably completely interdenominational, or non-denominational.

A minister in a delegation meeting with the President once hoped, it is said, that the Lord be "on our side."

"I don't agree with you," said Lincoln.

"I'm not at all concerned about that, for we know that the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

Baptism Claimed

Some interest attaches, therefore, to a statement sent in by a reader. It appeared in the Canton (O.) Christian, a Church of Christ publication, some time ago, alleging that the President was baptized in that church.

The paper was edited and published by the late Pearl H. Welshimer of Canton. He was pastor for 50 years of a 6000-member church and held a number of high-denominational positions before his death a few years ago.

A story said that "in 1862, W. H. Morris, a minister of the Christian Church, was stationed with his regiment in Arlington Heights across the river from Washington. During this time Mr. Morris held a protracted meeting of about two weeks during which he baptized many of the men in his regiment.

"Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Stanton attended his meetings nearly every night. Near the close of the meeting, Mr. Lincoln came to him and said, 'Morris, do you think it is necessary for every person to

be baptized?' The minister replied, 'It is not a matter of "think so" with me. It is a matter of revelation.'

"He then proceeded to quote Scripture references at the conclusion of which Mr. Lincoln said, 'Well, Morris, I look at this matter just as you do and I intend to attend to it.'"

Mrs. Lincoln, however, according to the article, "flew into a tantrum," and nothing was done about it at the time.

"Later on John O'Kane (he later was State evangelist in Indiana) actually baptized Lincoln," the article continued.

Cried All Night

"As Mr. O'Kane told it, 'On the night before Lincoln was to be baptized, his wife cried all night. The matter was deferred, as she thought, but soon after Lincoln and I took a buggy ride. I baptized him in a creek near Springfield.

"We changed into dry clothing and returned to the city and, by his request, I placed his name on the church book. He lived and died a member of the Church of Christ."

Supporting evidence for this account is lacking.

In commenting on the generally accepted belief that Lincoln never joined any church, the Rev. Emerald L. Olson of the Manhattan Beach Community Church said that the President remained outside organized religion because he could not find a church to meet his requirements.

He will preach on "The Church Lincoln Would Have Joined" at 9:30 and 11 a.m. services tomorrow.

God and Lincoln

The Rev. S. Mark Hogue will speak on "God and Lincoln" at 9:15 and 10:30 a.m. services at the Westwood Hills Congregational Church, 1989 Westwood Blvd., Westwood.

The traditional Lincoln Day program at the Spanish-American Institute, 15840 S Figueroa St., Gardena, today will feature a morning address by Dr. Melvin E. Wheatley, pastor of Westwood Community Methodist Church, and an afternoon oratorical contest. Box lunches will be sold and the public is invited.

Religion

Lincoln Was Religious, Superstitious

By JULES LOR

[Associated Press Writer]

In 1846 there was a religious issue in an election campaign.

Somebody claimed the candidate for the House of Representatives from Springfield, Ill.—Abraham Lincoln—was “an infidel.”

“That I am not a member of any Christian church is true,” replied Abe, honestly, “but I have never denied the truth of the

Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general or of any denomination of Christians in particular.”

Lincoln won the election. But three years earlier it had been a different story. He had tried for the Whig party nomination without success, and laid at least part of the blame to religious intolerance.

Suspected Of Being Deist

“It was everywhere contended,” he wrote, “that no Christian ought to go for me because I belonged to no church, was suspected of being a deist, and had talked about fighting a duel.”

Much has been written about Lincoln's religious beliefs, and as his birthday rolls around each year a popular pastime in some quarters is to try to figure out what denomination he belonged to.

His own words, however, provided the best insight regarding the innermost feelings of this deeply religious man.

Told Cabinet Of Dream

He admitted to being superstitious. In 1841 he wrote to his friend, Joshua F. Speed, of Louisville: “I was always superstitious. I believe God made me one of the instruments for bringing your (wife) and you together, which union I have no doubt he fore-ordained.”

And the day before his death he

told his Cabinet about a dream he had had the night before; the same dream he said he had dreamt immediately before all the great events of the war.

But Lincoln also had a strong reliance on prayer.

“I went to my room and got down on my knees in prayer,” he said shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg. “Never before had I prayed with such earnestness. I felt that I must put all my trust in Almighty God. . . . I prayed that he would not let the nation perish.”

And on the Bible:

“Take all of this Book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith,” he wrote to Speed in 1864, “and you will live and die a happier and better man.”

Faith In Providence

And a profound faith in Divine Providence:

“If, after endeavoring to do my best in the light which (God) affords me, I find my efforts fail,” he wrote in 1862, “I must believe that for some purpose unknown to me He wills it otherwise.”

Again, shortly before his death, he wrote:

“The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong.

“God cannot be for and against

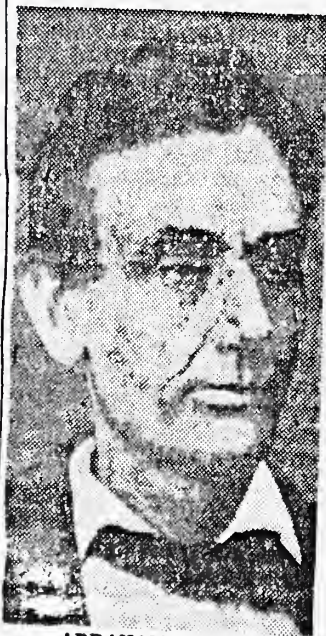
the same thing at the same time. In the present Civil War it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are the best adaptations to effect his purpose.

“This Is Probably True”

“I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest and wills that it shall not end yet. . . . He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.”

Perhaps the most revealing declaration of Lincoln's religious attitude was summed up in the latter part of his life when he said: “I have never united myself to any church because I have found difficulty in giving my assent . . . to the long complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their articles of belief.

“When any church will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership, the Master's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself’ that church will I join with all my heart and with all my soul.”



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE UNEXPLAINED

Is Abe Lincoln still in the White House?



By Allen Spraggett

● Does the ghost of Abraham Lincoln still walk the halls of the White House?

This question came up in a conversation I had in Washington with a senator who shares my interest in psychic phenomena.

