

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE MISSION OF AMERICA

ST MARGARET'S CHURCH, WESTMINSTER, 7 JULY 2009

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Allow me to begin by thanking warmly those at the Abbey who have invited me to take part in today's special event: the Dean and Chapter – in particular the Canon Treasurer, Bob Reiss, and the Receiver General, Sir Stephen Lamport – as well as Valerie Humphrey of the Abbey Foundation and Gwen Shaw, the Projects Officer. I am gratefully aware that the event has enjoyed the good offices of Lord Hurd of Westwell and Lord Lloyd of Berwick, as well as the involvement of Richard LeBaron, the Chargé d'Affaires at the United States Embassy, and his colleagues. I also want to pay a special and warm tribute to Dr Andrew Chandler, Director of the George Bell Institute at the University of Chichester, whose initiative this has been.

I am also delighted to say that this evening's audience includes a number of American visitors, including senior members of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (co-chairman Harold Holzer, Commissioner Frank Williams and Executive Director Eileen Mackevich). It is equally a pleasure to note that we have with us some 35 British Fulbright Scholars who are preparing to leave for a year in the United States: we congratulate them and wish them every success in their studies.

Few people who stand to examine and admire the statue of Abraham Lincoln, where we earlier laid a wreath, are aware of when and why it was sited there. It is a copy of an original in Chicago, called 'Lincoln the Man', the work of Augustus Saint Gaudens. 'A gift of the American people', it was unveiled in July 1920 under the auspices of the Anglo-American Society. Lord Bryce presided over a public meeting at Central Hall, Westminster, at which the American ambassador – Elihu Root – made a speech of presentation. The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, responded, accepting the statue on behalf of the British people. A procession of worthies then made its way to the west side of Parliament Square, where the Duke of Connaught, the president of the Anglo-American Society, unveiled the monument. The choir of Westminster Abbey sang the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic'; American Civil War veterans laid a wreath; and the proceedings concluded with the British national anthem.

This episode was just one manifestation, during the years of the Great War and its aftermath, of what George Bernard Shaw described as a 'cult of Lincoln' amongst the British, particularly amongst liberals. This was the period when a replica of George Barnard's Cincinnati statue of a rugged, angular, rough-hewn Lincoln was placed in Manchester: known as the 'stomach ache statue', since Lincoln's hands unintentionally suggest a man troubled with colic, it commemorates the president's tribute to suffering Lancashire mill-operatives during the wartime cotton famine. A little later, David Lloyd George, by then an ex-prime minister, made a triumphal tour of North America. Feted as a wartime statesman of 'almost superhuman' character (as the *New York Times* put it), he spent what he called 'a glorious day' visiting the Kentucky birthplace of his life-long hero; a little later, like other European pilgrims, he journeyed to pay his respects at Lincoln's tomb at Oak Ridge cemetery in Springfield.

Even before the Great War ended, the poet John Drinkwater had published a celebratory play, *Abraham Lincoln*, the first effective stage dramatization of Lincoln's life. It opened in Birmingham in 1918 and, at Arnold Bennett's instigation, transferred with 'spectacular success' to London, to the Lyric, Hammersmith. As a piece of history, the play is decidedly shaky. And much of the characterization is stereotypical (ludicrously so in the case of Frederick Douglass, the pre-eminent black abolitionist, who speaks in pidgin English). However, complete with a verse-speaking chorus, the play provided a stirring portrait of a president weighed down, but not defeated, by the pressures of war. The part of Lincoln himself was incongruously played by an actor with an Irish brogue (and Frederick Douglass's lines were spoken by a blacked-up young Alistair Sim). It was reported that 'All Mayfair went to see it. Hammersmith became a nightly pilgrimage for the West End.' It drew all social classes, including the King and Queen. The play ran for hundreds of performances, crossed the Atlantic, and was several times revived in London over the next decade.

Drinkwater's inspiration was one of the earliest of all the scholarly lives of Abraham Lincoln, that by Godfrey Rathbone Benson, Lord Charnwood. In that study, published in 1916, the Oxford-educated Charnwood brought a sympathetic and discerning eye to bear on Lincoln's moral purpose, while avoiding the hagiography that had marked so many earlier biographies of the Great Emancipator. The Liberal peer attributed to Lincoln a main role in what he called the 'wider cause of human good'. Here was a plain master of political cunning whose honesty, intellectual rigour and moral determination fashioned 'a statesman guided in shifting circumstances by great [democratic and emancipatory] principles' – a leader driven by 'a larger philosophy

than that of simple abolitionism': 'His statesmanship stands out as a singular instance of what the Greeks were after when they dreamt of a "philosopher king."'

