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RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS IN LINCOLN'S LETTERS

No phase of Lincoln's character has been more thoroughly discussed than his reaction toward religion. In harmony with the major theme of the Christmas season, the following excerpts bearing on religion have been copied without discrimination from letters over Lincoln's own signature. They are exhibited in chronological order that any evolution of his religious thoughts which appear might be observed more easily.

September 27, 1841

Miss Mary Speed:

Tell your mother that I have not got her present, an Oxford Bible, with me but I intend to read it regularly when I return home. I doubt not that it is really, as she says, the best cure for the blues, could one but take it according to the truth.

July 4, 1842

Mr. Joshua Speed:

I was always superstitious; I believe God made me one of the instruments of bringing your Fanny and you together, which union I have no doubt he had fore-ordained. Whatever he designs, he will do for me yet. "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord," is my text just now.

January 12, 1851

John E. Johnston:

If it be his (Thomas Lincoln's) 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.

August 15, 1855

Hon. George Robertson:

Our political problem now is "Can we as a nation continue together permanently—forever—half slave and half free?" The problem is too mighty for me—may God in His mercy superintend the solution.

May 25, 1861

To the Father and Mother of Col. Elmer E. Elsworth:

May God give you that consolation which is beyond all earthly power.

February 4, 1862

Nathaniel Gordon:

In granting this respite, it becomes my painful duty to admonish the prisoner that, relinquishing all expectation of pardon by human authority, he refer himself alone to the mercy of the common God and Father of all men.

May 15, 1862

Revs. I. A. Gere, A. A. Reese,
G. E. Chenoweth:

By the help of an all-wise Providence, I shall endeavor to do my duty, and I shall expect the continuance of your prayers for a right solution of our national difficulty.

July 26, 1862

Hon. Reverdy Johnson:

I am a patient man—always willing to forgive on the Christian's terms of repentance and also to give ample time for repentance.

January 5, 1863

Caleb Russell and Sallie A. Finton:

I am upheld and sustained by the good wishes and prayers of God's people. No one is more deeply than myself aware that without His favor our highest wisdom is but as foolishness and that our most strenuous efforts would avail nothing in the shadow of His displeasure.

I am conscious of no desire for my country's welfare that is not in consonance with His will, and of no plan upon which we may not ask His blessing. It seems to me that if there be one subject on which all good men may unitedly agree, it is imploring the gracious favor of the God of nations upon the struggles our people are making, for the preservation of their precious birthright of civil and religious liberty.

February 22, 1863

Rev. Alexander Reeve:

The birthday of Washington and a Christian Sabbath coinciding this year and suggesting together the highest interest of this life and of that to come is most propitious for the meeting proposed.

April 4, 1864

A. E. Hodges, Esq.:

If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills also that we

of the North as well as you of the South shall pay sorely for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the judgment and goodness of God.

April 5, 1864

Mrs. Horace Mann:

While I have not the power to grant all they ask, I trust they will remember that God has and that, as it seems, He wills to do it.

May 30, 1864

Rev. Dr. Ide, Hon. J. R. Doolittle,
Hon. A. Hubbell, Committee:

I can only thank you for thus adding to the effective and almost unanimous support which the Christian communities are so zealously giving to the country and to liberty. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how it could be otherwise with any one professing Christianity or even having ordinary conception of right and wrong. We read in the Bible, as the word of God, Himself, that "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread," and to preach therefrom that "In the sweat of other men's faces shalt thou eat bread" to my mind can scarcely be reconciled with honest sincerity.

September 4, 1864

Eliza P. Gurney:

I have not forgotten and probably never shall forget the very impressive occasion when yourself and friends visited me on a Sabbath forenoon two years ago, nor has your kind letter, written nearly a year later, ever been forgotten. In all it has been your purpose to strengthen my reliance on God. I am much indebted to the good Christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolations; and to no one of them more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately 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.

March 15, 1865

Hon. Thurlow Weed:

Everyone likes a compliment. Thank you for yours on my little notification speech and on the recent inaugural address. I expect the latter to wear as well as—perhaps better than—anything I have produced; but I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world.