The senator said that there have been those in recent years who reported seeing Mr. Lincoln prowling his old haunts, as it were.

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of F.D.R., was one of those who took such reports seriously. As a matter of fact, she had her own theory of what a haunting was and it agreed with the views held by many scientists who have studied the phenomenon.

Mrs. Roosevelt believed that, as she put it, any place where someone had lived hard would quite likely be haunted by that individual's personality.

Parapsychologists—scientists who study psychic phenomena—believe that a house can retain impressions of those who have lived in it, long after the occupants are dead. This is particularly true if the occupant had

a powerful personality, and even more so if the dwelling was the scene of strong emotionalism or tragic events.

This theory may account for the numerous reported sightings of the ghost of Abraham Lincoln in the White House. Certainly he had a powerful personality. And certainly he experienced tragedy, as well as triumph, in the executive mansion.

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt told the following story:

"I was sitting in my study downstairs when one of the maids burst in on me in a state of great excitement. I looked up from my work and asked her what the trouble was."

"He's up there—sitting on the edge of the bed and taking off his shoes," she exclaimed.

"Who's up there taking off his shoes?" I asked.

"Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Lincoln," the maid replied.

Mrs. Roosevelt said she had always felt that Lincoln's bedroom was haunted by what she called a serene and dignified presence.

One more example of The Unexplained!

Toronto Sun

Lincoln Ghost Reported Haunting White House

By L. PERRY WILBUR

Something is keeping the ghost of Abe Lincoln restless. Reported sightings of his ghost in the White House are increasing.

Some reports claim the ghost prowls the second floor of the White House near the historic Lincoln bedroom. Over the years, this is the one area where the ghost has been seen the most.

When Franklin Roosevelt occupied the White House, his wife's servant, Mary Eban, insisted that she'd seen Lincoln sitting in the northwest bedroom pulling on his boots. Various other servants also claimed they saw the ghost lying in his bed or standing quietly at the oval window above the main White House entrance. Mrs. Roosevelt even said that altho she never actually saw Lincoln, she did feel a ghostly kind of "presence" sometimes, while working late at night.

The valet of FDR reported that paintings would fall off the wall whenever someone connected with the White House died.

Even Harry Truman acknowledged the Lincoln ghost in his 1945 book, *Mr. President*: "My daughter and her two pals were sleeping in Lincoln's bed tonight. If I were not afraid it would scare them too badly, I would have Lincoln appear. The maids and butlers swear he has appeared on several occasions. It is said that even Mrs. Coolidge saw him." Truman could possibly have been implying by this that he considered arranging for the ghost to appear — as a joke.

A few years ago, a White House employe for 25 years (John Ficklin), reported the following: "I've heard about all kinds of crazy things . . . lights going on and off, doors opening and closing, knocks on doors when there's nobody there, Abe Lincoln wandering the halls."

Harry Truman also once told how he heard a knock on his bedroom door one night in 1946. The knock kept up, so he went to the door. No one was there,

but Truman could hear what sounded like footsteps going down the hall.

Writing to his daughter, Margaret, Truman also wrote: "This old place cracks and pops all night and you can very well imagine that old Jackson or Andy Johnson or some other ghost is walking. Why they'd want to come back here I could never understand. It's a nice prison nevertheless. About these ghosts, I'm sure they're here and I'm not half so alarmed at meeting up with any one of them as I am at having to meet the live nuts I have to see every day."

But even royalty has seen the Lincoln ghost. Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, during a White House visit, told FDR and Mrs. Roosevelt that

she'd heard a knock at her door, answered it, and fainted when she saw the ghost of Lincoln standing there.

Over one dozen dependable witnesses — White House staff employes to government officials — have seen the ghost of John Kennedy. Even the late Lyndon Johnson saw it. LBJ reportedly told a cleaning worker he'd just seen JFK.

But the Lincoln ghost, of all ghosts seen in the White House, is apparently the most troubled or restless. It's of course a well-known fact that Lincoln, when alive, once saw his own body in a dream, lying in a casket in the East Room.

More strange happenings have been taking place lately at the White House address on Pennsylvania Avenue. Staff

members have told of lights on the second floor going on and off mysteriously, squeaking floors, and even wall pictures somehow changing their positions.

A Nixon aide even admits today that he doesn't relish the idea of visiting the second floor. Soon after the Nixons moved into the White House, this aide went up to the second floor to be sure all the lights were out. A few minutes after returning downstairs, the second-floor lights were on again with no explanation. "I hate to admit it," said the aide, "but I won't go up to the second floor at night unless someone is with me."

One thing seems certain. Ghosts who do their wandering in the White House obviously prefer to haunt in style.

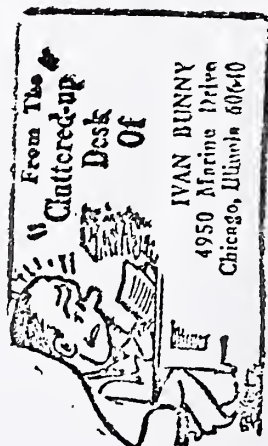
CAPPER'S WEEKLY

HEART OF THE HOME NEWS WEEKLY FOR MID-AMERICA

Volume 98—No. 37

TOPEKA, KANSAS 66607

October 16-



10-27-73

Dear Mr. Newman;

Came across the enclosed

article about the Ghost of Abraham Lincoln, and thought you might find it interesting.

There's really nothing to worry about, as

the Ghost of John Wilkes Booth will probably

take care of it.