In the post-war world of Versailles and national reconstruction, others seized on Charnwood's Lincoln to fashion a figure of universal, not local, relevance. Lincoln – the tragic, humble, Christ-like figure of history – had shown an exemplary devotion to democracy and freedom. 'He hit us', Arnold Bennett said, 'in our historical Puritan's wind. He seemed to incarnate our purpose, our usefulness, our sacrifice ... This nobility – was it not ours? This man of government of the people by the people for the people – was this not the new order promised by our politicians, nay actually being made in Paris by the peoples' representatives? And so Lincoln became the stuff our dreams are made of.'

Even *The Times*, which during Lincoln's presidency had been scornful at best, now recanted: 'We know now, as neither ... [his countrymen] nor we could then discern, that to him was given vision; and the measure of our present reverence is the measure of an earlier incomprehension. Here in England we ... should find in him inspiration.' No one made more of Lincoln's 'universal significance in history' than John Drinkwater, in a set of essays addressed to the English-speaking world. *Lincoln: The World Emancipator* (not history but a romantic prospectus), presented Lincoln as a supreme exponent of 'the great principle of individual liberty within national unity'. Drinkwater articulated the shared self-understanding of Britons and Americans as joint defenders of progressive, democratic government. As Lloyd George put it: '[Lincoln] is one of those giant figures, of whom there are very few in history, who lose their nationality in death.'

There are indeed elements in Lincoln's moral philosophy and political achievement whose wider relevance helps explain the appetite with which those in other societies and later generations have seized on him as a model.

In essence, Lincoln's social and moral project was to construct an enterprising, commercially prosperous nation in which, under the equal operation of republican laws, each and every citizen would enjoy the right to rise and get the education needed to seize the chances presented by a fluid and expanding society.

The logic of Lincoln's economic thought dictated a social and moral order at odds with southern slavery. 'I am naturally anti-slavery,' Lincoln later wrote. 'If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel.' His argument drew especially on the doctrines of natural rights and human equality set out in the nation's founding texts. All men, black and white, should be free to enjoy the fruits of their own work. Free labour offered the prospect of 'improvement in condition' and kept the social order fluid. Lincoln had no fear of a permanent proletariat: he saw no insuperable barriers to the social progress of any free, enterprising and conscientious working man. Slavery, however, the enemy of this kind of economic meritocracy, stifled individual enterprise in both planters and slaves, and sustained a fundamental inequality: depriving human beings of the just rewards of their labour.

The Declaration of Independence, on which he grounded his arguments, was for Lincoln a near-sanctified statement of universal principles, and one that squared with essential elements of his personal religious faith: belief in a God who had created all men equal and whose relations with mankind were based on the principles of justice.

Lincoln was clear enough where the Bible's principles led: "*Give to him that is needy*" is the Christian rule of charity; but "*Take from him that is needy*" is the rule of slavery.' He was scornful of southern divines like the Presbyterian Frederick A. Ross, who had constructed a proslavery theology that concluded, as Lincoln put it, that 'it is better for *some* people to be slaves; and, in such cases, it is the Will of God that they be such.' But how was God's will to be established? Suppose Ross had a slave named Sambo. To the question 'Is it the Will of God that Sambo shall remain a slave, or be set free?' God 'gives no audible answer' and the Bible, his revelation, 'gives none, or, at most, none but such as admits of a squabble, as to its meaning.' But the fact that the question was to be resolved by Dr Ross, who 'sits in the shade, with gloves on his hands, and subsists on the bread that Sambo is earning in the burning sun', gave little confidence that he would 'be actuated by that perfect impartiality, which has ever been considered most favorable to correct decisions.'

Lincoln's election to the presidency in 1860 did nothing to alter his hostility to slavery but – by provoking the secession of seven southern states – did everything to change his political priorities. Yet Lincoln's underlying vision did not change.

