

“WHO HAS DONE THIS DEED?”
THE RESPONSE OF METHODIST PULPITS IN THE NORTH
TO THE
ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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In preparation of a larger work,¹ this writer has read 340 Northern Protestant sermons which cover the seven-week period following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The sermons began on April 16, 1865—Easter Sunday, two days following the tragedy at Ford’s Theater, and ended on June 1, a Thursday set aside as a Day of National Humiliation to mark the end of the official mourning period for the slain President. Of the 340 sermons, thirty-eight (11%) were from Methodist pulpits.² The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the responses of those thirty-eight sermons to the assassination and how those responses compared to the more general population of northern Protestant preachers. Five major themes emerged from the Methodist sermons.

Grief

The Methodist preachers joined their Protestant counterparts in making grief, both national and personal, the predominant theme of their post-assassination sermons. To read these sermons is to understand better the overwhelming and pervasive sadness that hung over the northern populace when Lincoln was killed. It was a grief, the preachers declared, that was unique in national and world history. In New York City, only a few days after the assassination, Henry J. Fox emphasized: “Never in the annals of nations was a people plunged into greater affliction. . . . Never in the history of the world was there, I apprehend, so spontaneous and so general an exhibition of the signs of mourning.”³ On May 4, at the burial service

¹David B. Chesebrough, *“No Sorrow Like Our Sorrow:” The Response of Northern Protestant Pulpits to the Assassination of Lincoln, April 16 to June 1, 1865* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994).

²Fourteen of the Methodist sermons were delivered in New York State; six in Ohio; four in Massachusetts; three in Maryland; two each in Illinois, Indiana, and New Jersey; and one each in the District of Columbia, Louisiana, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. The sermons from Louisiana and Missouri were delivered by chaplains of Union troops.

³“Sermon XX,” *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln. Voices From the Pulpit of New York and Brooklyn* (New York: Tibbals and Whiting, 1865), 341, 342.

of the slain President, Bishop Matthew Simpson, a personal friend of Lincoln, asserted that "never was there, in the history of man, such mourning as that which has accompanied this funeral procession, and has gathered around the mortal remains of him who was once our loved one, and who now sleeps among us."⁴

The grief the preachers were describing was not some abstract or formal national mourning for a fallen leader. It was a grief that was being personally and painfully experienced by the preachers themselves and those who heard them. On April 30, at West Alexandria, Ohio, S. Salisbury complained of the sorrowful burden he bore in speaking of the murdered Lincoln. "Why should this task devolve upon me?" he asked. "Do I feel the stroke less than my hearers? . . . Then how shall I speak to you to-day?"⁵ At the Methodist Episcopal Church in Frederick City, Maryland, on April 19, William W. Hicks lamented: "It is though one were dead in every house. . . . Every man . . . will weep for him, as for a father."⁶

At the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Troy, New York, Jacob Thomas poignantly spoke of his own grief and that of his fellow African Americans:

We, as a people, feel more than all others that we are bereaved. We had learned to love Mr. Lincoln as we have never loved man before. We idolized his very name. We looked up to him as our saviour, our deliverer. . . . It was something so new to us to see such sentiments manifested by the chief magistrate of the United States that we could not help but love him. So is it to be wondered at that we mourn to-day?⁷

The Character of Abraham Lincoln

The Methodist clergy, in their post-assassination sermons, joined their northern Protestant counterparts in effusive praise of the character of Abraham Lincoln, often elevating the sixteenth President to a status close to Protestant sainthood. In doing so, the preachers rendered a significant contribution to the immortalizing of Lincoln. The ministers singled out various traits of Lincoln's character to emphasize. They were universal in their praise of his moral character, his integrity, and honesty. Several spoke of Lincoln's mental powers. Some pointed to the President's sense of humor as an important part of his character. The preachers praised Lincoln as a representative man, a man of the people, like the people, and at one with the people.