Ivan Bunny
IVAN BUNNY

The Faith of Mr. LINCOLN

David Bast

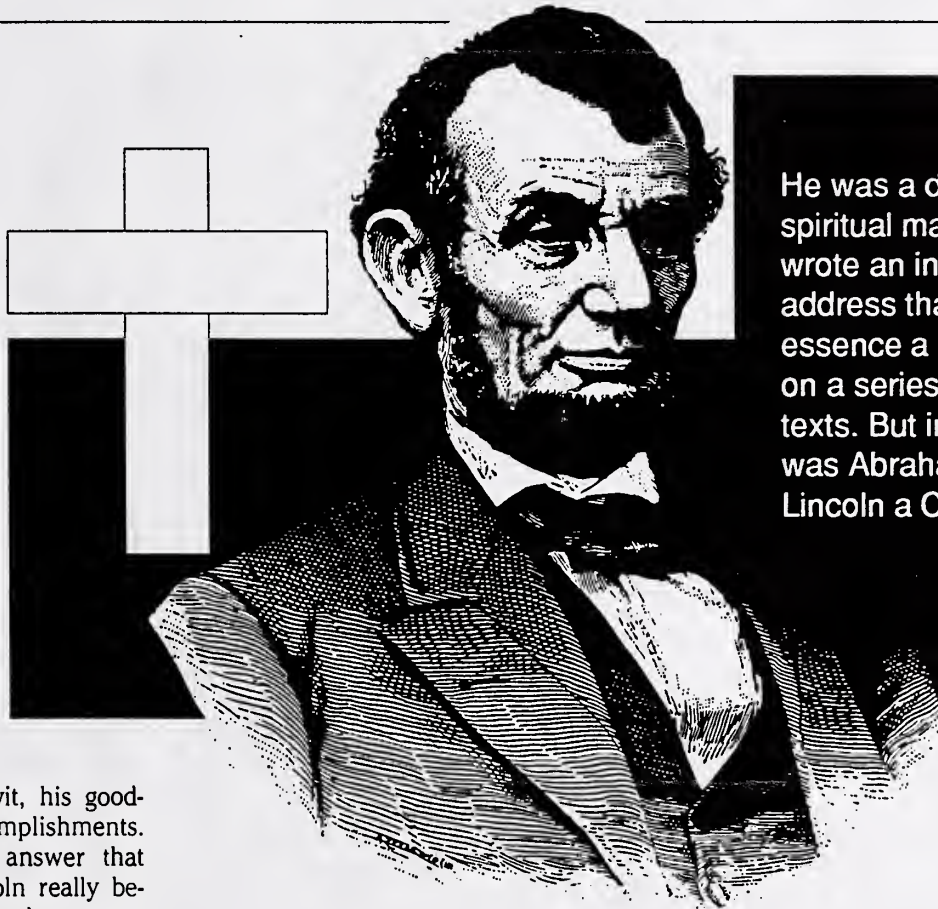
"Was Abraham Lincoln a Christian?"

We had been enjoying casual conversation around the dinner table, a group of us seated together at an evening function. Somehow the topic had drifted to Lincoln and to his faith. "You hear a lot about Lincoln and faith," someone said, "but was he really a Christian?"

I have long been drawn to this greatest of all Americans, drawn by his complex personality and strength of character, his eloquence, his wit, his goodness, his towering accomplishments. But I could not easily answer that question. What did Lincoln really believe? What sort of faith drove, sustained, and comforted him? And could that faith which, admittedly, was unorthodox by evangelical standards, be described as Christian?

The question of Lincoln's personal religious convictions is vexing for a number of reasons. Like so many other aspects of his character, this one remains obscure first of all because of

The Rev. David Bast is pastor of Fifth Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. All quotes taken from *Speeches and Writings* by Abraham Lincoln.



He was a deeply spiritual man. He wrote an inaugural address that was in essence a sermon on a series of biblical texts. But in all that, was Abraham Lincoln a Christian?

Lincoln's reticence about himself. Lincoln wrote extensively and compellingly about points of law or party strategy, about political questions of sectional or national interest, and, increasingly, about the one question that came to dominate all discussion—slavery. In arguing for his positions, he articulated clearly and compellingly the principles which led him to those positions, especially the principle he believed to be the foundation of the nation: that "all men are created equal, and are en-

dowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."

But Lincoln did not speak about the deeper beliefs that led him to embrace his political principles. His letters and speeches contain a good many insights, but almost never insights into the deepest places of his own heart. One can read all of Abraham Lincoln's works and still come away feeling that the inmost man remains a mystery.

Another reason for the difficulty in assessing Lincoln's faith is the quality

of paradox that runs through his religious life. Deeply devout and possessing a nature inclined toward spiritual things, Lincoln nevertheless was not formally committed to any creed. Having been raised on the backwoods frontier of southern Indiana and Illinois, he had very little exposure to organized religion. "I've never been to church yet nor probably shall not be soon," the young Lincoln wrote a friend not long after moving to Springfield. "I stay away because I am conscious I should not know how to behave myself." As an adult Lincoln rented pews in and attended Presbyterian churches in both Springfield and Washington, but he never joined one, although his wife and children did.

Lincoln has been described as the most spiritual of all presidents; certainly he was the most biblical, at least with respect to his knowledge of and love for the Scriptures. "It is the best gift God has given to man," he said of the Bible. "All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book....All things most desirable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it." His speeches were dotted with allusions and quotations from both Testaments, his thinking shaped by biblical teaching, his matchless prose echoing the sonorous beauty of the Authorized Version. No president made more use of the Scriptures than Abraham Lincoln.

Yet he was more than once accused of spiritual infidelity. When he ran for Congress in 1846, Lincoln's opponent, a Democrat and Methodist preacher named Peter Cartwright, traveled the district informing the voters that Lincoln was an unbeliever. In reply Lincoln published and circulated a handbill that stated:

That I am not a member of any Christian Church, is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular....I do not think I could myself, be brought to support a man for office, whom I knew to be...[a] scoffer at religion.

Leaving the higher matter of eternal consequences, between him and his Maker, I still do not think any man has the right thus to insult the feelings, and injure the morals, of the community in which he may live.

But notice the ambiguity in this statement. Lincoln says he never denied or attacked the Bible or Christianity, and that he could never support anyone who did, but he does not positively affirm what he believes. Is this merely clever lawyer's language to minimize the political damage of a serious charge (in nineteenth-century America, at least) without compromising his intellectual integrity? Or is it the careful response of a man who knows himself to have been wronged by the spreading of an accusation that is unfair because it is untrue, but who does not wish to make a political issue of his personal beliefs?

