

Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish. By Elton Trueblood. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973. Pp. ix, 149. Notes, index. \$4.95.)

Elton Trueblood has written a short but significant work devoted not to Abraham Lincoln's religion but to his religious thinking. One of the most important features of the president's religious thinking, according to Trueblood, was that the Illinoisan's theology underwent significant development from 1841 to 1862. As a result of his broken engagement with Mary Todd in 1841, the death of a son in 1850, the death of another son in 1862, and the growing abolition agitation, Lincoln's theology matured. Ended forever was the light-hearted irreverence of Lincoln's youth. Central to his new spiritual development was the belief that he was acting less and less on his own wishes and was becoming more and more the instrument of God's will.

In connection with this development, Trueblood also stresses that Lincoln became profoundly aware that God acts in history. He believed that God not only dealt with individuals but also with nations and that the Civil War was a terrible penalty God placed on America for the guilt of cherishing slavery. Just as he maintained that the country was being punished for slavery, the president also believed God had plans for a better America. His concern then was to learn what God's will for America was. Lincoln's overwhelming conviction, the author relates, was that God's will could be partly known and that the only hope for finite men lay in conformity to that will.

Professor Trueblood also states, but in a less convincing manner, that Lincoln outmaneuvered the Radicals by making the Emancipation Proclamation a war measure rather than merely an act of detached idealism. Many readers may doubt that the Radicals so emphasized abolition that they neglected the need to preserve the Union, as Trueblood maintains, and they may ask for further clarification on how the proclamation saved the Union and kept alive the opportunity for a life of freedom on the part of all involved.

According to the author, part of Lincoln's greatness was that he reached political decisions at a level far deeper than that of politics. Underlying all of Lincoln's decisions was a moral revulsion against slavery, a mystical sense of the im-

portance of the Union, and an abiding conviction that the divine order could be ascertained and followed.

It is apparent throughout the book that Trueblood admires Lincoln as one of the greatest figures in American history, but was the president as profound a religious thinker as the author depicts? The reader may wonder if what is at times presented in this book is really Lincoln's religious thinking or is a careful mixture of Lincoln's theology and Trueblood's theology.

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