A Lincoln trait which drew mixed reviews from the preachers was his gentle, lenient, and forgiving spirit. All agreed that tenderness was an important Lincoln feature. For several Methodist preachers, however,

⁴"Oration," *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 394.

⁵*Sermon* (Eaton, OH: Register Hand Power Press Print, 1865), 5.

⁶*An Address* (Frederick, MD: Schley, Keefer & Co., 1865), 3, 5.

⁷"Sermon," *A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy* (Troy, NY: Young and Benson, 1865), 44-45.

Lincoln's merciful and tender spirit was closer to a vice than a virtue. On April 23, in Mount Carmel, Illinois, Hiram Sears said: "If he [Lincoln] erred at all, it was on the side of mercy. It seemed to us sometimes that we were infinitely more endangered by the characteristic kindness of his loving heart than we were by any weakness or error in his head."⁸ On April 19, in New Harmony, Indiana, J. Tansy echoed: "If he had a fault, it grew out of his kindness of heart. It often tempted him to snatch the victim from the hand of Justice."⁹

Other Methodist ministers, aware that some of their brothers looked upon Lincoln's kindness as a flaw, scoffed at such a notion. On April 19, in New York City, John McClintock, with a touch of sarcasm, declared: "We had no fear about Abraham Lincoln, except the fear that he would be too forgiving. Oh! what an epitaph — that the only fear men had that he would be too tender, that he had too much love; in a word, that he was too Christ-like."¹⁰

As would be expected, the preachers had much to say about the religious and spiritual dimensions of Lincoln's life. They all agreed that Lincoln was a man of deep spiritual resources, yet, they confessed, there was a certain mystery, some unknowns, about the President's religious convictions. He had never publicly professed his faith nor joined a church. On April 23, at the State Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Troy, Erastus Wentworth stated: "Abraham Lincoln was not a church member, but he was a Christian and led a life of virtue and a life of prayer."¹¹ On April 19, at an outdoor community service in Zanesville, Ohio, with thousands in attendance, D. D. Mather, a presiding elder of the Ohio Conference, related what many others were saying as to Lincoln's religious faith:

. . . Abraham Lincoln was a Christian. . . . What were his particular views on many controverted points in theology we know not. He did not intrude them on the public. Yet he was a close student of the Bible, and a man of prayer, and to a friend in conversation prophesied his love for Jesus the Saviour of man, remarking, "when I came here I was not a Christian, when I buried our dear Willie, I was not a Christian, but when I stood upon the battlefield of Gettysburg I consecrated myself to Jesus Christ, and now I do know I love Jesus." We may hope that having finished his work of unparalleled toil, difficulty, anxiety, and weariness, God, for Christ's sake, has kindly admitted him to eternal rest.¹²

All in all, the Methodist preachers looked upon Lincoln as a truly great man. In New York City, Henry J. Fox exclaimed: "Mr. Lincoln will be spoken of to-day and for generations to come, on every anniversary

⁸*The People's Keepsake* (Cincinnati: Poe & Hitchcock, 1865), 20.

⁹*From the Cabin to the White House* (Evansville, IN: Evansville Journal Co., 1865), 9.

¹⁰"Sermon VII," *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 139.

¹¹"The Nation's Sorrow," *A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy*, 229.

¹²*True Greatness* (Zanesville, OH: John T. Shyrock, 1865), 14. This story of Lincoln's conversion after Gettysburg was told by many Methodist and other Protestant preachers, though the authenticity of the account is highly doubtful.

of this day, as a great and noble man. I say A GREAT MAN!"¹³ Lincoln was great, the preachers asserted, not only because of what he was, but also because of what he did; great, not only in character, but in accomplishments as well. Over and over again the ministers trumpeted the slain President's two most important deeds; the saving of the Union and the emancipation of the slaves. On June 1, at the Eutaw Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, Maryland, James A. McCauley proclaimed: ". . . two stars flamed in his sky; Union—liberty conserved for those already free; and Emancipation—liberty decreed for the millions hitherto enslaved. . . . And though for this he fell, it was not till he had seen these stars fixed in the clearing azure of the nation's sky, beyond the peril of extinction or eclipse."¹⁴