Those who wish to turn to the works of historians and other writers to learn what Lincoln believed will find they have a bewildering—and conflicting—variety of views from which to choose. Even during his lifetime Abraham Lincoln was the subject of myth-making. Honest Abe the Railsplitter, who went from log cabin to White House, was as much image as reality; then as now, image was often the result of good public relations. Lincoln had come from very humble origins and was largely self-educated, but that was not unusual in his time and place. The truth is, Lincoln was a prominent and highly successful attorney, a speaker with a national reputation, and a brilliant and ambitious politician, all before he became president.

Following the assassination the Lincoln myth grew to immense proportions. It is difficult to discern the truth about the man in the multitude of interpretations that sprang up after his death. The martyred president was portrayed as the model Christian, particularly by earnest Victorian clergymen. Some nearly deified Lincoln, describing him in Christlike terms as one who gave his life (on Good Friday, no less!) to save a nation. In reaction to Lincoln's elevation to the spiritual leader of American civil religion, Lin-

coln's old law partner William Herndon wrote a biography that claimed Lincoln was a cynical agnostic, and people have been choosing sides since.

So what did Lincoln really believe? Was he a Christian? He was certainly conscious of religious shortcomings. Delivering remarks to a Presbyterian assembly during the war, Lincoln confessed, "I sincerely wish that I was a more devoted man than I am. Sometimes in my difficulties I have been driven to the last resort to say God is still my only hope. It is still all the world to me."

His faith was non-sectarian, although this is understandable given the way denominations had treated him:

My wife has some relatives in the Presbyterian and some in the Episcopal Churches, and therefore, wherever it would tell, I was set down as either the one or the other, whilst it was every where contended that no christian ought to go for me, because I belonged to no church, and was suspected of being a deist.

His faith was also non-dogmatic; while Lincoln quoted Jesus and the Old Testament often, he seems to have been less fond of the doctrinal epistles. But that does not mean his faith was not real. A rare and affecting glimpse into Lincoln's own heart is offered in another letter, written to his stepbrother in January 1851 after receiving news of his father's serious illness:

I sincerely hope Father may yet recover his health; but at all events tell him to remember to call upon, and confide in, our great, and good, and merciful Maker; who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads; and He will not forget the dying man, who puts his trust in Him. Say to him that...if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before; and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere-long to join them.

It seems difficult not to conclude that someone who could speak this way in a private communication is a believer.

But Lincoln's personal faith, or his

relationship with God, is not what is relevant to us. Leaving aside the higher matter of eternal consequences between him and his Maker, it is more important to consider Lincoln's faith as it applied to issues of public life.

The spiritual testimony of the mature Lincoln is contained in his greatest speech, the Second Inaugural Address. This profoundest and most deeply moving of all American political documents is really a sermon on a series of biblical texts. In March of 1865, with the war grinding to its close, Lincoln was trying to make sense of it all.

The catastrophe that had overtaken the whole nation, North and South, was more overwhelming than anyone had imagined. People were struggling to understand why it had happened, how a good God, in whom nearly everyone on both sides still believed, could have allowed it.

Lincoln's answer, forged out of his own suffering, his years of anxiety and toil, reaffirmed both the goodness and severity of God:

The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that

offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

And then the well-known conclusion,

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Lincoln believed in the providence of God, God's government over human affairs. Lincoln believed in the holiness of God, and the justice of God in judging sin, and in the responsibility of people to practice the will of God in human society. Lincoln also believed in the mercy of God and in the need to live out that mercy by showing love for neighbors, even for enemies.

Whether or not he was a Christian is, for us, an irrelevant, perhaps an impertinent question. What is more significant is that for the American people in the 1860s, Lincoln's blend of political and religious feeling assured a broken and war-weary people that a new society could be better than the one before. □

Faith and the Country's Father

George Washington was not an orthodox Christian, as some have claimed, nor an orthodox deist, as others have proposed. His personal theology, based on his own understanding of the Bible and his reading of many Enlightenment thinkers of his time, was most likely broadly Unitarian, as was that of most deists of his time. Concerning revealed religion and systematic theology, these deists were either privately skeptical (as Washington may have been), philosophically curious (like Thomas Jefferson) or belligerently argumentative (like Thomas Paine). But they all believed in God and generally in life after death. As far as Washington was concerned, God was the Creator of the universe, and human affairs were guided by providence, the Almighty Being, the Great Author or the Invisible Hand (terms often used by Washington). He highly respected the teachings of Jesus but upheld the right of every religious group—Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Jews—to freedom of worship and equality before the law, and condemned all forms of bigotry, intolerance, discrimination, and persecution.

Most striking, after 1799 the first president became one of the most powerful symbols of national unity and a veritable totem of America's public faith. Not only was he regarded as the father of his country, but also as the American Moses who had led his people, God's New Israel, out of British bondage into the Promised Land of republican America. In sermon after sermon following his death, the clergy exalted him as the American Moses and the savior of his people. All of this was soon translated into a thousand sacred myths which in turn supported the unifying political superstructure of the nation's public faith.

Washington, therefore, occupied a special place in the development of America's public religion. He gave it a voice, served as the focal point for its formation and encased his presidency in religion by his words and example, and through his powerful personality bestowed on the office a sacred aura. Quickly elevated to civil sainthood following his death, he also became the Moses figure who reminded his people that they enjoyed a common heritage and that God had chosen them as his New Israel for a new era. Washington not only provided critical leadership as the key founder of a new nation dedicated to republican ideals and human rights, but also formative leadership as the key founder of the public faith of that new nation.



Source: *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, InterVarsity Press, 1990. Used with permission.



OPINION

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Lincoln's faith

In the darkest hours of civil conflict, when it appeared nothing earthly could hold the Union together, Abraham Lincoln turned to the one guiding influence that had aided him so often before — his deep faith in the power of God.

Today, as we observe the 186th anniversary of the Great Emancipator's birth, many students and scholars of Lincoln once again are sorting through his qualities and strengths, trying to discover the source of his greatness. As they do, they will focus on his courage, his strong moral convictions, his sense of humor, his humility and concern for others and, of course, the great accomplishments themselves.

But what frequently takes the background in such discussions is the strength he gained from his complete faith in the Almighty. As the fighting raged during the Civil War, Lincoln said: "I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do a particular thing, he finds a way of letting me know it. I am confident that it is his design to restore the Union. He will do it in his own good time." That faith was finally rewarded after four torturous years of conflict, and he lived to see its conclusion.