In a speech to New Yorkers as president-elect, Lincoln set out the purposes that sustained him during his term of office: 'There is nothing that can ever bring me

willingly to consent to the destruction of this Union, unless it were to be that thing for which the Union itself was made. I understand a ship to be made for the carrying and preservation of the cargo, and so long as the ship can be saved, with the cargo, it should never be abandoned. ... So long, then, as it is possible that the prosperity and the liberties of the people can be preserved in the Union, it shall be my purpose at all times to preserve it.'

Lincoln lauded the physical grandeur and material endowments of the US, but far more significant were the political purposes of the Union and the moral magnificence of its free institutions. Thanks to the legacies of the Revolutionary generation -- the Declaration of Independence, with its philosophical celebration of equality, and the Federal Constitution, the guarantor of freedom -- the United States enjoyed a unique and unprecedented liberty ('far exceeding that of any other of the nations of the earth'), whose distinctive features included self-government, or government by the consent of the governed (lauded by Lincoln as 'absolutely and eternally right'), a bill of rights which guaranteed a variety of religious and civil freedoms beyond those 'which the history of former times tells us', a legal system capped by a Supreme Court he deemed 'the most enlightened judicial tribunal in the world', and a commitment to meritocracy through a government 'whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men -- ... to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.')

Here is the key to the vision that sustained Lincoln throughout his presidency. The Union vessel was important only for the cargo it carried: liberty, equality, and a meritocratic society. During the war, Lincoln came to see that, in order to preserve that cargo, he had to embrace the emancipation of the slaves. Many, then and since, judge this and his other acts relating to slavery to have been sluggish, grudging and partial.

This view -- though correctly identifying Lincoln's temperamental caution -- neglects the political constraints on his freedom of action. What impresses is Lincoln's determination, during the two years after he had issued the Proclamation, to follow through its logic: in the arming of black troops, in the refusal to renege on the promise to emancipate, in the invocation of 'a new birth of freedom' at Gettysburg; in energetic efforts to secure a constitutional amendment to end slavery; and in an openness to enfranchising some classes of freedmen. It was this readiness to contemplate an equal citizenship for educated African Americans and those blacks who had taken up

arms in the Union cause which prompted his assassination. John Wilkes Booth heard Lincoln suggest this agenda on 11 April 1865 and shot him three days later.

Lincoln the moral exemplar, the democrat, the stern defender and interpreter of the principles encoded in the Declaration of Independence, the emancipator, the self-improving natural man of the frontier: these were the models which prompted international appreciation of Lincoln and elicited tributes to his breadth of vision and understanding. But Lincoln the embodiment of universal values and principles was also a proud American, and his presidential achievement was constructed upon his harnessing of a potent American nationalism. He tapped into the deep well-springs of a specifically American patriotism, and appealed to a widespread belief in the exceptional mission of the United States under the hand of Providence. Let me illustrate this with a snapshot.

On the morning of 21 February 1861 Abraham Lincoln stood to address the New Jersey Senate in the state house at Trenton. By now the president-elect was entering the eleventh day of an exhausting and roundabout train journey to the nation's capital, to take office in what had become, since his election three months earlier, a deeply fractured Union.

By the time Lincoln reached the New Jersey state capital he had already spoken dozens of times, on some occasions with a prepared speech, more often with just a few inconsequential remarks made from the platform of his railroad car. Borne from the Trenton depot by open carriage, and accompanied by mounted marshals, through muddied streets lined with the cheering crowds, Lincoln arrived at a thronged senate chamber. As the tumult of applause died down, Lincoln turned to his carefully prepared text.

'I cannot but remember the place that New-Jersey holds in our early history', he began. '[A]way back in my childhood ... I got hold of a small book, ... "Weem's Life of Washington."' I remember all the accounts there given of the battle fields and struggles for the liberties of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton The crossing of the river; the contest with the Hessians; the great hardships endured at that time ... I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that those men struggled for. I am exceedingly anxious that that thing which they struggled

for; that something even more than National Independence; ...this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, *his almost chosen people*, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle.'