The ultimate test of Lincoln's greatness was to be found in how he compared to George Washington, the one most Americans at that time considered to be the greatest and most noble figure in the short history of the nation. The preachers affirmed that Lincoln measured up in the comparison. On April 19, at City Hall in Providence, with the Rhode Island Governor and other political officials in attendance, Sidney Dean attested: "George Washington was the first Saviour of his country; Abraham Lincoln was the second and his equal."¹⁵ Henry J. Fox noted that the names of Washington and Lincoln "are entwined forever."¹⁶

The Assessment of Blame

On April 19, in Palmyra, New York, the Methodist pastor, Thomas Tousey asked the question that many in the North were asking: "Who has done this deed?"¹⁷ Of course, almost everyone knew that John Wilkes Booth had pulled the trigger, but most were certain that Booth was but a small cog in the mechanism of assassination. On April 19, Seth Reed, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Edgartown, Massachusetts, emphasized that Booth was "a most insignificant particle. . . . Booth was but the tool of the Confederacy, the plot was the plot of the rebels."¹⁸

Reed was echoing what most Methodist clergymen were saying. Ultimate blame for Lincoln's murder must be laid upon the South, the Confederacy, the rebels, slavery—the terms were used interchangeably. On April 23, at the Methodist Church in Jamaica, Long Island, Charles Backman charged that the rebellion "as it was just drawing its last gasp . . . summoned its remaining energies as dying men often do . . . and aimed a deadly blow at him who had struck down Slavery and Rebellion."¹⁹

¹³"Sermons XX," *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 348.

¹⁴*Character and Services of Abraham Lincoln* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1865), 14.

¹⁵*Eulogy* (Providence: H. H. Thomas & Co., 1865), 7.

¹⁶"Sermon XX," *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 356.

¹⁷*Discourse on the Death of Abraham Lincoln* (Rochester, NY: C. D. Tracy & Co., 1865), 18.

¹⁸*A Discourse* (Boston: Geo. C. Rand & Avery, 1865), 12.

¹⁹*Abraham Lincoln, the World's Great Martyr* (Jamaica, NY: Charles Welling, Long Island Farmer, 1865), 11.

To add credence to their charges of widespread southern complicity in and responsibility for Lincoln's death, the Methodist preachers pointed to other alleged southern atrocities. Thus, the murder of Lincoln, they claimed, was only the latest of a long list of unconscionable acts committed by the Confederacy. The words of Thomas Tousey were fairly typical of charges made by several other Methodist and Protestant preachers:

What else could be expected from a class of fiends in human shape? I will not call them men, who have for years rioted in wealth, wrought from the tears, groans, sighs, blood, and outraged virtue of their fellow-man—who have been schooled in lowest vice, and educated in blackest crime from infancy—whose heart is treason, and breath pollution. Men who can deliberately, and with set purpose, murder by the slow torture of starvation tens of thousands of innocent prisoners who have fallen into their hands by the fortunes of war! Surely those who look for anything better from them have not deeply studied the laws of cause and effect in morals, or calculated rightly the force of evil in a heart depraved.²⁰

The Methodist preachers noted a certain irony in the guilt of the South for Lincoln's assassination. The rebels, the clergy scorned, had killed their best and most benevolent friend. On the evening of April 16, at Pike's Opera House in Cincinnati, Maxwell P. Gaddis asserted that Lincoln had been killed "by the hands of those who had the best reasons for regarding him as their truest friend: for in the midst of his successful efforts to preserve the government he had sworn to protect, he, at the same time, tempered the words of vengeance to the meanest of its foes."²¹

