

**Joseph H. Barrett and John Locke Scripps,
Shapers of Lincoln's Religious Image**

Joseph R. Nightingale

In 1860, Lincoln, the Republican presidential candidate, recognized that his uncertain religious image put him at a distinct political disadvantage on the national scene, possibly inviting disturbing inquiries into his orthodoxy. In a preemptive move against this prospect, Lincoln ensured that two biographers, Joseph Hartwell Barrett and John Locke Scripps, separately, would describe his religious attitudes favorably, showing him clearly to have Protestant Christian inclinations.

Lincoln's obscure religious beliefs had sufficed, tolerably, until his 1860 entry into the national arena, although it was later argued by one of his closest friends that as early as 1854 he had devised a strategy, with but limited success, to become acceptable to the clergy.¹ The actual nature of his beliefs at the time is still debated, though he is perhaps most often described as a "Deist."² But in the 1860 contest, the broader electorate would not warm to a candidate who, it could be alleged, had questioned any of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Further, by reason of his indefinite religious image, Lincoln's early Catholic associations, if brought to light by a heightened interest in his beginnings, could be turned against him. Although any accusations that he was a "secret Catholic" could be refuted, they would be credited by the many who believed that Catholics were engaged in a conspiracy against protestant and republican America. Such accusations, even if quickly dismissed by others, would raise the question of Lincoln's beliefs to an elevated level of interest, possibly leading to an unwelcome probing of his Christian convictions. Lincoln would have been aware of these dangers, for the previous Presidential campaign could not have faded from his memory.

In 1856, John C. Frémont, a famed western explorer and military figure, had been the Republican party's nominee for President. Trading on public sentiment, the American Party, whose candidate was ex-President Millard Fillmore, branded Frémont a clandestine

Catholic, on the most fragile basis. The Party produced pamphlets with such titles as *Fremont's Romanism Established* and *Fremont's Religious History. The Authentic Account. Papist or Protestant. Which?* A pamphlet titled *The Romish Intrigue* claimed Frémont was a member of the church of Rome and a Jesuit. These accusations finally demanded the published Republican response, *Colonel Fremont Not a Catholic*. The basis for the rumor seemed to be that the marriage of Frémont and Jessie Benton was solemnized by a Catholic priest who had taken the place of his Episcopal minister, unable to officiate as planned.³

If Frémont *had* been found to be a Catholic, a Republican defense would have been inconceivable, considering the times. Earlier, an anti-Catholic and nativist sentiment found expression in groups of various, and usually secret, societies. These discriminated against immigrants, particularly Catholics, with the intent to prevent them from holding political office. Ultimately they had joined to form the Know-Nothing party⁴ the predecessor of the American party. The flavor of their sentiments may be sampled in a resolution of an early Know-Nothing convention, which also revealed strong anti-slavery sentiments:

Whereas, Roman Catholicism and slavery being alike founded and supported on the basis of ignorance and tyranny; and being, therefore, natural allies in every warfare against liberty and enlightenment; therefore be it: Resolved, That there can exist no real hostility to Roman Catholicism which does not [include] slavery, its natural co-worker in opposition to freedom and republican institutions.⁵

The American party had made a strong showing in 1856, for though Buchanan was elected, Fillmore received almost 900,000 votes. And though in 1860 the American party was moribund, its departed constituents were now counted not only among the Republicans, but in the membership of the new Constitutional Union Party⁶ – the title 'Know-Nothing' remaining a label for anyone of their sentiments.

Lincoln would certainly have encountered these zealots

through his involvement in the 1856 campaign. At the Republican convention he had received over 100 votes for the vice-president candidacy, and during the campaign had spoken over fifty times in support of Frémont. A visitor to Lincoln in 1856 later reported that "Lincoln had started in on the Know-Nothings, saying that they arose from ignorance of religion and intolerance . . . He charged that religious fanatics of the country were behind the Know-Nothings, and that they had the right name - they knew nothing." However, Lincoln's views on these nativists had formed even earlier. In 1855 he complained to his friend Joshua Speed, "Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that '*all men are created equal.*' We now practically read it '*all men are created equal, except negroes.*' When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read '*all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics.*' When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty—to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy."³

Clearly, allegations of Lincoln's "Catholic persuasion" arising from any source, whether political or religious, would be damaging. Political prudence suggested that Lincoln should at least be perceived as having unquestioned Protestant *leanings* - and, if the matter could be handled with some delicacy, as manifestly not a Catholic. A clear line needed to be drawn between the Protestant and Catholic elements in his Kentucky background, even as the Protestant factor was built upon, and presented as formative - and the Catholic environment in part acknowledged, and shown as without effect.

Lincoln had been born into probably the most Catholic community of the times between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi River. The first Catholic church established within that span, in 1792, was just a few miles away. When, in 1808, Baltimore was made the first Archdiocese of the Catholic Church in the United States, its dioceses were Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown, Kentucky, about twenty miles from Lincoln's boyhood home. Many of the family's neighbors and acquaintances were Catholic. His uncle, the moderately well off Mordecai Lincoln, apparently a favorite of Lincoln, married a devout Catholic from a prominent

Catholic family (Mudd), and their two sons, Mordecai and Abraham Lincoln, were Catholic.⁹ There is substantial evidence that Mordecai's wife had a sister and an aunt whose daughters became nuns in that locality. Records indicate that a niece of Mordecai's wife, an Ellen Buckman, became a nun in 1828, at nearby Loretto, Kentucky. She served at several locations, including a Kansas Indian mission. A Mary Cassidy, allegedly a cousin of uncle Mordecai's wife, also became a Loretto nun, and is buried in the Loretto convent cemetery. Traditions connect still other members of the family to the Catholic Church, but have less substantiation.¹⁰

This was, however, an area in which both Baptists and Catholics lived peaceably as neighbors, even as they did where Baptists were more influential, some twenty or so miles to the north.¹¹ There, the Mill Creek [Baptist] Church, which also served as a community center, was important in the broader history of the Lincolns. "[It] was the only church in this section, and was patronized by everybody of any religious persuasion. There are buried there most of the old settlers around here who died at the time including the Lincoln women and some of their offspring."¹² These women were grandfather Abraham's wife, Bersheba (or Bathsheba), their daughter Nancy Lincoln Brumfield, and probably Mary Lincoln, another daughter. In sum, this part of Kentucky was under both Baptist and Catholic influence, the latter touching some members of the Lincoln family, but certainly not Lincoln himself. It was in this environment that the young Lincoln joined with Catholics and other Baptists at Zachariah Riney's school. But, in the canvass of 1860, that school hung over Lincoln's head as a threat. By his own description, it was little short of a *Catholic school*, and a schoolmate was even now a prominent Catholic priest in the Diocese of Louisville, and President of St. Mary's College.¹³ Riney's school would nicely fit the slur, "cradle of conspiracy."

Today, anti-Catholicism is not likely to weigh heavily in national politics, but it was vigorously alive in Lincoln's time, still thriving in Al Smith's, and only clearly expiring in 1960.¹⁴ Through immigration, Catholics formed a large presence, particularly in the big cities, where their votes now gave them some political power. At the same time, labor markets were disturbed as many jobs were lost

to these late arrivals, often eager to work for lesser wages. Further, some strong Anglo-American religious traditions formed part of the basis of an 'anti-popery' sentiment. But, quite apart from a religious dissent rooted in history, these new-comers, foreign to the 'American experience,' disturbed the unifying social code of a largely Protestant population, and affronted the nativist extremists. In this atmosphere, anti-Catholic novels, plays, histories, pamphlets, and sermons abounded, both feeding existing prejudice and extending it. Sydney E. Ahlstrom in his *Religious History of the American People* remarks, with particular reference to the 1856 election: "America experienced the most violent period of religious discord in its history . . . [I]n a culminating phase of the struggle, a bitter and secretive form of anti-Catholic nativism reached the very threshold of national power. Never before or since have religion and American politics been more explicitly interrelated, nor has ethnic conflict reached such ugly dimensions."