This past December brought the death of D. Elton Trueblood, an eminent American theologian, for many years professor at large at Earlham College in Richmond, Ind. In 1973, he wrote a book titled "Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish" which remains one of the most enlightening studies ever done of Lincoln's personal feelings and beliefs.

In that book, Dr. Trueblood revealed a Lincoln few ever think about, an immortal leader of our country who once said and believed: "I have felt His hand upon me in great trials." When we look for the source of Lincoln's greatness, faith is an essential ingredient.

Thus, on this weekend of special Lincoln observances, it is worthwhile to recall some of Dr. Trueblood's insights. The 16th president's humility, nurtured by his faith, caused him to accept his insignificance in the eyes of his maker, but he also firmly believed he was the tool God was using to accomplish his plan.

As a result, prayer became a daily necessity to determine the path he should take. He prayed in time of crisis; he prayed in time of victory. He prayed by himself and he rallied the nation to prayer, for as Trueblood wrote: "He prayed for guidance, and he prayed in gratitude."

Trueblood says Lincoln's extensive knowledge of the Bible enabled him to develop an unusual spiritual relationship with God. He firmly believed that God's will directs human beings, but Lincoln also became engulfed in anguish resulting from his struggle to determine God's will for him.

Lincoln's faith was so strong that he used prayer not to dare try to alter the will of God, but to ask for direction and to discover partially what God's will was. His own realization that he was but a tool in the hands of his maker nourished his humility, enabling him to appear modest, while recognizing he had a destiny he must pursue. Coupled with that was his deeply embedded sense of moral purpose.

In his major speeches, Lincoln relied heavily on his biblical knowledge. The "House Divided" speech is a prime example of Lincoln's use of the Bible in a public address. The words, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," are closely copied from those of St. Mark.

The style of the Gettysburg Address closely resembles that of the Twenty-Third Psalm. Of the 265 words in the Address, 194 are one syllable. The psalm, which Lincoln could repeat from memory, has 118 words, 92 of which are one syllable.

Abraham Lincoln was without question a complicated man, thus the reason that scholars have devoted so much attention not only to his accomplishments but also to his makeup as a person. Faith was an essential element of his greatness.

With our modern materialism and sophistication, many find it difficult to relate religion to our daily lives, but there is a lesson in Lincoln's faith. He showed that trust in a being far greater than himself gave him the courage to do the necessary things that ultimately carried him to greatness.

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Investigative Files

Paranormal Lincoln

Joe Nickell



His guiding of the United States through its greatest crisis and his subsequent martyrdom have caused the shadow of the tall, sixteenth president to loom still larger. Called "the most mythic of all American presidents" (Cohen 1989, 7), Abraham Lincoln has long been credited by paranormalists with supernatural powers. These include an early mirror-vision, prophetic dreams, and spiritualistic phenomena. His ghost, some say, even haunts the White House.¹

In the Looking Glass

Many people have portrayed Lincoln as a man given to belief in omens-particularly those relating to his assassination. An incident often cited in this regard occurred at his home in Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln related it to a few friends and associates, including Noah Brooks in 1864. Brooks shared it with the readers of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* the following July-three months after Lincoln's death-recounting the president's story "as nearly as possible in his own words":

It was just after my election in 1860. . . . I was well tired out, and went home to rest, throwing myself down on a lounge in my chamber. Opposite where I lay was a bureau, with a swinging-glass upon it-[and here he got up and placed furniture to illustrate the position]-and, looking in that glass, I saw myself reflected, nearly at full length; but my face, I noticed, had two separate and distinct images, the tip of the nose of one being about three inches from the tip of the other. I was a little bothered, perhaps startled, and got up and looked in the glass, but the illusion vanished. On lying down again I saw it a second time-plainer, if possible, than before; and then I noticed that one of the faces was a little paler, say five shades, than the other. I got up and the thing melted away, and I went off and, in the excitement of the hour, forgot all about it-nearly, but not quite, for the thing would once in a while come up, and give me a little pang, as though something uncomfortable had happened. When I went home I told my wife about it, and a few days after I tried the experiment again, when [with a laugh], sure enough, the thing came again; but I never succeeded in bringing the ghost back after that, though I once tried very industriously to show it to my wife, who was worried about it somewhat. She thought it was "a sign" that I was to be elected to a second term of office, and that the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through the last term. (Brooks 1865, 224-225)

The same story was told by Ward Hill Lamon in his book, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*. Lamon was a friend of Lincoln's,

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a fearless man who accompanied him to Washington for his protection, being given the special title, Marshal of the District of Columbia. In discussing the matter of the double image in the mirror, Lamon stated: "Mr. Lincoln more than once told me that he could not explain this phenomenon" and "that he had tried to reproduce the double reflection at the Executive Mansion, but without success." In Lamon's account it was not Mrs. Lincoln but the president himself who thought the "ghostly" image foretold "that death would overtake him" before the end of his second term (Lamon 1995, 111-112).

In recent years, paranormalists have gotten hold of Lincoln's anecdote and offered their own interpretations. Hans Holzer states that "What the President saw was a brief 'out of the body experience,' or astral projection," meaning "that the bonds between conscious mind and the unconscious are temporarily loosened and that the inner or true self has quickly slipped out" (Holzer 1995, 65).

Such an explanation utterly fails to fit the evidence. Lincoln did not describe an out-of-body experience—a feeling of being outside one's physical self—but, according to Brooks (1865, 225), "The President, with his usual good sense, saw nothing in all this but an optical illusion."

The nature of this optical illusion can be deduced from the circumstances. The double image was of Lincoln's face only, could be seen in a particular mirror but not others, and vanished and reappeared with respect to a certain vantage point. Taken together, these details are corroborative evidence that the mirror was the cause. An ordinary mirror can produce a slight double-image effect due to light reflecting off the front of the glass as well as off the silvering on the back. In modern mirrors this is usually not noticeable, and the shift in the image is slight in any event. But in the case of old mirrors, whose glass plates "were generally imperfect" (Cescinsky 1931), a distinct double image might be produced, like that shown in Figure 1. (Unfortunately, the actual mirror-topped bureau Lincoln described is no longer to be found at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, much of the furniture having been dispersed in earlier years [Suits 1998].)