A few Methodists were not willing to place all the blame upon the South for the assassination. There were also those in the North, some preachers accused, who must bear a share of the blame. On April 23, at St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church in Buffalo, New York, J. B. Wentworth emphasized: "That this base and causeless malignity manifested towards him by Northern men, encouraged and intensified Southern hatred of his person and character, can not for a moment be doubted. And who shall say that copperheads, North, are not as responsible for his murder, as rebels, South?"²²

Most Methodist preachers, however, along with most northern Protestant preachers, were not willing to think or speak of a wider responsibility for the assassination. The great majority placed the blame solely upon the South. It was the South, or some significant aspect of it, that was the motivator and instigator of Lincoln's murder. The South, therefore, must be the recipient of certain and harsh justice. It was not the time to consider nor pursue leniency, forgiveness, or mercy.

²⁰*Discourse on the Death of Abraham Lincoln*, 18–19. Almost every Methodist sermon contained a short or long list of alleged Southern atrocities.

²¹*Sermon Upon the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Cincinnati: Times Steam Book and Job Office, 1865), 6.

²²*Discourse on the Death of President Lincoln* (Buffalo: Matthews & Warren, 1865), 21.

The Demand for Justice

On June 1, at the Greenwich Methodist Episcopal Church in Huron County, Ohio, Rolla Chubb proclaimed: "The day of compromise is forever past. President Lincoln tried kindness and conciliation for four years, and they murdered him for it."²³ It was not a slap-on-the-wrist justice the preachers were demanding, but severe and harsh justice. Many of the clergymen asked for the death penalty to be imposed on various Confederate leaders. In Providence, Sidney Dean asked for a justice that "would hang these infamous outlaws, employers, and assassins, as high as the fifty cubits of Haman's gallows." Later in his sermon, Dean returned to the same theme. "Give us justice," he exclaimed, "simple and unadorned—except with a hempen halter—now! Omnipotence can deal with such dark spirits in the prison house of the other life, better than we can here. The peace of the world requires their exit."²⁴ Rolla Chubb intoned: ". . . if they are not ultimately hanged, hemp will have lost its virtue, and if not finally damned, Hell ought to be abolished for having violated its charter."²⁵

So vindictive in nature, and so harsh in judgment, was the tone of so many post-assassination sermons, including those of the Methodists, that a majority of preachers represented the most punitive and radical views toward the South of any group in the North. Charles J. Stewart, in his study of post-assassination sermons, has noted that "the proposals made by these clergymen were of a much severer nature than those made by the 'Radicals' in Congress. Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, and Benjamin Wade desired stern measures, but they did not go to the extent of wholesale executions as did a great many preachers." Stewart wrote that over 61% of the sermons he studied "demonstrated harsher actions against the South than did the 'Radicals' Many of these plans [from clergymen] were unbelievably vengeance-minded."²⁶

Most of the congregations who heard these ministers not only accepted the preachers' inflammatory accusations and demands, but enthusiastically approved of them. On the evening of April 16, speaking to a crowd of over 4,000 listeners, at Pike's Opera House in Cincinnati, Maxwell Gaddis exclaimed: "For every drop of blood that flowed from the veins of this great and good man [Lincoln], at least one leading Rebel must die, or be banished from this country forever." Someone who was at the Opera House described the congregation's reaction to these particular words: "The scene that followed this cannot be described. Hundreds rose to their feet;

²³ *A Disclosure Upon the Death of President Lincoln* (Mansfield, OH: Herald Book and Job Printing Establishment, 1865), 14.

²⁴ *Eulogy*, 6, 17-18.

²⁵ *A Discourse Upon the Death of President Lincoln*, 12.