Of course, this "crusade" was widely deplored as well, particularly by the better educated. Influential Protestants often supported Catholic works, as in Springfield. When Ursuline nuns arrived in 1857 to found an Academy for young ladies, Governor William H. Bissell, a Protestant, had offered temporary lodging in the mansion.¹⁵ Bissell was a friend of Lincoln, of whom his daughter Rhoda later wrote: "[He often came] to our house for quiet talks with my father, sometimes bringing Willie and Tad with him. They were two hearty, happy, mischievous boys who made themselves at home everywhere. One day they climbed through the window of our room and established themselves on the bay window roof just beneath, enjoying our fright at what we considered their dangerous situation." Lincoln visited Bissell on his deathbed, "clasping his friend's hand for a last farewell while his own kind eyes filled with tears."¹⁶

The Governor's welcome to the Ursulines, though graciously refused, had been a contrast to the still fresh-in-memory anti-Catholic riot of 1853 in Cincinnati, from which they believed they had barely escaped with their lives.¹⁷ And, when the Academy opened, the "elite of the city" sent their daughters, and prominent among them, Rhoda Bissell. Even Herndon successively sent three of his own to the Academy, from 1858 through 1869.¹⁸ On the playbill of

an Ursuline Academy playlet, presented June 16, 1858, in addition to the Misses Herndon, Bissell, and Maxcy, are the Misses McClernand, Carpenter, and Lanphier, names still well known in Springfield.¹⁹ Miss Maxcy was no doubt a relative of the first Mrs. Herndon, who was also a Maxcy. In 1909, the Ursulines recalled Herndon, General McClernand, and Jacob Bunn as having been great benefactors of the Academy.²⁰ The Bunn family worshipped at the First Presbyterian Church. "Often the Bunn Family kept their good works secret and contributed anonymously when special projects were in need of financial support."²¹ As the Ursulines also maintained a school for poor children of the area, this may have been the special beneficiary of the Bunn's generosity.

Lincoln himself as early as 1844, during a particularly violent outbreak of nativism, had taken a bold stand on Catholic rights. At a meeting of Whigs in that year Lincoln introduced the resolution that any "attempts to abridge or interfere with these rights [of conscience] either of Catholic or Protestant, directly or indirectly, have our decided disapprobation, and shall have our most effective opposition."²² Although the 1860 Republican platform contained a resolution "in favor of giving a full and efficient protection to the rights of all classes of citizens, whether native or naturalized," it avoided specific reference to religion. The religious factor could be perilous in politics – as Lincoln had occasion to observe both before and after the Frémont complication, and their combination was particularly odious to Lincoln as early as his 1832 contest with the preacher Peter Cartwright, who "freely mixed blind religion with local politics" in the defeat of Lincoln for a seat in the Illinois General Assembly. Cartwright had allegedly spread rumors of Lincoln's irreligiosity. When, later, Cartwright appealed to ardent Methodists to come West and teach in the common schools, Lincoln saw this as a threat to the separation of Church and State. He found both a voice and a degree of retribution by subterfuge, in the columns of a local paper, where under the name "Sam Hill" he attacked Cartwright, as Wayne C. Temple has described: "Although Cartwright 'may sometimes labor, all know that he spends the greater part of his time in preaching and electioneering.' In addition, the writer [Lincoln] divulged that Cartwright had publicly boasted of 'mustered his militia, alluding to

the Methodist Church, and marching and counter-marching them in favor of this or that candidate."²³ Lincoln himself had learned how the religious card might be played in politics.

In 1842, Lincoln aroused the ire of churches in a frank but impolitic speech to a Springfield Temperance Society, in which he declared that the progress of temperance was due to the efforts of reformed drunkards, rather than to the denunciations of preachers and other moralists,²⁴ and he attributed to religious factions his being ruled out as a congressional candidate in 1844. In 1846, his opponent, once again Peter Cartwright, lost to Lincoln in the congressional election. Herndon attributed his loss to the very hint of the union of Church and State in the election of a preacher to such a position.²⁵ Lincoln's earlier raising of alerts on Cartwright may have finally paid off. Approaching the election of 1860, Lincoln would recall the malicious accusations made against Stephen A. Douglas in 1858. Douglas, whose wife was Catholic, was charged as being supported by the Pope.²⁶ This charge was revived in 1860, with rumors of his conversion to Catholicism. "If he is a Catholic, he owes allegiance to a foreign despotic power, and if elected President will not be the President of the people, but an instrument of evil in the hands of the Pope of Rome."²⁷

It was not sufficient that, very early, American Catholic bishops praised the Constitution for the freedom of religion it ensured. Protestants gauged the praise as coming from a politically powerless Church, whose members were few – and no augury of its position if Catholics grew in numbers. They were understandably wary that the long association of direct political power with the Christian religion, from the moment the Emperor Constantine first laid his hand in "blessing" on the Church, would be reinstated in America with the rise of Catholic influence. The test was soon to be made. Catholic immigrants arrived by the boat-loads, Irish mostly, and Germans, some seven-hundred thousand in the 1840's alone. Throughout this period a complex of Catholic-Nativist-Protestant actions and reactions escalated the tension between these new arrivals and the long established citizens. Much of the animus was directed at the Irish as stealers of jobs, and for other reasons, rather than because of their religion. However, economic, social, and religious issues were so

entangled as hardly to be distinguished. In 1834, the Reverend Lyman Beecher's railings against Catholics were followed by a mob's burning the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts. In Philadelphia, in 1844, an anti-Catholic mob burned two Catholic churches, and numbers were killed and wounded. When in New York City the same year the Mayor refused protection to Catholic churches under threat, Bishop John A. Hughes stationed armed guards about them to face off the attackers. As the threat of a bloody battle heightened, the Mayor and Council begged Hughes to hold his largely Irish flock in check. The feisty bishop replied, "I have not the power; you must take care that they are not provoked."²⁸ Order was finally restored without deaths or injuries, and the show of determination and force led to the temporary decline of physical menace. Certainly Hughes never hesitated to use his personal influence to affect legislation favorable to the Church, but when he later encouraged the creation of an *ad hoc* Catholic party for a New York City election on an issue of discrimination against Catholic schools, Protestants believed their fears of Catholic usurpation of political power had been justified. Though this sortie had been no attempt to gain any broad political power, it lent support to such expectations of the Catholic Church. In addition, Irish concentrations in the big cities created largely defensive voting blocs, often characterized as the "Catholic vote," though these arose more from a common social situation rather than from a common religion. The German Catholics were of no such mind as the Irish, except on religion, often opposing them politically, and creating their own communities and churches when they could.

The Catholic Church in the United States was in fact "Americanized," not by reason of necessity, but out of conviction. Early on, the famed Bishop John Carroll was insistent that the clergy should stay out of politics, and not urge upon their people any particular party or candidate. Even when Catholics became more numerous, the bishops (except for Hughes in his notorious excursion), had stayed aloof from direct influence in politics. When Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina had arrived in America in the 1820s, he was elated over the benefits deriving from a free church in a free society. By his writings and speeches on religious

freedom he attracted wide attention, even to the point of addressing Congress, and his considerations of the facets of Church-to-State relations under the Constitution offered a kind of theoretical foundation for the operations of the Church in America.²⁹ Concerning the individuality of the American Catholic Church, Ahlstrom writes: "As for the Curia in Rome, it seems not to have understood the distinctive character of American [Catholic Church] developments until well into the twentieth century, if then."³⁰ Indeed, events in Europe involving the Catholic Church, and Rome's insensitivity to the situation in the United States, kept a focus on the Pope and the Papal States as a political power. The greatest proof of the Vatican's misunderstanding of the American situation at the time was the tour of the country by the Italian Monsignor Bedini in 1853-54. Because he had been associated with the quelling of Italian liberalism some years before, his tour was "a riot-ridden disaster which heads the list of Roman Catholic blunders during this period. Bedini probably stimulated as many Know-Nothing votes as any other single factor."³¹ Despite such problems, the Catholic Church, in its American presence, had not been so laid bare as purely a religion for sixteen centuries. Thus was the power of the Constitution. But, just as Rome did not recognize this "different church," neither did other churches in America.

All was not negative for the American Catholic Church. Paradoxically, the constant criticism of nativists and others contributed to its rapid increase. The growth of the Catholic press was one response, initiated by Bishop England with his weekly "United States Catholic Miscellany" in 1822. His objective was to offer a "fair and simple statement of Catholic doctrine from authentic documents, plain and correct views of those doctrines, inoffensively exhibited, refutations of calumnies . . . [and] reviews of books for and against Catholicity."³² Bishop England was especially sensitive to the strangeness of the Church to Americans, and was the greatest early American explicator of Catholic doctrine and practices. Converts to Catholicism had an increasing role in this. In 1835, in Charleston, South Carolina, Bishop England officiated at a Miss Harriett Woulfe's "taking of the veil" of the Ursulines. This young lady, a convert to Catholicism, was some twenty years later the founder and Mother Superior of the Springfield Ursuline Convent and Academy, a deter-

mined leader whose Community was to make its mark on the history of Springfield.³³

Following Bishop England's example, a number of Catholic newspapers were established over the years.³⁴ Evangelizing efforts, most notably by the converts Isaac Hecker and Orestes Brownson, were effective in bringing many others to the Catholic Church. Hecker, who became a priest and founded the society of priests known as the Paulists, was likened by Cardinal Newman to himself, in his role in England during the nineteenth century tide of Anglican conversions to the Church of Rome. Unreasoned attacks on the Church and its teachings often led to a more sympathetic view or even a favorable interest when misrepresentations were contradicted by personal experience. Such was likely the case with Rhoda Bissell, for she ultimately became a Catholic, being baptized and confirmed in the Ursuline chapel.³⁵ It appears that Lincoln had a favorable view of Archbishop Hughes, one of the very few "preachers" he did not consider arrogant.³⁶ If all the roots of Lincoln's concern for fair treatment of Catholics could be traced, at least one would doubtless lead to his earliest Catholic associations, formed not only in the school and community, but personalized in his uncle Mordecai's family.