This resort to a form of sacred language had not been Lincoln's conventional or natural mode of address in his pre-presidential speeches. The allusion to Americans as a 'chosen people', albeit with some qualification and hesitancy, was not one that came easily to Lincoln's lips. But it was of a piece with the themes and tone of his speeches as he travelled east. In his first remarks of substance, at Lafayette, Indiana, he reflected: 'While some of us may differ in political opinion', the common bonds of 'christianity, civilization and patriotism' ensured that 'we are all united in one feeling for the Union.' Thereafter he continued to harness the common religious sensibilities of his audience by pointedly stressing his dependence on (sequentially) 'Divine Providence', 'God', 'the Providence of God', 'that God who has never forsaken this people', 'the Divine Power, without whose aid we can do nothing', 'that Supreme Being who has never forsaken this favored land', 'the Maker of the Universe', 'the Almighty', and 'Almighty God'. And these themes (in language that played on the 'sacred sources of national identity') converged with particular clarity in his address to the New Jersey Senate.

They would shortly find expression in the new president's inaugural address, through which Lincoln appealed for patience to allow for the workings of 'intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land', and drew to a close by affirming the nation's bonds of affection: 'The mystic chords of memory, stre[t]ching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.'

Lincoln's rhetoric was in part a measure of his need to appeal above and beyond party, and to find a language in which to do so. But his resort to religious language was also a measure of the human pressure he felt as he left his home of twenty-five years to face the Union's most serious crisis.

The question of Lincoln's faith has been the subject of much unedifying speculation. What is clear is that the young Lincoln, while no atheist, was influenced by the works of Tom Paine and other deists; but that as a husband, father and established lawyer during the 1840s and 1850s he drew somewhat closer to the orbit of conventional Protestant Christianity, evincing a faith which owed something to Universalism and Unitarianism, but which did not shake off the Calvinistic fatalism under whose influence he had been raised as a boy. Whatever Lincoln's religious views on the eve of his presidency, his wartime experience encouraged an increasing profundity of faith. Not only did he feel a sense of personal responsibility for a war of unimagined savagery, but the conflict brought him trials closer to home: the death of friends and close colleagues, and above all the loss through typhoid of his son, Willie. He attended public worship more habitually than ever before. He found increasing solace in the scriptures. Before the war, Lincoln regarded superintending providence as a remote and mechanistic power, but under the pressure of events he exchanged that providence for an active and more personal God, an interventionist and judgmental figure, one more mysterious and less predictable than the ruling force it superseded.

Lincoln made several public theological forays during his presidency, most notably in his second inaugural address, which directly addressed the meaning of the war and its place in the dispensation of the Almighty. Collectively his writings present three major lines of thought: every nation was a moral being with duties; God's purposes were wise and mysterious; and the American Union, under God, promised to be an agent of moral and political transfiguration.

Lincoln's Calvinistic frame of thought prompted him to conceive of the Almighty as the ruler of nations as well as of men; to identify nations as moral entities equally as capable of transgressions against the divine law as the individuals who composed them. Thus, he explained, 'nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world.' Lincoln made clear his conviction that the nation's continuing trials related specifically to its perpetuating the wrong of slavery. God's punishment of the nation for slavery, Lincoln frequently reflected, was part of the Almighty's purposes, which were, he declared, 'mysterious and unknown to us'. He offered no more memorable statement of his views than to Eliza P. Gurney, of the Society of Friends. 'The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail accurately to perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and

has ruled otherwise. ... Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.'

However mysterious God's purposes, then, and however disobedient the nation, there was reason to believe that a purified Union would emerge from the fiery trial of war. Lincoln's thanksgiving proclamations marvelled at the 'the gracious gifts of the Most High God' and reasons 'to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.' At the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery, he memorably reformulated this idea in a non-scriptural rhetoric of salvation and renewal: for loyal Unionists the great task was to 'resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.'

Lincoln's theology – with its strain of humility and remarkable lack of self-righteousness – stands in some contrast to that of the mainstream Union pulpits, mostly confident that God was on their side. Yet Lincoln and the loyal northern Protestant clergy largely shared a common theological language, and this would be a matter of considerable political, not just theological, significance.

Lincoln's call in April 1861 to put down the rebellion generally drew northern Protestants onto a common platform. Pre-war conservative Unionists and radical antislavery evangelicals now united in 'a great people's war for Christian democracy' and the avoidance of national annihilation. One editor doubted if in the history of the world so many pulpits had thundered against rebellion as on the last Sunday of the first month of the war.

Those pulpits helped crystallize ideas about the nature and meaning of the American nation. Protestant leaders strove to make sense of unfolding events. Nations, they knew, had a primary and essential place in God's moral economy. He worked through them to achieve his purposes. He was the supreme arbiter of their affairs. Every nation's days were numbered, but no nation would die until its purposes were achieved.