²⁶ "A Rhetorical Study of the Reactions of the Protestant Pulpit in the North to Lincoln's Assassination," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1963), 137, 144.

thousands of handkerchiefs waved all over the hall, and it was many seconds ere the eloquent preacher could proceed." "Continued cheering," followed these words from Gaddis: "I demand that this climax of their terrible iniquity be wiped out at the hands of the sternest justice that this nation is capable of administering." When Gaddis thundered, "Now, the adder must die," the listeners responded with "immense applause."²⁷

For those who wondered how it was that ministers of the gospel could be so uncompromising in their demands for harsh justice, the preachers reminded that justice was ordained by God. On April 19 at the North Second Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Troy, New York, J. Wesley Carhart stressed: "It is God's purpose that treason against this government shall be punished."²⁸ Charles Backman asked: ". . . can men, in the administration of human Government, afford to be more generous than God in the administration of Divine government?"²⁹

In their demands for stern justice, the preachers were careful to make a distinction between those whom they perceived were the responsible and guilty leaders in the South, and the misguided, innocent masses. In his burial oration, Bishop Matthew Simpson spoke for many of his fellow clergy when he intoned:

Let every man who was a senator or representative in Congress, and who aided in beginning this rebellion . . . be brought to speedy and to certain punishment. Let every officer educated at public expense . . . and [who] turned his sword against the vitals of his country, be doomed to a traitor's death. . . . But to the deluded masses we will extend the arms of forgiveness. We will take them to our hearts, and walk with them side by side, as we go forward to work out a glorious destiny.³⁰

The call for stern justice and uncompromising retribution among the Methodists was nearly unanimous, but not quite so. Two days after the assassination, New York City Methodist John McClintock cautioned:

If anything I have said, or anything you read or hear in these sad days, breeds within you a single revengeful feeling, even towards the leaders of this rebellion, then think of Abraham Lincoln, and pray God to make you merciful. . . . I have been sorry to hear from the lips of generous young men, under the pangs of the President's assassination, sentiments of bitterness and indignation, amounting to fierceness. It is natural, no doubt, but what is natural is not always right.³¹

Voices urging moderation and conciliation, such as that of McClintock's, were in short supply in every Protestant denomination. They were almost unheard and unnoticed among the great majority of voices crying out that somehow, and in someway, Lincoln's murder must be avenged.

²⁷*Sermon Upon the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, 11.

²⁸"Sermon," *A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy*, 126.

²⁹*Abraham Lincoln, the World's Great Martyr*, 14.

³⁰"Oration," *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 409.

³¹"Sermon VII," *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 143.

The Assassination as an Act of Providence

Most preachers in the mid-nineteenth century perceived events, whether individual or national, as providential in nature. Throughout the Civil War most preachers had trumpeted that it was God who had led the nation into the tumult. Thus, when the Methodist preachers spoke of even such an abhorrent deed as the assassination, this, too, they claimed, fell under the purview of God's plans and purposes. Only through such an interpretation of events could the ministers hope to bring meaning and order into seeming chaos, and offer comfort in the midst of despair. Thus, Jacob Thomas assured that "an all-wise God has permitted this grief to come upon us;"³² and Maxwell Gaddis instructed that he would not "attempt to apologize for God in his actions toward us as a nation."³³

The great question with which the preachers struggled was just what was the providential purpose in taking the life of the revered Lincoln. A few asserted that purpose could not be determined by finite minds. On June 1, the Rev. Charles Hammond, Principal of Monson Academy in Massachusetts, asserted "that human speculation is utterly unable to scan the purposes of Divine Providence in such a calamity as this. And yet," Hammond scorned, "from the day of Mr. Lincoln's death, there have not been wanting those, who have presumed upon their ability to penetrate so profound a mystery."³⁴

Most northern ministers, however, including most Methodist clergy, were not at all hesitant in attempting to interpret the ways of the Almighty. Those interpretations varied widely. Several preachers saw in the assassination an event which united the North as nothing else could have done. William W. Hicks exclaimed: "It may yet be found out, that the sacrifice of the noble President, was necessary to cement and consolidate the Union, and thus permanently establish Republican freedom all over the world."³⁵ Erastus Wentworth declared: "Opposing parties shake hands over the coffin of their common father, and agree to bury past animosities and to stand nobly by his successor in this hour of trial."³⁶

Many preachers affirmed that God took Abraham Lincoln because the sixteenth President's work was done. Rolla H. Chubb declared that Lincoln "had finished his share of the programme—his work was done, and the hand of a vile copperhead assassin was permitted to place the martyr's crown . . . upon the immortal brow of the Hero of Liberty."³⁷ This theme was stressed often by the Methodist clergy.