Despite any progress in explaining itself to the nation, the Church attracted increasing fire for its stance on slavery. Unlike many of the Northern Protestant churches, the American Catholic Church remained fixed in the 1850s in the biblical tradition reflected in St. Paul, that slavery itself was not against divine law. This was despite that most of the Christian world had by that time abandoned slavery as impracticable, if not immoral. Instead, Catholic orations on slavery were directed towards slave-owners (of whom the North had many), insisting that they treat their slaves with Christian love and compassion, and encouraging voluntary manumission. The bishops, whatever their personal feelings may have been, did not move the church towards abolition – the issue was deemed political rather than religious. Bishop England had written shortly before his death in 1842, "I am not [favorable to the continuation of slavery] but I also see the impossibility of abolishing it here [South Carolina]. When it can and ought to be abolished, is a question for the legislature, not for me."³⁷ Thus, as the century wore on, the Catholic Church, with its

greatest constituency in the North, became more and more representative of the South on this ballooning issue. And though some German Catholic immigrants favored the Republican party, they were small in number as compared to the Irish immigrants. These latter found safety in numbers in the Democratic party, whose base was in the South – and, no doubt as a learned response to socially destructive policies dictated from afar, they tended to favor the rights of the States. So did Roger B. Taney, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, from which came the 1857 pro-slavery Dred Scott Decision, so bitterly received in the North. Much of the blame was laid on Taney, a Southerner, a friend of the now deceased Bishop England, and a convert to the Catholic faith. He too claimed to despise slavery, but he had voted with the majority. Catholics were not alone, of course, in this ambivalence, which sundered even individual Protestant congregations, as it appears to have done in the First Presbyterian Church in Springfield.³⁸

Largely because of the affiliation of a large body of Catholics with the Democratic party, the Republican party became a harbor for the Know-Nothings, though these were but one element of its makeup. Reinhard H. Luthin has commented that early Republicanism “was a sectional, almost purely northern movement. The cohesive force within the new political party, however, was not anti-southern sentiment, but opposition to the Democrats. It was this common antagonism to the dominant political organization, the eagerness of the “outs” to get “in,” that made possible cooperation between the diverse elements who joined forces under the Republican standard.”³⁹ And, so, in 1860, politics and religion remained inextricably intertwined, despite that the American party – the anti-Catholic political *institution* – had crumbled. There remained but one point on which there was wide agreement – the United States was a *Christian Nation*.

Lincoln, if previous events were a harbinger, faced the possibility of charges that he came from a Catholic family, that he was a secret Catholic himself, and a tool of the Pope for the defeat of democracy. He could not know how much might be made of his Kentucky connections; a great deal had been made out of markedly less in Frémont’s case.⁴⁰ And if bothersome questions about his sup-

posed Catholic connections should be posed – and easily answered – how would he then respond to ensuing probes of his *Christianity*? Moving beyond his frequent and comfortable use of the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, and his denial of ever having disparaged the Christian religion, how would he answer, at this period of his life, as to the *special nature* of its Founder?

Of the two authors who worked to create an essentially Protestant image for Lincoln, John Locke Scripps needs little introduction. He is generally credited with having written the biography of Lincoln that appeared in the *Chicago Press and Tribune* on May 19, 1860, the day after the Chicago Republican nominating convention closed. Lincoln agreed shortly thereafter that Scripps should write a more complete biography for campaign purposes, in which Lincoln gave him assistance. This work is featured here with that of Barrett.

Joseph Hartwell Barrett requires considerably more attention. Though his name is still known to many, the substance of his contribution has largely faded from the body of scholarly knowledge. In 1860, he was the political editor of the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, and at the Republican Convention he helped draw up the party platform. Some forty years later he wrote of his initial relationship with Lincoln:⁴¹

Before the meeting of the Republican National Convention of 1860 I had undertaken, not of my own motion or at first willingly, to write a campaign biography of its nominee for the Presidency. I was confident that my subject would not be Mr. Seward, but I had no presentiment that the choice of the convention would be Abraham Lincoln, whom I had never met. In my first interview with him, soon after the adjournment of the convention (of which I was a member), he earnestly and even sadly insisted that there was no adequate material for such a work as was intended, yet he received me very kindly, and showed no unusual reserve in talking of either his earlier or maturer life. As to both periods, he readily gave such facts as my inquiries invited or suggested; introduced me to friends with whom he had

been on intimate terms for more than twenty years; and put me in the way of exploring newspaper files and legislative journals in the Illinois State library for biographic material . . . At my request and in my presence (May 24, 1861[sic]) he sat for a daguerreotype, which was lithographically reproduced for the volume then in preparation, published the following month [June 1860].⁴² My personal intercourse with Lincoln was continued later at Springfield, as well as during part of his journey to Washington the next winter, and in that city thenceforward during the rest of his days.

The credibility of Barrett's first biographic witness, the 1860 work, is certified by later events and testimonies, the most impressive of these being Lincoln's implied approval. In 1861, Lincoln appointed Barrett as Commissioner of Pensions⁴³ and engaged him in an extension of his first biography, giving him personal access (which became one of friendship), and granting him use of government documents including "autograph letters and papers of the President, General Scott, and General McClellan, not then generally accessible."⁴⁴ F. B. Carpenter, who late in Lincoln's administration spent six months in the White House while painting his Emancipation Proclamation portrait, declared concerning the locale of the first draft of the Proclamation that Barrett's version was "undoubtedly true" because of the "known relations of the author with the President."⁴⁵ J. G. Holland, in his 1866 biography of Lincoln, acknowledged consulting the biographies of Scripps, Raymond, and Barrett, "to the excellence of which I bear cheerful testimony."⁴⁶ An unwitting endorsement of Barrett comes even from Herndon, for as David Donald remarks, when in 1866 Herndon contemplated a biography of Lincoln, he purchased Barrett's 1865 edition of the *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, "studied it closely, and for handy reference made a five-page index."⁴⁷ Also in 1866, Herndon inquired of Barrett the source of his details of Lincoln's ancestry. Barrett wrote in return, "[M]y information was derived exclusively from Mr. L. himself [except for a footnoted authority] . . . His statements were made to me orally and I took notes as he went along"⁴⁸ As late as 1938, Ernest James Wessen,

a historian and collector of the 1860 campaign biographies (who found few of their contents worthy of praise), remarked that Barrett's, "was a commendable work, the first of a long series which was to issue from the pen of this author."⁴⁹

The works of Barrett and Scripps were part of the phenomenon of campaign biographies, generally historical only to the point of necessity. These originated, in any quantity, in the campaign of 1840, in which "over thirty different lives of William Henry Harrison had been published. Campaign lives were issued in all subsequent presidential campaigns, and by 1860 had become an established quadrennial source of income for enterprising publishers, and their hack writers."⁵⁰ Shortly after Lincoln's nomination, a deluge of his biographies, by some twenty authors, was released, in total number estimated as up to two hundred thousand. Most were copies of previously published material, particularly of a *Chicago Press and Tribune* article attributed to Scripps.⁵¹ These campaign lives have been, like campaign buttons, of interest principally to collectors. However, the subsequent and more developed work of Scripps considered in this paper has been well memorialized, and that of William Dean Howells has been honored both on its own merit and, retrospectively, by Howells' later eminent place in American literature. Barrett's biography, however meritorious it may be, has been swept out of recent memory, as if it belonged with the rubbish of the campaign.⁵² While most campaign biographers offered nothing but copies of the pre-scripted commonplaces of Lincoln's life and of his various speeches and documents, the special material which Scripps and Barrett received enabled them to pursue the issue of Lincoln's religion, and to tie him firmly to Protestantism. Their efforts appear more than accidentally related to their special relationship with him.

The credibility of both Barrett and Scripps, in certain of their particulars, depends of course on the evidence of their support by Lincoln himself. This does not touch on the larger issue of "Authorized Biographies." In fact, Lincoln authorized *no* 1860 campaign biography, not even that of Scripps, as occasionally has been claimed. Scripps had agreed to submit his manuscript to Lincoln for approval before publication, but events made this impossible. Scripps sent an overdue apology to Lincoln, but commented that he

would probably find nothing in the publication which would "give [him] pain."⁵³ Nevertheless, it is clear that Scripps felt he had been empowered to take some literary measures that had been suggested by Lincoln, for in a follow-up letter he wrote, "I believe the biography contains nothing that I was not fully authorized to put in it." Scripps added, however, "In speaking of the books you read in early life, I took the liberty of adding Plutarch's Lives. I take it for granted that you have read the book. If you have not, then you must read it at once to make my statement good."⁵⁴ (Lincoln thought this was quite humorous.) Barrett, in his Preface, specifically disclaimed to speak in Lincoln's name.