Few, though, conceded that the American Union faced imminent destruction; indeed, none doubted that God had chosen the nation for special favour and a particular role. In 'the finest territory on the face of the globe', America had reached 'a state of

advanced civilization', separated from 'the discordant ... elements of the old world'. Americans enjoyed 'the richest inheritance of civil and religious freedom ever bequeathed to any nation in ancient or modern times'. They were guided by 'the best government that was ever constituted since the world began'. America had a mission that would see her 'conquer the world'. This was no conventional lust for conquest. As a latter-day Israel, America's role was to serve, by example, the welfare of the whole human race. This made the rebellion of the South not only political treason against the secular nation, but profanity, or treason against God.

Protestants celebrated the 'the grand providential purposes' for which God had raised up their Christian republic. They were fighting, one said, 'for free government ... in all lands for all ages to come. Ancient republics stand on the page of history as discouraging failures... and the modern republics ... in the old world, have gone down in blood. Our government was organized ...with the conservative element of Christian faith to give stability to [the] work. If [it] ... is cast down ..., when may mankind be expected to repeat the experiment?'

If the Confederacy represented 'the vilest treason ever known since the great secession from heaven' then why was God putting the *whole* nation through this time of trial? For many the war was part of a testing process of discipline characteristic of America's history. What above all explained the nation's paroxysm was its complicity in the peculiar institution. As a visiting group of Chicago clergy told Lincoln in September 1862, the Almighty had 'bared his arm in behalf of the American slave' and now commanded the nation's rulers as He once had ordered Pharaoh: 'Let my people go!'

Yet, despite the punishment, there were no grounds for despair. Out of the severity of war would come a transfigured nation. The Congregationalist minister Homer Dunning fused Christ and the Union: 'I rejoice to be with the nation, when ... on its Calvary it is crucified by its own children. ... Our children and children's children will speak of 1861, as we speak of 1776 ... And when the nation shall have ... covered the continent; when it shall have overmastered the monster of slavery, and ... when it shall stand up ... transfigured with Divine beauty for the doing of God's will, men will give thanks to God for this great and sore trial.'

The logic of evangelicals' understanding of events culminated in the certainty that, as one Episcopalian simply put it, 'God is with us; ... the Lord of Hosts is on our side.'

Without question, God was against the rebels: how could He possibly 'smile upon rebellion, treason, and a nationality with slavery as its corner-stone', a Methodist editor asked. A few preachers warned against hubris and self-righteousness. As Charles Fowler put it, 'The only way to get God on *our side* is to get on *his side*.' But usually this appetite for self-criticism co-existed with a belief in the North's moral superiority and its 'sacred cause'. The North's sins were stains to be washed away, but the Confederacy's were systemic evils removable only by destroying the body itself. 'It is not merely war between sections, between North and South, between Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis', explained one Methodist minister. 'It is war between God on one side, a gigantic wrong on the other.'

If Unionist Protestants were commonly more confident than Lincoln that God was on their side, in other respects, as this summary suggests, the themes of the President's public theology harmonised well with their own. Both he and they knew that nations had a place in the Almighty's moral economy; both conceived of an interventionist God; both understood the Union, under divine providence, to amount to more than a glorious experiment in liberty and republicanism; both understood slavery to compromise that design.

This broad congruence between Lincoln's public theology and that of religious loyalists had rich meaning for the wartime politics of the Union. Mainstream Protestants embraced Lincoln as one of them; Lincoln worked energetically to mobilise the churches behind the war effort. Amongst the complex of ingredients that made for the Union's eventual victory, none was more important than its capacity to sustain popular patriotism, despite the enormous cost in human suffering. Without a regenerating patriotism the Lincoln administration would have foundered on the rocks of war weariness, as Confederates confidently but mistakenly predicted. The White House understood the importance of harnessing a range of voluntary organisations to this end, and none was more potent as a moral influence than the nation's churches. Within these, there was no match for the power of evangelical Protestantism – the millions of Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and others, who made up the country's most formidable religious grouping.