³²"Sermon," *A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy*, 46.

³³*Sermon Upon the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, 8.

³⁴*A Sermon on the Life and Character of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, MA: Samuel Bowles and Company, 1865), 8.

³⁵*An Address*, 27.

³⁶"The Nation's Sorrow," *A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy*, 229.

³⁷*A Discourse Upon the Death of President Lincoln*, 15.

Yet another purpose the ministers saw in the assassination was that the violent and evil deed had assured the immortalizing of the victim. James A. McCauley affirmed that "the fame of Mr. Lincoln will not be hurt — it likely will be helped — by the tragic close of his career. All the more lovingly will he be thought of, and all the more undying his services be cherished, for the cruel manner of his 'taking off.'"³⁸ Several preachers were certain that Lincoln's influence in death would be even greater than his influence in life. On June 1, at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittston, Pennsylvania, N. G. Parker proclaimed that Lincoln's "death has disarmed opposition and made it certain that his views will be carried out. . . . The eloquence of the President, dead, has been felt in behalf of justice and right and his country, as the eloquence of the President, alive, never could have been felt."³⁹

Many Methodists judged that God removed Lincoln from the worldly scene because he was not stern enough for the days ahead. Rolla Chubb announced: ". . . the God of justice saw that his heart was too soft and lenient to mete out the punishment those hell-born wretches deserved; so he permitted him to be taken away, and another more fitted to the work has been called to finish up the grand drama of this nation's regeneration."⁴⁰ On April 23, at the Methodist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, N. L. Brakeman, a chaplain for Union troops, suggested: "Perhaps he would have been too lenient . . . and was removed that justice might be dealt with a sterner hand."⁴¹

That "sterner hand" was, of course, Andrew Johnson. Preachers all over the northern portion of the nation displayed great confidence in the new President and especially in his ability to administer stern justice. On April 16, in Boston, W. S. Studley drew a sharp contrast between Lincoln and Johnson. "In dealing with traitors," Studley emphasized, "Andrew Johnson's little finger will be thicker than Abraham Lincoln's loins. If the OLD president chastised with whips, the NEW president will chastise them with scorpions."⁴²

The preachers' hopes for and support of President Johnson were short lived. Within a year's time, most northern preachers, including most Methodist preachers, turned against Johnson with a vehemence and used the power and the authority of the pulpit to discredit the President. Johnson proved to be much too lenient in his policies toward the South, as far as most northern preachers were concerned. Paul C. Brownlow, in an article that describes the tactics used by northern preachers in their

³⁸*Character and Services of Abraham Lincoln*, 16.

³⁹*The Assassination of the President of the United States Overruled for the Good of Our Country* (Pittston, PA: Gazette Office, 1865), 10.

⁴⁰*A Discourse Upon the Death of President Lincoln*, 15.

⁴¹*A Great Man Fallen* (New Orleans: New Orleans Times Book and Job Office, 1865), 21.

⁴²"Sermon," *Sermons Preached in Boston on the Death of Abraham Lincoln* (Boston: J. E. Tilton and Company, 1865), 230.

attacks upon Johnson has written: "Northern Protestant clergymen supported Andrew Johnson in 1865, but during 1866-1867 they repudiated him primarily because he had forsaken radicalism in favor of a moderation which they believed would ruin the country."⁴³ Those many preachers who had confidently proclaimed that Providence took the life of Lincoln so that he could be replaced by the sterner hand of Johnson were wrong in their attempts to decipher the ways of the Almighty.