When the publishers of William Dean Howells' biography⁵⁵ touted their first edition as "authorized," Lincoln wrote with vehemence, "I would authorize no biography, without time and opportunity to carefully examine and consider every word of it."⁵⁶ (The campaign biography by D. W. Bartlett also made the claim "Authorized Edition" in its second edition, no doubt emboldened by its support by the powerful Horace Greeley.⁵⁷ Lincoln had not authorized this text, but wisely left the claim unchallenged.) Lincoln's stance on personal authorization had political advantage: it left him free to correct erroneous and troublesome statements, without obligation to disown erroneous but favorable ones. Thus, what Lincoln did not contradict may not *necessarily* be taken as true. He did not amend his own early inaccurate descriptions of his schooling and family poverty, likely arising from his youthful misapprehension of his family's situation. Later, after coming into a better knowledge of the facts, he would pay a political price if he were to *directly* contradict what he had previously said or implied. Lincoln may have received negative feedback from Kentucky during the post-Convention period concerning his now publicized statements about his youth. Smith, in his *Lincoln and the Lincolns*, writes of early neighbors' indignation over Lincoln's bad-mouthing of his family and its circumstances.⁵⁸ These reactions would have been quite localized, of course. No hint of such feelings is seen, for example, in the August, 1860 letter of Samuel Haycraft of Elizabethtown, Kentucky to Lincoln, in which the topic is the glad welcome Lincoln would receive if he should visit there.⁵⁹

Whether or not at Lincoln's instigation, Barrett does draw a

more hopeful picture than the customary one. Contrary to the unmitigated poverty into which Lincoln was supposedly born, according to Scripps and others, Barrett wrote of his father's circumstances: "More comfortable days, and a much improved state of things had come, before Thomas arrived at maturity, but in his boyhood and youth, he must have known whatever was worst in the trials and penury of the first generation of Kentucky frontiersmen."⁶⁰

Both Scripps and Barrett testify to Lincoln's early exposure to the Baptist faith. Here, Scripps focuses on the piety of Lincoln's mother:

She, as well as her husband, was a devout member of the Baptist Church. It was her custom on the Sabbath, when there was no religious worship in the neighborhood – a thing of frequent occurrence – to employ a portion of the day in reading the Scriptures aloud to her family. After Abraham and his sister had learned to read, they shared by turns in this duty of Sunday reading. This practice ... could not fail to produce certain effects. Among other things ... it must have been largely instrumental in developing the religious element in [Lincoln's] character ... There are few men in public life so familiar with the Scriptures as Mr. Lincoln.⁶¹

Barrett, on a different tack, writes:

They [LaRue and Hodgen, local pioneer settlers] were consistent and zealous members of the Baptist church, and one of their associates, Benjamin Lynn, was a minister of the same persuasion. Such were the influences which, more than twenty years before Thomas Lincoln settled there, this little colony had been founded, and which went far to give the community its permanent character.⁶²

The influence of this Baptist community on the young Lincoln could not be denied, a counter to the fact that Catholic influence was also widespread.

Barrett reveals Lincoln's early teacher as a Catholic who taught the Catholic faith in his school and even conducted religious devotions, but nevertheless maintained a wall between the child Lincoln and the Catholic religion:

The period of Abraham Lincoln's Kentucky life extends through a little more than seven years, terminating with the autumn of 1816 . . . In those days there were no common schools in that country. . . Education was by no means disregarded, nor did young Lincoln, poor as were his opportunities, grow up an illiterate boy, as some have supposed. Competent teachers were accustomed to offer themselves then, as in later years, who opened private schools for a neighborhood, being supported by tuition or subscription. During his boyhood days in Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln attended, at different times, at least two schools of this description, of which he has clear recollections. One of these was kept by Zachariah Riney, a Roman Catholic, whose peculiarities have not been wholly effaced from the memory of his since so distinguished pupil. But although this teacher was himself an ardent Catholic, he made no proselyting efforts in his school, and when any little religious ceremonies, or perhaps more catechizing and the like, were to be gone through with, all Protestant children, of whom, it is needless to say that young "Abe" was one, were accustomed to retire, by permission or command. Riney was probably in some way connected with the movement of the "Trappists,"[monks] who came to Kentucky in the autumn of 1805 . . . They were active in promoting education, especially among the poorer classes, and had a school for boys under their immediate supervision.

Barrett's approach to the "Catholic problem" was one of limited disclosure of Lincoln's contact with Catholics, acknowledging freely the character of Riney and his school, but denying that Lincoln had been instructed in the Catholic religion. The Catholic *family* rela-

tionships were not mentioned, but if these connections were to surface later, an explanation had been put in place through which they could be understood and dismissed as irrelevant. Barrett's words, "of which he has clear recollections," are in character as the introduction to a Lincoln third-person piece, and it is indeed doubtful that Lincoln would have left the core of this critical account entirely to another's discretion. As to Riney's often disputed status, he was a layman. The Trappists, absent from Kentucky during Lincoln's childhood there, returned in 1848, founding the present Abbey of Gethsemani. In his late years Riney deeded fifty acres of land to Abbot Peter Bergier in the interest of this Abbey, to which he retired as an informal member of the Community, where his grandson William Riney was a monk. He died in 1859, and is buried on the grounds. As recorded in this area of Kentucky, he was a person of some substance.⁶³

The Zachariah Riney account may be viewed as the last of three steps Lincoln took in the direction of revealing the touchy subject of Riney's school. His first was in his 1859 "Fell Autobiography": "There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin'", and cipherin' to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard." Though Latin words and phrases were bandied about by the better educated of the times, the use of the word "Latin" was by itself suggestive of "Catholic" – in this instance, perhaps, a Catholic teacher who, considering his "drifter" status, could be of no moment. The second step was taken in his post-Convention "Short Autobiography" where he was both neutral in tone and explicit as to place and names: "Before leaving Kentucky he and his sister were sent for short periods, to A. B. C. schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney, and the second by Caleb Hazel." As Lincoln certainly had his "clear recollections" at the time he wrote his "Fell Autobiography," it is not unreasonable to speculate that his three statements were a halting and experimental progression in solution to a problem.

After describing Lincoln's studies with Riney Barrett wrote:

While he lived in Kentucky, he never saw even the exte-

rior of what was properly a church edifice. The religious services he attended were held either at a private dwelling, or in some log school-house, or in some open grove:

“Fit shrine for humble worshiper to hold
Communion with his Maker. These dim vaults,
These winding aisles, of human pomp or pride
Report not. No fantastic carvings show
The boast of our vain race, to change the form
Of Thy fair works. But Thou art here, Thou fill’st
The solitude.” — Bryant⁶⁴

Barrett had previously taken care to distance the youth from the Catholic religion, as such, and deemed it “needless to say” that Lincoln was a Protestant. Now we see that this early Protestantism was primitive, easily finding its home in the small group, the outdoors, with no need, even, of a physical church; and thus, in popular perception, at the opposite extreme from Catholicism on the religious spectrum.

Going beyond previous assurances that Lincoln had no exposure to Catholic teachings, the poetry suggests Lincoln’s state of mind towards religious pomp and display. William Cullen Bryant’s words provide an additional symbol for Lincoln’s religious inclination, namely, aversion to the cathedrals of men, to the display of human pomp and pride, to human carvings, in effect, his preference of simplicity over the trappings of organized religion; and, to the unstated point, Catholicism. This section of text, beginning with Riney, may be seen as a single, subtle, piece contributing to a dual theme: Lincoln is a *basic* Protestant; he is not only not a Catholic – *his very temperament rebels* against Catholicism (in the popular concept). Yet, under the veil of metaphor, marvelously, there is nothing spoken or implied that should alienate the Catholics Lincoln did not wish and could not afford to insult. Recognition of a Catholic institution for its concern for the poor would offend no one, and would be noted favorably by any Catholic reader – an adept political straddle.