Figure 1. Double image of author (and of photographer Rob McElroy) reproduces a curious effect experienced by

Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and thought by Mrs. Lincoln to be an omen.

Dreams of Death

The mirror incident sets the stage for claims of even more emphatically premonitory experiences. These were dreams Lincoln reportedly had that foretold dramatic events. One he related to his cabinet on April 14, 1865. The previous night he had dreamed he was in some mysterious boat, he said, "sailing toward a dark and indefinite shore." In another version it was of "a ship sailing rapidly" (Lewis 1973, 290). When Lincoln was assassinated only hours later, the dream was seen as weirdly prophetic. The story grew in the retellings which spread, says Lloyd Lewis in *Myths After Lincoln* (1973, 291) "around the world."

In fact, Lincoln had not thought the dream presaged his death. He had actually mentioned it in reply to General Grant, his guest that Good Friday afternoon, who had expressed worries about General Sherman's fate in North Carolina. Lincoln felt that Sherman would be victorious because, he said, the dream had often come to him prior to significant events in the war. According to Lewis (1973, 290): "For a President of the United States, in a time like the Civil War, to dream that he was sailing rapidly to an unseen shore was certainly not remarkable. Most of his waking hours, across four years, were spent in wondering where the Ship of State was going."

Lincoln supposedly described an even more ominous dream to Mrs. Lincoln, not long before his assassination, then again to Ward Hill Lamon (1895, 115-116) who reconstructed Lincoln's words as follows:

About ten days ago, I retired very late. I had been up waiting for important dispatches from the front. I could not have been long in bed when I fell into a slumber, for I was weary. I soon began to dream. There seemed to be a death-like stillness about me. Then I heard subdued sobs, as if a number of people were weeping. I thought I left my bed and wandered downstairs. There the silence was broken by the same pitiful sobbing, but the mourners were invisible. . . . Determined to find the cause of a state of things so mysterious and so shocking, I kept on until I arrived at the East Room, which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral vestments. Around it were stationed soldiers who were acting as guards; and there was a throng of people, some gazing mournfully upon the corpse, whose face was covered, others weeping pitifully. "Who is dead in the White House?" I demanded of one of the soldiers. "The President," was his answer; "he was killed by an assassin!" Then came a loud burst of grief from the crowd, which awoke me from my dream. I slept no more that night; and although it was only a dream, I have been strangely annoyed by it ever since.

Lamon's account may be true, although he has been criticized for having "fed the fire of superstition that people were kindling about the name of Lincoln" (Lewis 1973, 294). In fact, however, Lamon had added a sequel to the story which is invariably ignored:

Once the President alluded to this terrible dream with some show of playful humor. "Hill," said he, "your apprehension of harm to

me from some hidden enemy is downright foolishness. For a long time you have been trying to keep somebody-the Lord knows who-from killing me. Don't you see how it will turn out? In this dream it was not me, but some other fellow, that was killed. It seems that this ghostly assassin tried his hand on some one else." (Lamon 1895, 116-117)

In any event, that Lincoln should have dreamed of assassination-even his own-can scarcely be termed remarkable. Prior to his first inauguration in 1861, Pinkerton detectives had smuggled Lincoln into Washington at night to avoid a change of trains in Baltimore where an assassination plot had been uncovered (Neely 1982, 16-17). Lincoln had subsequently "received untold number of death threats" (St. George 1990, 66), and on one occasion had a hole shot through his top hat by a would-be assassin (Neely 1982, 282).

Among the Spirits

Lamon (1895, 120) insisted that Lincoln "was no dabbler in divination-astrology, horoscopy, prophecy, ghostly lore, or witcheries of any sort." Yet soon after his death spiritualists sought to use Lincoln to give respectability to their practices by citing the occasions he had permitted seances in the White House, as well as to claim contact with his own departed spirit. The extent of Lincoln's involvement with spiritualism has been much debated.

Actually, it was Mrs. Lincoln who was involved with spiritualists. She turned to them in her bereavement over the death of Willie, the Lincolns' beloved eleven-year-old son who died of "bilious fever" in 1862. One such spiritualist medium was Henrietta "Nettie" Colburn (1841-1892). Mary Todd Lincoln met her at a "circle" or seance at the Georgetown home of Cranstoun Laurie, chief clerk of the post office in Washington. On one occasion, a seance with Nettie was being held in the White House's Red Parlor when the president stumbled upon the group and watched with curiosity. Another time he accompanied Mary to a seance at the Lauries' home. At least one biographer has suggested that Lincoln's marginal involvement may have stemmed from a desire "to protect his gullible wife" (Temple 1995, 199).

That was exactly what Lincoln did with regard to a trickster named Charles J. Colchester. Styling himself "Lord Colchester," he conducted seances wherein "spirit rappings" were produced. A concerned Lincoln asked Dr. Joseph Henry (1797-1878), the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, for his advice about Colchester, whereupon Dr. Henry invited the medium to give a demonstration at his office. The scientist determined that the sounds came from Colchester and he suspected trickery. Later, Noah Brooks caught the medium cheating and warned Colchester not to return to the Executive Mansion (Temple 1995, 200). Lincoln himself was not interested in seances, but, according to Lloyd Lewis's *Myths After Lincoln* (1973, 301), "In these dark hocus-pocuses Mrs. Lincoln found comfort, and Lincoln let them go on for a time, careless of whether the intellectuals of the capital thought him addle-pated or no."

Spectral Visits

It is ironic that Lincoln did not believe in spiritualism, since his ghost is now reportedly so active. Although his Springfield home is decidedly unhaunted, according to curator Linda Suits (1998), who

says neither she nor anyone she knows has had a ghostly encounter there, other places compete for attention. There have been numerous reported sightings of Lincoln's ghost at his tomb in Springfield as well as at Fort Monroe in Virginia and, in Washington, at both the White House and Ford's Theater (where Lincoln was assassinated) (Cohen 1989, 11; Winer and Osborn 1979, 125; Jones 1996, 15).