Some Methodist clergy argued that Providence had taken the life of Lincoln because the American people were beginning to idolize the President, which was an affront to Almighty God. Sidney Dean instructed: "He should not have been enthroned in the popular heart as its idol, but we fear that he was."⁴⁴ J. Wesley Carhart noted that "it may be . . . we had come to depend too much on him, and God suffered him to be taken away, to show us that the salvation of the nation was in His hands, and safe; that He can carry on His work though His workmen fall."⁴⁵

As the preachers sought to discover providential purposes and meanings in the assassination, on one matter they were universally optimistic and triumphant. Over and over again the ministers exalted that though the beloved Lincoln was dead, the nation still lived. Not in spite of Lincoln's death, but in great measure because of it, the nation would rise to new, greater, and more majestic heights than ever before. Hiram Sears proclaimed: "To-day the cause of our country is stronger than it ever was before. The Government will rise from the baptism of affliction regenerated; it will go on though its President has fallen."⁴⁶

The assassination had thus revived the historic millennial vision of America, a vision that could only be secured through sacrifice. James Moorhead has written: "The death of President Lincoln by an assassin's bullet on Good Friday . . . was widely interpreted as the final blood sacrifice by which the nation was purified and reborn in its high mission."⁴⁷ The Methodist sermons demonstrated Moorhead's thesis. Along with many others, S. L. Yourtee, on April 19, at the Central Methodist Episcopal Church of Springfield, Ohio, stated the millennium-through-suffering theme:

. . . the way to distinction and to glory is through great tribulation. . . . The nation must be baptized in the blood of our Chief Magistrate. . . . But this darkness shall not impede, but hasten the nation's latter day glory. . . . even at midnight the earth is turning towards the sun, and above this dark canopy there is sunlight, broad, peaceful, glorious sunlight.⁴⁸

⁴³"The Northern Protestant Pulpit and Andrew Johnson," *The Southern Speech Journal* 39 (Spring 1974): 248.

⁴⁴*Eulogy*, 7.

⁴⁵"Sermon," *A Tribute of Respect by the Citizens of Troy*, 125.

⁴⁶*The People's Keepsake*, 16.

⁴⁷*American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 174-75.

⁴⁸*A Sermon* (Springfield, OH: News and Republic Job Printing Rooms, 1865), 13-15.

It was a glorious and noble nation that would arise out of the ashes of war and the sacrifice of Abraham Lincoln. Chubb exalted: "For a thousand years shall the people of this nation enjoy a millennium of joy, liberty, and union in peace and security." God had ordained "this government," said Chubb, "to stand forth as a beacon of light to the world, and shed abroad those great principles of civil liberty and human equality."⁴⁹

A belief in Providence seemed to be essential to both clergy and laity in the spring of 1865 as they sought to make some kind of sense out of their loss and grief. Only a belief in a God who ordained the affairs of men, the world, and history could bring any meaning or comfort in the midst of such tragedy. On this the preachers were nearly unanimous. Whether they were Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, or Unitarians; whether conservative or liberal, Old Side or New Side, the clergy dealt with their own and the nation's grief by believing in and looking for the directing hand of God. Only this made their burden bearable. Only this brought order to what was otherwise meaningless chaos.

Conclusion

There were no significant differences in the post-assassination sermons delivered by the Methodist ministers and those delivered by other Protestant clergymen in the North. The same basic issues stressed in the Methodist sermons were the same basic issues stressed by the Baptists, Presbyterians, and others. The Methodist post-assassination sermons were, therefore, a mirror of what was being said and felt by ministers from other denominations all across the Union.

Because sermons are valuable indicators of the public mood, to read these post-assassination sermons is to become aware of how deep and pervasive the sorrow was over Lincoln's death; of how greatly the character of Lincoln was venerated after his death; of how strong the tendency was to blame the South for his murder; of how passionate were the demands for harsh reprisals upon the guilty; and of how much providential explanations were relied upon to give meaning to a horrible tragedy, as well as being a source of comfort in the midst of overwhelming grief.

⁴⁹*A Discourse Upon the Death of President Lincoln*, 15, 18.