Scripps makes a point of the Lincoln family’s scrupulous attendance at services:

The people were glad of an opportunity to hear a sermon, whether delivered by one of their own religious faith or not. Thus it was at least with the father and the mother of young Lincoln, who never failed to attend, with their family, upon religious worship . . . They gladly received the word, caring less for the doctrinal tenets of the preacher than for the earnestness and zeal with which he enforced practical godliness. . . Of course the immediate result of such preaching was to awaken the religious element, rather than to inform the understanding as to doctrines and dogmas – to lead to spiritual exaltation and religious fervor, rather than to a clear knowledge and appreciation of those points of theological controversy which for many centuries have engaged the attention of disputatious divines. . . But as to the great value of the preaching here spoken of . . . there can be but one opinion. That it exerted a marked influence upon the character of young Lincoln, that it thoroughly awakened the religious element within him, and that his subsequent life has been greatly influenced by it, are facts which the writer desires to place upon record . . .⁶⁵

This persuasive account not only 'spiritualizes' Lincoln, but seems to preclude the very *issue* of doctrine from any discussion of his religion, and to declare any attempt at precise religious definitions out of bounds.

Scripps wrote concerning Lincoln's current Church connections:

He is a regular attendant upon religious worship, and, though not a communicant, is a pew-holder and liberal supporter of the Presbyterian Church in Springfield, to which Mrs. Lincoln belongs ... [N]o man ever charged ... [that] he would depart from the Scriptural command.⁶⁶

Barrett wrote nothing of Lincoln's attendance, but added some facts:

It is proper to add here that Mrs. Lincoln is a Presbyterian by education and profession (two of her sisters are Episcopalians), and that her husband, though not a member, is a liberal supporter of the church to which she belongs. It should further be stated that the Sunday-School, and other benevolent enterprises associated with these church relations, find in him a constant friend.⁶⁷

The following story in Barrett, found also in D. W. Bartlett's 1860 biography, is the only significant instance of Lincoln's religious activity, other than attendance at church, to be found in the four campaign biographies. The incident described took place on March 11, 1860, and was preceded by Lincoln's attendance at one church, and a visit to another.⁶⁸ These activities suggest a growing awareness of the political importance of such religious connections.

It was during this visit to New York [for the Cooper Union speech] that the following incident occurred, as related by a teacher in the Five-Points House of Industry in that city: Our Sunday-school in the Five-Points was assembled, one Sabbath morning, a few months since, when I noticed a tall and remarkable-looking man enter the room and take a seat among us. He listened with fixed attention to our exercises, and his countenance manifested such genuine interest, that I approached him and suggested he might be willing to say something to the children. He accepted the invitation with evident pleasure, and coming forward began a simple address, which at once fascinated every little hearer, and hushed the room into silence. His language was strikingly beautiful, and his tones musical with intensest feeling. The little faces around would droop into sad conviction as he uttered sentences of warning, and would brighten into sunshine as he spoke cheerful

words of promise. Once or twice he attempted to close his remarks, but the imperative shout of "Go on!" "Oh, do go on!" would compel him to resume. As I looked upon the gaunt and sinewy frame of the stranger, and marked his powerful head and determined features, now touched into softness by the impressions of the moment, I felt an irrepressible curiosity to learn something more about him, and when he was quietly leaving the room, I begged to know his name. He courteously replied, "It is Abra'm Lincoln, from Illinois!"⁶⁹

The Five Points House of Industry was a charity school in the midst of Manhattan slums, at 155 Worth Street, in an area noted for crime.⁷⁰ The incident that took place there is more credibly described by the Reverend Edward Eggleston: When news of the event appeared in the New York *Tribune*, and reached Springfield, it raised some guffaws among Lincoln's friends. On his return, Lincoln explained that Washburne had suggested the visit to the Sunday-School, and there, Pease [director of the Mission] invited both Washburne and Lincoln to speak. Washburne spoke first, and then urged on the hesitant Lincoln. The nature of Lincoln's talk itself accords with the information provided to Barrett, but the teacher's letter is deliberately circumscribed so as to picture Lincoln as alone and unrecognized, and the event itself as something of a happenstance, as does not seem to have been the case. Lincoln himself would probably not have been a direct party to such posing. As to his personal experience of the event, according to Eggleston, he had been deeply touched.⁷¹

While Scripps is generally supposed to have been the beneficiary both of Lincoln's special trust and his personal information, Lincoln clearly favored Barrett among the 1860 campaign biographers in the amount and the nature of the facts he shared – and in Barrett alone does Lincoln appear in a Catholic setting. Lincoln, who granted a political position to Barrett after his election, provided also for Scripps and Howells. The latter was appointed Consul to Venice, and Scripps as Postmaster of Chicago. Even so, Lincoln appears to have been irritated by Scripps in 1864. When the postmaster sought

a Republican nomination to Congress, and was requiring the support of his own appointees against a friend and supporter of Lincoln, the President prohibited his actions in a cold and impersonal fashion. When Scripps, outraged by this treatment, protested that other and various heads of offices were doing as he was attempting, Lincoln responded that it would be "laborious" to respond to each situation, and he would "not quite like to publish a general circular on the subject."⁷² Nevertheless, some three weeks after Lincoln's death, learning that Herndon was planning on "giving us something" about Lincoln, Scripps exclaimed in a letter to him that Lincoln would be "for all time to come the great American Man – the grand central figure in American (perhaps the World's) History." Scripps' raising Lincoln to mythical heights is suggestive that he hoped Herndon would quote him in his prospective work.⁷³ That Lincoln had come to regard Barrett highly is apparent in his confiding to him, but a week after his election, his considerations in the selection of his Cabinet.⁷⁴

Ernest James Wessen's 1937 paper has been a valued introduction to the 1860 Lincoln campaign biographies but may, coincidentally, have discouraged their further consideration by scholars. To Wessen, they were principally "collectibles," destined for the shelf, and in their sameness, of little value. Wessen did attribute a degree of worth to Barrett's biography, mentioning his association with Lincoln for several days while gathering information, and calling his work commendable, though not by reason of any singular content, but because "he sought to provide an accurate background." This would hardly tempt scholars to investigate further. It was beyond Wessen's interest that Barrett's 1860 biography was distinct by reason of its post-1860 history. With Lincoln's cooperation, Barrett extended it for use in the presidential campaign of 1864, and following Lincoln's death, he further expanded it, in his 1865 edition. But this volume, very popular just after the assassination, was soon outdated by more properly historical biographies. Even an 1866 edition of the same work seems not to have prospered, as it is extremely rare. Nevertheless, this was followed by a repeat edition in 1888, and several cheap "throw-away" editions by various printers in 1902, one a blatantly-commercial advertising vehicle. In a sense, Barrett's work *had* become trash.

In 1904, Barrett's *Abraham Lincoln and His Presidency* was published. In this he reviewed the Lincoln Administration in perspective, and with some fresh material, but though the publisher offered testimonials from a number of sources, it does not appear that Barrett found redemption, as this work too is quite rare. By this time, Barrett's works, though totalling over sixteen-hundred pages, were better-forgotten news. It is no surprise, then, that Barrett is rarely mentioned today.

As a full biographer of Lincoln, David Donald is properly regarded as the dean of present Lincoln scholarship, and his *Lincoln*, its exemplar text.⁷⁵ Donald writes regarding the "A.B.C." schools which Lincoln attended in Kentucky, that he "was first taught by one Zachariah Riney, about whom little is known except that he was a Catholic. . ."⁷⁶ Donald says nothing about Riney's school, but speaks of the teacher Caleb Hazel, and describes his qualifications and methods. Was Donald aware of Barrett's account? One would think not, but it is hazardous to make a conclusion, on this evidence. A better test may be made concerning Barrett's 1865 biography. In the debate about where Lincoln created his first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, Donald favors David Bates' story of its composition, over many days, in the War Department telegraph office.⁷⁷ He refers in a note, however, to the contrary opinion of Mark E. Neely, Jr., who believes Lincoln "wrote the first draft of the document by himself and in secret." Neely regards Bates' version as dubious, and in a note dismisses, without reference to texts, the recollections of F. B. Carpenter and Gideon Welles as being too long after the event.⁷⁸ To what recollection in Carpenter's account Neely refers is not evident, but Carpenter makes this testable remark: "In Barrett's biography of Mr. Lincoln, it is stated that the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation was written on board of the steam-boat returning from his 8th of July visit to the army at Harrison's Landing . . ."⁷⁹ Barrett does indeed state this in his 1865 edition.⁸⁰ Later, in his 1904 *Presidency*, after amplifying his previous account, Barrett adds in a footnote, as if to settle the controversy, that this fact had been "stated to the writer by President Lincoln, as noted at the time."⁸¹ It seems doubtful that Donald or Neely would dismiss this Barrett testimony without comment if they were aware of it.