Lincoln thus strove readily met a full gamut of religious visitors who came to lecture him, offer opinions, seek appointments, or pay their respects: nationally-renowned preachers, well-placed editors of mass-circulation papers, and distinguished

abolitionists. These meetings contributed to the view of thousands of Union clergy that the president warranted respect, even admiration, not just *ex officio* but because they found in him qualities to be extolled. There was no personal cult of Lincoln. Yet popular perceptions of Lincoln mattered in sustaining the Union administration as a whole. And those perceptions were shaped to an extent by preachers who used their position to review the president's qualities, and to place him within the divine economy. Scrutinizing Lincoln's character and demeanour, loyal clergy mostly provided a counter-weight to popular impatience over the Union's snail-like progress on the battlefield and over what was deemed the paralysis of the administration itself. In sermons, tracts and newspapers Protestant ministers told of the president's admirable honesty, determination, integrity, and unflinching patriotism.

Although Lincoln continued to disappoint those hoping he would confess Christ as his personal Saviour, many observers perceived in Lincoln a capacity for reverence and 'deep religious feeling'. Jonathan Turner remarked that both president and people 'seem ... to imagine that he is a sort of half way clergyman'. Many saw him as an instrument of the divine will, operating under Providence to become, after George Washington, 'the *second saviour of our country*.' As freedom became a reality, African Americans regarded the president-emancipator as an Old Testament prophet, a Joshua fighting the battle of freedom. Most vividly of all, a Chicago Methodist believed he had located 'the true theory & solution of this "terrible war"' in the remark of one of the city's lawyers, who had declared: '*You may depend upon it, the Lord runs Lincoln.*'

Together, Lincoln's cultivation of loyalist religious constituencies and their reciprocal confidence in him, contributed signally to the larger mobilisation of nationalist sentiment. Cadres of Protestants recruited volunteer soldiers for the Union and Christ, energised the aid societies that served the Union's fighting men, ministered as field chaplains to inspire the troops with the nation's millennial mission, and participated as organisers in the home-front politics of national defence. With remarkable consistency, Protestant spokesmen lined up to defend the Lincoln administration's conscription measures, tolerance of arbitrary arrests, and strong-arm action against draft resisters and dissenters.

There were, of course, anti-Lincolnites within mainstream northern Protestantism. But the reality was that most of the Union's politically active Protestants were deeply committed to Lincoln's expression of America's mission. Re-elected to the presidency in 1864, Lincoln was the beneficiary of a wartime canvass that witnessed the most

complete fusing of religious crusade and political mobilisation in America's electoral experience. Ministers engaged in a fervent round of ward meetings, election speeches, sermons, and editorialising. The president's re-election was due in large part to the extraordinary mobilisation of support by those who saw themselves as agents of God and of Lincoln: the leaders of the Protestant churches.

Amongst the thousands of correspondents who sought to sustain Lincoln during the civil war was one Ephraim Shaler, a crippled veteran of the war of 1812. 'Dont for Gods sake give or yield one inch, or parley a moment with the Rebels Traitors and Murderers, til they lay down the weapons of rebellion and sue for peace,' he urged the president during the first month of the war. 'Have no fears of the final result -- the multitudes of loyal Americans will sustain you and God will overthrow all your enemies. God Speed the right.'

Two and a half years later, the trials of war had shaken none of Shaler's confidence: 'Mr. President; you need have no fears in regard to the termination of this unholy war. ... God is a prayer hearing God, and He will most assuredly hear and answer the ten-thousand prayers offered up morning and evening by' – and here Shaler made no concession to doubt – 'by *His own chosen People* through the length & breadth of our land ... that He would go forth with our armies, and give them victory in every future conflict, til the Rebels lay down their arms & return to their allegiance.'

It was men like Shaler whose single-minded determination provided the bedrock of Unionism and on whose sense of American mission Lincoln would rely, and which he encouraged by his allusions to the Union's special role in providential dispensation, as the last best hope of the world, as 'hope to the world for all future time', and as 'something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world for all time to come'.

Yet we have to return to the Lincoln who could speak more cautiously of 'the *almost* chosen people', of a nation which should be wary of self-righteousness and remain alert to its moral failings. He expressed this idea no more powerfully than in his second inaugural address, from which I have refrained from quoting so far. It is there that the 'almost' of the 'almost chosen' is most directly confronted: "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, ... 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, ... so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether." It was, and is, *this* Lincoln – St Gaudens' 'Lincoln the Man' – who has exerted such a hold on political and public imagination well beyond the limits of the United States, above all for his depth of moral understanding, and a profundity both uncommon in political leaders and timeless in its relevance.