Understandably, perhaps, it is the White House that seems to receive the most attention-especially the "Lincoln Bedroom" (which, in Lincoln's time, was actually his office). The notion that his ghost frequents the stately rooms and corridors doubtless began with Mrs. Lincoln's post-assassination seances and it was probably given impetus by a figurative remark made by President Theodore Roosevelt (who served from 1901-1909): "I think of Lincoln, shambling, homely, with his strong, sad, deeply-furrowed face, all the time. I see him in the different rooms and in the halls" (St. George 1990, 84). Such feelings are still common and may trigger sightings among imaginative people and those predisposed to see ghosts. The first person to report actually seeing Lincoln's ghost was Grace Coolidge (First Lady from 1923 to 1929), who saw his tall figure looking out an Oval Office window (Scott and Norman 1991, 74; Cohen 1989, 10). During her tenure, guests were lodged in the "Lincoln bedroom" and "Every newcomer was informed of the legend that when the great light over the front door was dimmed for the night the ghost of Abraham Lincoln was supposed to pace silently to and fro on the North Porch" (Ross 1962, 109).

Among subsequent Lincoln sightings was one by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (who had a prior interest in spiritualism). She was a guest of President Franklin D. Roosevelt when she heard a knock during the night at her bedroom door. Opening it, the drowsy queen saw the figure of Abraham Lincoln looking down at her, causing her to swoon (Ronan 1974, 40; Cohen 1989, 10). Religious leader Norman Vincent Peale claimed that a prominent actor (whom he would not name) had been a White House guest when he awoke to Lincoln's voice pleading for help. The actor sat up to see "the lanky form of Lincoln prostrate on the floor in prayer, arms outstretched with fingers digging into the carpet" (Winer and Osborn 1979, 135). And President Reagan's daughter Maureen said she had occasionally seen Lincoln's ghost-"an aura, sometimes red, sometimes orange"-during the night. So had her husband Dennis Revell (Caroli 1992, 39).

These examples are typical of many ghost sightings that are due to common "waking dreams," an experience that occurs when someone is just going to sleep or waking up and perceives ghosts, lights, or other strange imagery (Nickell 1995, 41, 46). Other apparitions are most likely to be seen when one is tired, daydreaming, performing routine chores, or is otherwise in a reverie or dissociative state (see e.g., Mackenzie 1982). This may help explain sightings such as one by Eleanor Roosevelt's secretary, who passed by the Lincoln Bedroom one day and was frightened to see the ghostly president sitting on the bed and pulling on his boots (Alexander 1998, 43; Jones 1996, 8).

Once the notion of a ghost is affixed to a place, almost anything-an unexplained noise, mechanical malfunction, misplaced object, or the like-can be added to the lore. For example, on one of my appearances on "The Michael Reagan Show," Mike told me an anecdote about his father and their dog, Rex. According to President Reagan, when passing the Lincoln Bedroom Rex would

often bark but would refuse to enter the room (Reagan 1998; see also Caroli 1992, 39, and Alexander 1998, 45). Mike related the story as more of a novelty than as proof of a supernatural occurrence. (President Reagan's daughter, Patti Davis, once asked her father if he had ever seen Lincoln's ghost. "'No,' my father answered-a bit sadly, I thought. 'I haven't seen him yet. But I do believe he's here'" [Davis 1995].) Neither the Bushes nor, as far as they could tell, their dog Millie ever saw the ghost of Lincoln, or indeed any of the other historical specters who are occasionally reported (Alexander 1998, 45).

Not all of the reports of Lincoln's ghost, however, have featured apparitions. In earlier times there were frequent reports of sounds that were variously interpreted, some describing them as heavy footfalls (Cohen 1989, 10; Jones 1996, 8), others as knockings at the door, with Lincoln's ghost typically being thought responsible. Not only Queen Wilhelmina but also "Presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Herbert Hoover and Harry Truman all said they heard mysterious rappings, often at their bedroom doors" (Scott and Norman 1991, 74). However, ghosthunter Hans Holzer (1995, 70) concedes: "President Truman, a skeptic, decided that the noises had to be due to 'natural' causes, such as the dangerous settling of the floors. He ordered the White House completely rebuilt, and perhaps this was a good thing: It would surely have collapsed soon after, according to the architect, General Edgerton."

For all his greatness Abraham Lincoln was of course human. Among his foibles were a tendency to melancholy, a sense of fatalism, and a touch of superstition from his frontier upbringing. However, as this investigation demonstrates, neither his life nor his death offers proof of paranormal or supernatural occurrences-not his very human apprehensions of mortality, not his wife's sad seduction into spiritualism, and not the evidence, even if expressed as anecdotes of ghostly apparitions, that his great legacy lives on.

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Note

1. Among other implicitly paranormal claims relating to Lincoln are the "mysterious coincidences" that are often claimed between him and President John F. Kennedy. See Martin Gardner, *The Magic Numbers of Dr. Matrix* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1985) and Bruce Martin, "Coincidence: Remarkable or Random?" *Skeptical Inquirer* 22(5) (September/October 1998): 23-28.

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THE AMERICAN THINKER

Lincoln's Faith

October 9th, 2005

Much has been made of President George W. Bush's faith and devotion to religion since he declared with simple eloquence that his personal hero was "Christ" during a Republican primary debate in 2000. The mainstream media lampooned and criticized the President after author Bob Woodward revealed on 60 Minutes last year that President Bush said he sought "a higher power" than his former-President father in the lonely moments before committing United States forces into Iraq in 2003.

In the current atmosphere of conventional wisdom mocking nearly every form of Judeo-Christian religion and accusing public officials who are public about their religious beliefs of breaching the intent of the Founders, it is important to again look to the past and the thoughts and meditations on the subject of previous Presidents and leaders. Perspective is needed, especially when it relates to the fanatical hatred of President Bush and the misunderstanding many have about his faith.

A study on the religious principles and leadership of Abraham Lincoln, written nearly 60 years ago and just recently published by the late author's son, helps illuminate the thoughts and actions of the sixteenth President during one of the most trying times in our nation's history and helps bring the badly-needed perspective to bear today.