Barrett does appear in Merrill D. Peterson's *Lincoln in American Memory*. The author focuses on the final pages of Barrett's 1865 edition, where Lincoln is described as a "true example of Christian character," and where a eulogistic parallel is drawn between Lincoln and Robert Burns, the Scottish poet.⁸² Because the apotheosis of Lincoln, the subject of Peterson's book, is largely a post-assassination phenomenon (though its foundations were exposed by Don Fehrenbacher⁸³), the author would hardly think to search any 1860 campaign biography for such an instance. Yet, a few weeks after first meeting Lincoln, Barrett wrote, "Wherever he has dwelt becomes classic and consecrated ground, and to have known him, even in his obscurest days, will be deemed a circumstance to be recounted with pride. To gather up such recollections and to perpetuate them with the pen, will be the work of future times and other hands."⁸⁴ This is likely the earliest biographical appearance of the "Great Man" at the heart of Peterson's essential "Man of the People" legend, yet was not noted by Peterson in his work.

From recent indications, the campaign biography stigma attaches to the 1864 campaign biographies as well. In his *Jewel of Liberty*, David E. Long, despite his generous coverage of the newspapers, handbills, circulars, and various "Loyal" publications in promoting Lincoln's reelection, takes no notice of the six biographies of Lincoln that were published in 1864.⁸⁵

John C. Waugh, in his *Reelecting Lincoln*, after discussing Henry J. Raymond's significant campaign role, comments on the "brisk business in campaign biographies" without mentioning that Raymond authored the most impressive of these. He does mention two on George McClellan, and alludes to six "either out or coming out on Lincoln." The source he cites for these, when searched, places Raymond's biography in a pre-eminent position. His authorship was apparently viewed by Waugh as insignificant in the campaign.⁸⁶

It is true that Lincoln nowhere expresses the desire to enhance his religious image. However, as he had encountered the Know-Nothing element in a previous presidential campaign and elsewhere, it is difficult to believe he would not act to be seen as in the religious mainstream, particularly as local suspicions to the contrary might easily become national doubts. The inventive Scripps ably embell-

ishes the few facts of Lincoln's Baptist childhood.⁸⁷ Barrett takes the initiative on the Catholic issue, with great sensitivity. He too enlarges, but by additional facts he brings to the subject, and by metaphor, rather than by stretching. Together, Scripps and Barrett, as if applying different brushes to the same canvas, bring forth a Protestantized Lincoln, not clearly seen before.

These biographers, each favored by a personal relation with Lincoln, fashioned works tailored to his situation; a match of need with remedy that can hardly be put down as accidental. Other campaign biographers who had no personal relationship with Lincoln (of whom Howells and Bartlett may stand as examples) were on no such insistent course. It is not necessary, however, that Lincoln ever revealed the details of his "Catholic problem" to Scripps and Barrett. It would have been enough for him simply to speak of his desire to improve his religious image. At root, it was Lincoln who *placed himself* on the Protestant scene, largely by the information he selectively furnished these biographers. There was no need to know his thoughts.

There is, of course, no way to estimate the effect of the campaign biographies on the election. *All* the biographies served to acquaint the public with a relatively unknown candidate rapidly and in detail, though Howells was confident enough to declare later, "I wrote the life of Lincoln which elected him." In Springfield, where Lincoln was best known, the churches were not moved. Lincoln said, after studying a local pre-election poll, "Here are 23 ministers, of different denominations, and all of them are against me but three; and here are a great many prominent members of the churches, a very large majority of whom are against me."⁸⁸ Some of this local disapproval could have sprung from the Southern sympathies of many central Illinois voters, rather than from perceptions of Lincoln's irreligion. Though suspicions concerning Lincoln's Catholic connections apparently were voiced elsewhere during the campaign, nothing came of these.

It may be asked, "If Lincoln had been so concerned about his past Catholic associations, why did he not reveal these to *all* his biographers and to the press, and explain his non-involvement. Why resort to a single biographer's subtleties?" Though Lincoln could

deflect accusations of a Catholic conspiracy, the question of religion once being put prominently on display, he could not restrain the flood of commentaries which would inevitably follow concerning his perhaps less defensible present religious state. True to form, Lincoln acted, preemptively, to lessen the risk that *either* issue would be raised. There was some peril in this. Under Lincoln, the Director, it was at least a *managed* peril.

The thesis that has been proposed here derives from the conjunction of Barrett and Scripps. Barrett, alone, can return but a few forgotten details to the store of knowledge. Only together do Barrett and Scripps offer a 'critical mass' of evidence in which Lincoln stands out, in a new perspective, against the politico-religious background of his time.

Notes

1 James H. Matheny, one of Lincoln's earliest and closest Springfield friends and fellow lawyer, told Herndon in 1870 that Lincoln had recognized as early as 1854 that his political future was vulnerable to the charge that he was an infidel, if not an atheist. Matheny alleged that around that time Lincoln began to appear as a "seeker after Salvation," and had "used" the Reverend Dr. James Smith of the First Presbyterian Church, the Reverend Dr. John G. Bergen "and others" for his own purposes. Matheny referred to Lincoln as playing "a sharp game on the Religious world." Herndon added his own comments to these notes: "I have often thought that there was something in this, but can't confirm it to be so. This is Matheny's honest opinion . . . he knew Lincoln as well as I did I think." [Quite a concession, from Herndon.] Herndon letter to Ward Hill Lamon, March 6, 1870, *Herndon's Informants*, Ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) #464, p. 577.

During the period to which Matheny referred, Dr. James Smith had become convinced that Lincoln had "avowed his belief in the Divine Authority and Inspiration of the Scripture" as a result of a series of talks with him and through the reading of Smith's book, *The Christian Defense*. Smith wrote Herndon: "To use his own language, 'he [Lincoln] examined the Arguments as a lawyer who is anxious to reach the truth investigates testimony.' The result was the announcement by himself that the argument in favor of the Divine Authority and inspiration of the Scripture was unanswerable." Ibid, James Smith letter to Herndon, Jan. 24, 1867, #435, pp. 547-50. To the Reverend Dr. Smith, all that was lacking, it seems, was Lincoln's declaration for a particular denomination. It did not strike the good minister that Lincoln's statement was well short of an assent, and no confession of faith. Yet, Lincoln had won the support of an influential cleric who would powerfully attest to

his presence within the threshold of Christianity, one of possibly three Springfield ministers he had favorably influenced during this period.

Ninian W. Edwards, Mary Todd Lincoln's brother-in-law, was later to insist that Lincoln's pre-1860 faith had indeed been established through Smith's instrumentality. Matheny also, under some pressure, revised some of his testimony concerning Lincoln's irreligiosity (though not the opinions expressed above). However, these reactions need to be assessed in light of the forces released by the elevation of Lincoln to a figure larger than life following his assassination, an issue which is considered in the book reviews to be found in the Appendix to this article.

2 The paper is not directly concerned with what Lincoln's religious beliefs may have been. However, Dr. Wayne C. Temple, recently writing of this period, says that Lincoln was probably "more of a Deist than anything else." *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet* (Mahomet: Mayhaven Publishing, 1995), 67. Webster's describes deism as "in philosophy, the belief that reason is sufficient to prove the existence of God, with the consequent rejection of revelation and authority," and as well, "the belief that God exists and created the world but thereafter assumed no control over it or the lives of people."

Lincoln's public declaration, in 1846, should also be considered: "[I]n early life I was inclined to believe [in the] 'Doctrine of Necessity' — that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind has no control; and I have sometimes . . . (but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument . . . [but have discontinued this] for more than five years." Basler, *Collected Works*, I, 382. We must accept, in this instance, Lincoln's own definition of the "doctrine of necessity." As conceived by the scientist Joseph Priestley, this was a kind of Theism, which allowed for God having a measure of involvement in the world and human life. It could be argued from some of his later expressions that Lincoln never completely abandoned this concept.

3 Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade 1800-1860* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), 429 & notes.

4 When asked about their tenets, members had generally responded, "I don't know."

5 Quoted in the *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix, 59.

6 The platform of the Constitutional Union Party, whose candidate was John Bell of Tennessee, was vague on particulars except, as a policy, to follow the precepts of the Constitution.

7 Harvey H. Smith, *Lincoln and the Lincolns* (New York: Pioneer Publications Inc., 1931, reprint.), 145.

8 Lincoln to Speed, August 24, 1855. *Collected Works* (CW), II, 323.

9 "President Lincoln's Interest in Catholic Institutions," *Lincoln Lore* (Lincoln National Life Foundation), ed. Dr. Louis A. Warren, Bulletin 790 (May 29, 1944.) The comments concern his cousin Abraham Lincoln, whose name had once prompted a scholarly confusion about the President's religion.

10 *Records of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Loretto, Loretto, Kentucky*. Among the presently unsupported stories is that Lincoln had told the Springfield family maid that his stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln, was a Catholic, but had not had the opportunity to practice her religion.

- 11 "live peaceably," except as disturbed by the incessant law-suits over land titles. Unfortunately, the state had not been initially surveyed before it was parceled out by piece-meal surveys. These contentions drove many land-owners to leave for Indiana and Illinois, where land rights could be assured.
- 12 a remark of a second generation Kentuckian. Smith, *Lincoln and the Lincolns*, 44. The author gratefully acknowledges the guidance of Wendell Freeman of Rineyville, Kentucky, in matters of area history. Mr. Freeman is related to several of the pioneers appearing in *Lincoln and the Lincolns*. Mrs. Freeman's great-great grandfather, who was pastor of the Mill Creek Church from 1831 to 1854, is said to have preached at Bersheba Lincoln's funeral in 1833.
- 13 Roger Futrell, "Zachariah Riney: Lincoln's First Schoolmaster," *Lincoln Herald* 74, Fall 1972, 138. Futrell cites as the source for his Hutchins information the Obituary of the Rev. John B. Hutchins, which appeared in the *Central Catholic Advocate*, Feb. 13, 1879.
- 14 (New York: Image Books, 1975), I, 666. For a treatment of the causes of this discord see *ibid.*, 666-681. For the views of an eminent Catholic historian, see John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (University of Chicago Press, 1955), 41-93.
- 15 *Record of Fifty Years* (Springfield: H. W. Rokker Co., 1909), 62. (A commemoration of the Ursulines' fifty years in Springfield; copy in possession of the author.)
- 16 Rhoda Bissell Thomas, *St. Ursula's Quarterly*, Vol. III, I (1910). The *Quarterly* was published and printed by the young ladies of the Academy. Letter, Springfield, Illinois Ursuline Convent Archivist to author, Feb. 7, 1996.
- 17 *Record*, 55-56
- 18 Attendance dates: Anna, 1858; Lizzie, 1858-1863; Mollie [probably a nickname for Mary], 1864-1869. Day-Student Records of the Springfield Ursuline Academy.
- 19 *Record*, 67-70.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 21 *Temple*, 162.
- 22 Nicolay & Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, a History* (New York: Century, 1917), I, 234-35.
- 23 *Temple*, 17-19, & note, 21. Sam Hill was a real person who had been humiliated by Cartwright, and who afforded Lincoln the opportunity to speak in his name. Lincoln had taken a kind of "devilish" pleasure early on in writing under a pseudonym, which caused him no small embarrassment in the "James Shields" affair in 1842. Here, "he used the personna of 'Rebecca,' a rough, uneducated, but shrewd countrywoman, to attack Democratic policies and to make fun of Shields," the Illinois State auditor, in the *Sangamo Journal*. Lincoln being exposed, he narrowly averted a duel with Shields. Mary Todd and one of her friends had also been involved in the attack on Shields, it appears. Donald, *Herndon*, 90-93.
- 24 *CW*, I, 271-79.
- 25 *Herndon's Lincoln* (Springfield: Herndon's Lincoln Publ., n.d.), II, 260-62, 268, 272-73.
- 26 *Weekly Chicago Democrat*, June 5, December 4, 1858.
- 27 *Bureau County Republican*, August 16, 1860.
- 28 John R. G. Hassard, *Life of Most Reverend John A. Hughes* (New York, 1866), p. 276, as quoted by Ellis, 68.

- 29 See Peter Clarke, *A Free Church in a Free Society* (Hartsville, S.C.: Center for John England Studies, Inc., 1982), 313-37.
- 30 Ahlstrom, I, 655-56.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 680.
- 32 Clarke, 42.
- 33 Bishop England's discourse on this occasion is found in *Record*, 1-34.
- 34 Ellis, 59.
- 35 Letter, Springfield, Illinois Ursuline Convent Archivist to author, Feb. 7, 1996. Rhoda's granddaughter, Rita Portuondo, became an Ursuline nun. *Ibid.*
- 36 Elizabeth Todd Grimsley, "Six Months in the White House," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XIX, 60.
- 37 Clarke, 41.
- 38 "It has been stated that the First Presbyterian Church never wholeheartedly supported abolition, and this fact assisted in the splitting of the original congregation." The Second Presbyterian Church arose from this split. Temple, 105-107.
- 39 Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1944), 220.
- 40 See Billington, 345-367, as an excellent summary of the anti-Catholic literature that reflected and fostered such suspicion. Papal plots and conspiracies to take over the government of the United States were a recurring feature in the literature of the time. See also Joseph George, Jr., "The Lincoln Writings of Charles P. T. Chiniquy," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Feb. 1976, 17-25.
- 41 Joseph H. Barrett, LL.D., *Abraham Lincoln and His Presidency* (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1904), I, iii-iv.
- 42 J. H. Barrett, *Life of Abraham Lincoln, and Sketch of Hannibal Hamlin* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach & Keys, 1860).
- 43 Lincoln mentioned Barrett's appointment in his Cabinet meeting of April 9, 1861. CW, IV, 325. Barrett remained in this position through 1867.
- 44 *Presidency*, I, iv.
- 45 F. B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 86.
- 46 J. G. Holland, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, Mass.: Gurdon Bull, 1866), 8.
- 47 David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 171. Herndon, however, never mentions Barrett.
- 48 Letter of Joseph H. Barrett to William H. Herndon, Oct. 1, 1866, *Herndon's Informants*, #256, p.364.
- 49 Ernest James Wessen, "Campaign Lives of Abraham Lincoln," *Papers in Illinois History*, 1937 (Springfield: The Illinois State Historical Society, 1938), 206.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 188.
- 51 This article was based on an autobiographical sketch Lincoln had provided to Jesse W. Fell in 1859, for use in generating support for his nomination, and is referred to as the "Fell autobiography."
- 52 David W. Bartlett is also counted among the better early biographers: *The Life and Public Services of Hon. Abraham Lincoln* (New York: H. Dayton, 1860). Bartlett, who in

his 1859 *Presidential Candidates of 1860* included biographies of twenty-one men but passed over Lincoln, seems in his 1860 biography to be especially interested in the phenomenon of his political skills, which had been below the threshold of his attention but a year before.

53 Scripps to Lincoln, July 11, 1860, Library of Congress, Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln.

54 *Ibid.*, July 17, 1860.

55 William Dean Howells, *Lives and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin* (Columbus: Follett, Foster & Co., 1860).

56 *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, edited by Mildred Howells, (NY: Garden City, 1928), I: 36-37.

57 Wessen, 194.

58 Smith, 20-21.

59 *The Lincoln Papers* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), Editor, David C. Mearns, I, 274-75.

60 Barrett, *Life*, 15.

61 John Locke Scripps, *Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), edited, with Introduction and Notes by Roy P. Basler and Lloyd A. Dunlap, 31-32.

62 Barrett, *Life*, 17.

63 Futrell, 136-42. A number of local sources create a quite full picture of Riney's life. Futrell includes a short third-person piece, written at the request of the Abbot, by William Riney (Brother Benedict), concerning his grandfather, and his relations to Lincoln. This was published on February 12, 1909 in the *Louisville Times*. The grandson remembered his aunt speaking a little of Lincoln's school days - she often heard Riney say "Come on, Abraham, and say your lesson," when it was his turn at recitation. Also helpful are various records of the Abbey of Gethsemani, Trappist, Kentucky.

64 Barrett, *Life*, 18-20.

65 Scripps, 37-39.

66 *Ibid.*, 165.

67 Barrett, *Life*, 67.

68 *New York Tribune*, March 13, 1860.

69 Barrett, *Life*, 189. This story is also told by Bartlett, 148-49. He refers to the *Tribune*, undated, as his source. Although the *Tribune*, on March 13, 1860, reported the incident, the story itself appeared at a later time, as is clear from "some months since." Barrett, however, may have received his story directly from an earlier source, possibly through Washburne, as in his account Lincoln pronounces his name "Abra'm," whereas it is "Abraham" in Bartlett and all others who later repeat it.

70 Peter J. Wosh, "Five Points Mission," *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (1995).

71 The present writer's account is substantially as related in Francis F. Browne's *Everyday Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 224-26.

72 *CW*, VII, 423-24, 453.

73 *Herndon's Informants*, Letter of John L. Scripps to W. H. Herndon, May 9, 1865, #1, p.3. The letter may be read as illustrative of the 'apotheosis,' or near-deification, of

Lincoln after his assassination, which subject Merrill D. Peterson so thoroughly explores in his *Lincoln in American Memory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

74 *Presidency*, I, 240-41.

75 David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

76 *Ibid.*, 23.

77 *Ibid.*, 363-64, & note, 654.

78 Mark E. Neely, *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 95-96, & note, 201.

79 Carpenter, 86.

80 Barrett *Life*, 823.

81 *Presidency*, II, 112.

82 Peterson, 66. The reference to "true example" is probably to p. 841. Regarding Robert Burns, 838-39.

83 Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness, Lincoln in the 1850's* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). Peterson remarks that Fehrenbacher had "moved the conception of [Lincoln as] the heroic statesman back to the fifties," 340.