Dr. G. George Fox wrote *Abraham Lincoln's Faith Based Leadership* in 1959. Dr. Fox, who was also a rabbi, desired to show that President Lincoln was indeed "a believer" and used religion and religious belief in his presidency, while also drawing on Dr. Fox's own scholarship to further examine the President's beliefs.

One of the unique aspects of Dr. Fox's work is that it intentionally looked beyond the self-imposed restrictions on celebrated volumes of the day such as *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, which deemed anecdotal evidence of the content of President Lincoln's religious life as incomplete and unworthy of inclusion of any published portrait of the President. Dr. Fox utilized early "utterances, memoirs, reminiscences and interviews" that many scholars to that point hastily discarded, but are prized by contemporary historians. This was a unique method when Dr. Fox first wrote his work, and at times one has to remember that indeed the manuscript was written decades ago, lest the reader dismiss the information within as common knowledge.

Dr. Fox points to conversations Lincoln had with people who in turn jotted down their remembrances. Dr. Fox, for example, points out a conversation President Lincoln had with Gen. Sickles regarding prayer and the battles at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Dr. Fox argues that such conversations are absent from the mainstream studies of Lincoln such as *The Collected Works*, but "vital" in understanding Lincoln's religion and his approach during wartime.

Readers who recall with a laugh the carefully-crafted of image of Bill and Hillary Clinton rolling up to church, the President carrying a Bible the size of a law school book will enjoy Dr. Fox's juxtaposition of President Lincoln skepticism of "pious displays" of religious devotion while detailing his stone-cold knowledge of the Bible and its teachings is craftily executed.

Among others with similar thoughts on the matter of faith, Dr. Fox cites Henry Whitney's observations of Lincoln driving "right straight to the essence and marrow of the subject." President Lincoln's reliance on the private act of prayer is also examined, relating to his "sublime faith" and certainty that the Lord stood on the side of right and Lincoln's anxiety that he was on the Lord's side. Dr. Fox cites reminiscence by Jesse Fell of Bloomington, Illinois, that follows in part:

"He never attached himself to any religious society whatsoever. His religious views were eminently practical,

and are summed up as I think in these two propositions: The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He fully believed in a superintending and overruling Providence, that guides and control the operations of the world; but maintained that law and order, and not their violation or suspension, are the appointed means by which this providence was exercised.”

Perhaps the most fascinating and unique discussion in this book is Dr. Fox’s meditations on President Lincoln and the Biblical prophets. Dr. Fox posits that President Lincoln’s knowledge of the ethical teachings of the prophets was “phenomenal.” Putting his rabbinical studies and knowledge to great use, Dr. Fox profiles “Lincoln’s Prophets,” who included Moses, Jesus, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Looking at various state papers of the Lincoln administration, Dr. Fox demonstrates that two proclamations for a Fast Day papers echo the burdens of Jeremiah and an excerpt from Ezekiel, respectively. Dr. Fox also shows how the Thanksgiving message of 1864 reads like Psalms 9 and 66. As Lincoln wrote in part:

It has pleased Almighty God to prolong our national life another year, defending us with His guardian care against unfriendly designs from abroad, and vouchsafing us unto in His mercy, many and signal victories over the enemy, who is of our own household. It has also pleased our Heavenly Father to favor as well our citizens in their homes, as our soldiers in their camps, and our sailors on the rivers and seas, with unusual health. He has largely augmented our free population by emancipation and immigration, while he has opened to us new sources of wealth, and had crowned the labor of our workingmen in every department of industry, with abundant rewards. Moreover he has been pleased to animate and inspire our minds and hearts with fortitude, courage and resolution, sufficient for the great trial of civil war into which we have been brought by our adherence as a nation to the cause of freedom and humanity, and to afford to us reasonable hopes of an ultimate and happy deliverance from all our dangers and afflictions.

Imagine if George W. Bush said that today.

Dr. Fox finally argues that Abraham Lincoln was a modern-day Jeremiah, who both lived in times of great peril and died for their causes. Dr. Fox’s use of state papers, anecdotal remembrances and the words of the Bible and Prophets is well-organized. Again, that this work was completed in 1959 yet still holds much value and perspective today is a testament to the craftsmanship and foresight of G. George Fox. In his introduction to the book, Dr. Fox wrote that he wished his writing “to have contributed some light to the study of the religion of Abraham Lincoln.” His writing did so – and more.

Matt May is a freelance writer and can be reached at matthewtmay@yahoo.com; his website is [here](#).

Matthew May

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sessment of the dual water system.

JEROME KORMAN
North Fort Myers

Lincoln's faith

I was amused at Homer Pyle's
propaganda piece on the religion of
Abe Lincoln.

Although he did not say so, I was
left with the impression, and I am
sure others were, that he was at-
tempting to associate Mr. Lincoln
with Christianity. At least, he failed
to tell his readers that Lincoln was a
deist and did not believe in the Jew-
ish-Christian God of the Bible who in
a fit of anger drowned all His chil-
dren but eight, upheld slavery, polyg-
amy, religious persecution and wars
of extermination.

Since space is limited in the Mail-
bag, I would suggest that Mr. Pyle
read from Ingersoll's works, Volume
12, pages 247 through 255.

Mr. Pyle should publish in the
News-Press Mark Twain's "The War
Prayer." It might help to show Chris-

tians how selfish and irrational most
of their prayers really are; especial-
ly during war time.

WILLIAM R. CABLE
Estero

No taxes for religion

In a Feb. 24 column, Homer Pyle
wrote, "The First Amendment has
been turned upside down" and that
the sole purpose of the "establish-
ment" and "free exercise" clauses
was "to prohibit government interfe-
rence in religious freedom, either by
establishing a religion or by forbid-
ding religious exercises." Then he
complained because "that same 'es-
tablishment' clause is used to sep-
arate religion from government."

Now that we've heard from
Opinion page editor, Mr. Pyle,
listen to the Supreme Court dec-
ision in the 1947 Everson case. It sta-
tes that no government bor-
"pass laws which aid one r-
aid all religions, or prefer c-
gion over another," and that
in any amount, large or sma-
levied to support any religi-
ities or institutions. In the
Jefferson, the clause aga-
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tended to erect a "wall o-
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Homer Pyle echoes
thinking of fundamen-
talists who
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JOSEPH M

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