84 Barrett, *Life*, 29.

85 *The Jewel of Liberty* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1994), 251-53.

86 John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1997), 310-11. The reference cited is to *Lincoln Lore*, 1100 (8 May 1950). The issue is devoted to the 1864 Lincoln biographies, including Barrett, of course.

87 An example of elaboration, based on the conjecture previously noted (Letter of Scripps to Lincoln, July 17, 1860): Scripps wrote that Lincoln "was fortunate enough to get possession of a copy of *Plutarch's Lives*. What fields of thought its perusal opened up to the stripling, what hopes were excited in his youthful breast, what worthy models of probity, of justice, of honor, and of devotion to the great principles he resolved to pattern after, can be readily imagined by those who are familiar with his subsequent career." Scripps, 36-37. Regarding this account, as has been noted earlier, Scripps wrote Lincoln, "I take it for granted you have read the book." Lincoln had been given no prior opportunity to strike any of Scripps' text, and chose not to protest any of its statements following publication of the first edition.

88 Holland, 236.

Appendix: Suggested Readings on Lincoln's Religion

Although this paper is not directed to the actual state of Lincoln's religion, either prior to or after his assumption of the Presidency, many readers are undoubtedly interested in this issue, and may wish to be advised of several recent related works:

Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*¹ - Why

should a study of the apotheosis of Lincoln – his elevation as a glorious legendary figure – be of particular interest to the searcher after Lincoln's religion as it "really was"? It is because the Lincoln myths that sprouted after his assassination, and form a large part of the greater American legend, have increased the problem of reaching a definitive determination. There is evidence that some of the earliest witnesses on Lincoln's religion were caught up and corrupted in the ground-swell of the great myths, and it would be inconceivable even today to many Americans that the "Great Emancipator," the "First American," and this great "Man of the People," may have been other than a Christian. The few who, early on, went so far as to state this, did so in peril of their reputations, as Herndon experienced. Many others who simply felt that Lincoln had evidenced little or no religious inclination claimed that he was, nevertheless, a great Christian.

Obscuring the meaning of theological terms was invited by the apotheosis. Calling Lincoln an "infidel," a common appellation for one who did not meet a denomination's definitions of a Christian, was discordant to an American ear that had become attuned to the legends. One of the earliest offenders was Herndon, Lincoln's old law-partner, largely by reason of his contribution to Ward Hill Lamon's 1872 biography of Lincoln, which diminished the younger Lincoln's reputation for piety and virtue considerably. Somewhat later, and probably most reviled, was John E. Remsburg, a friend of Herndon who, around the turn of the century, brought together a huge collection of testimonials by Lincoln's contemporaries, both favorable and unfavorable to his religious image, and argued from these that Lincoln was an infidel. Of course, Remsburg's arguments were greatly suspect at the time, for he was an avid unbeliever himself, dedicated to attacking the whole of Christianity. (The writer once studied a rare copy of Remsburg's 1906 *Six Historic Americans*, in which the segment on Lincoln had been carefully noted with counter-arguments in the margins, in an archaic and feminine hand, and bore such comments as "Shame!" and "Liar!" It is a wonder the book had not been burned!) Whatever judgment may be made on Remsburg's logic, he was careful in his terminology, and quick to point out fuzzy language used by others. He made this observation, still cogent: "If the terms morality, religion, and Christianity, were

always used in their legitimate sense – used to express the ideas of which they were the original signs – much trouble and ambiguity would be avoided. As it is, they are promiscuously used as interchangeable terms. Many use the word religion and even Christianity when they mean morality.” A reader of works treating of Lincoln’s religion does well today in having both a dictionary and an encyclopedia at hand, with no guarantee that the author under study had done likewise while writing.

Peterson’s work thus provides a cautionary background to the reading of works on Lincoln’s religion, besides being of immediate general interest to Lincoln students. The book has two other features of benefit as well, a summary of the works of the earlier writers on Lincoln’s religion,² and a review of his earliest post-assassination biographers.³

Wayne C. Temple, *Abraham Lincoln; From Skeptic to Prophet*⁴ – The author’s depth of research and detail creates a storehouse of information both directly and indirectly related to Lincoln’s religion, frequently calling upon relatively unknown sources. The author, who has an extensive Springfield Presbyterian background, offers a complete history of the denomination there and the Lincoln family’s involvement with it, though Lincoln himself never became a formal member. Further, Temple traces with the same detail Lincoln’s religious affiliations throughout his Presidency. It may annoy some that the biographical minutiae of so many persons who had a religious association with Lincoln are meticulously explored, but most will find the rewards of a careful reading even among these particulars. (The present writer, though becoming accustomed to the author’s passion for detail, was surprised when the author gave the *street address* of the “last of the Todds who had known Robert Todd Lincoln to some degree” — placing in a new light the next-door neighbor of the writer’s parents in the 1940’s!)

A fuller explanation of the historical roots of Presbyterianism, and its doctrines and practices, would have been useful – social dancing, occasionally engaged in by Mrs. Lincoln, who remained a respected member, being featured by the author as a “heinous crime.” This perceived moral “flexibility” leaves the reader perplexed. And traditional Christians, who believe in the Trinity – One

God in Three Persons – should prepare to be offended occasionally, as by the author's reference to their belief in Jesus as a "lesser god," or by insinuations that they are not monotheists. However, all considered, this is a volume that no student of Lincoln's religion can afford to ignore.

Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln Before Washington*⁵ – The author describes the devastating second attack on Herndon, from whom our knowledge of Lincoln's personal life before the Presidency largely comes. This, however, was to be less frontal than the first, which had been largely occasioned by his charges of Lincoln's infidelity. The young Paul M. Angle began to chip away at the credibility of Herndon's work in 1927, and was followed by a succession of scholars, the near-finishing blows being credited by Wilson to David Donald's engaging biography, *Lincoln's Herndon*, in 1948.⁶ In but a little over twenty years, what had surfaced as a healthy historical skepticism in the absence of hard evidence turned into a broad disdain for the reminiscences of Herndon's informants, which constituted the body of his efforts. Herndon came to be seen as a credulous and indiscriminating interviewer who often led these informants to his own desired results and was generally unaware of the myriad pitfalls of oral history. One authority calculated that Herndon had been the creator of at least a dozen popular Lincoln myths. Finally, Herndon was reduced to an erratic would-be intellectual, a clever, even fascinating character, too often besotted with alcohol.

This is the Herndon widely perceived today, partly because, as Wilson comments, "Lincoln scholars . . . tend to accept without question the judgments of previous generations." But, also responsible for this state, he adds, is that present scholars "are scarcely conversant with the sources for [Lincoln's] prepresidential years."⁷ Wilson, co-editor with Rodney O. Davis of the recently released complete collection of the Herndon sources, *Herndon's Informants*,⁸ (much of its contents previously difficult to access and interpret, and insufficiently researched by Herndon's earlier critics) explores his subject well. He not only exposes the flawed scholarship of these Herndon detractors, but supports the overall value of the reminiscences as collected by Herndon. He does this without excusing Herndon's "intuitive judgments" or declaring his methods exemplary, but demonstrates that he was anything but naïve concerning the pitfalls of rem-

iniscence and took care to minimize them by various means. Further, he analyzes several of the Lincoln myths which Herndon was accused of creating, and generally absolves Herndon of invention. This work may become a landmark in the shift of scholarly opinion of Herndon.

For the student of Lincoln's religion, what are the consequences of this revised view? Surely, some confidence that the opinions expressed to Herndon concerning Lincoln's religion had not been coaxed or specifically invited, and that the majority of the witnesses were not motivated by self-importance in recounting their relations with Lincoln. In addition, the evidence is that Herndon did not discard what he considered honest statements that disagreed with his own convictions. The fact remains, however, that Lincoln revealed his inner self to almost no one other than Joshua Speed – and then, perhaps, regarding only fragments of his life.

Prior to the tragic death of his son Eddie, the testimony concerning Lincoln's irreligiosity probably should be accepted. In the sad aftermath, beginning in the eighteen-fifties, Lincoln may have become truly concerned with finding a religious home, even while recognizing its political benefits – contrary to his friend Matheny's speculation that he was merely "playing the religion card." We cannot deny the persisting "tug of the heart" in us, whatever our religion, to believe that Lincoln, in whom justice was so tempered with mercy, did indeed find a path to his Creator, in Whom, alone, Justice and Mercy are one and the same.

Notes to Appendix

- 1 Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln In American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 2 *Ibid.*, 217-32. Peterson expatiates on the work of William E. Barton, in particular.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 66-81.
- 4 Temple, *Abraham Lincoln; From Skeptic to Prophet*.
- 5 Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln Before Washington* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997)
- 6 David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948)
- 7 Wilson, ix.
- 8 *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).