PRESIDENT LINCOLN ON NATIONAL SIN
AND NATIONAL REPENTANCE

Call for a day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer

August 12, 1861.

Whereas it is fit and becoming in all people at all times to acknowledge and reverence the supreme government of God, to bow in humble submission to His chastisements, to confess and deplore their sins and transgressions in the full conviction that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to pray with all fervency and contrition for the pardon of their past offences and for a blessing upon their present and prospective action; and

Whereas when our own beloved country, once by the blessing of God, united, prosperous, and happy, is now afflicted with faction and civil war, it is peculiarly fit for us to recognize the hand of God in this terrible visitation, and in sorrowful remembrance of our own faults and crimes as a nation and as individuals to humble ourselves before Him and to pray for His mercy—to pray that we may be spared further punishment, though most justly deserved; that our arms may be blessed and made effectual for the reestablishment of law, order, and peace throughout the wide extent of our country; and that the inestimable boon of civil and religious liberty, earned under His guidance and blessing by the labors and sufferings of our fathers, may be restored in all its original excellence:

Therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do appoint . . .

The famous Harlan resolution adopted by the Senate March 2, 1861

Resolved, That, devoutly recognizing the supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in the affairs of men and of nations, and sincerely believing that no people, however great in numbers and resources, or however strong in the justice of their cause, can prosper without His favor, and at the same time deploving the national offenses which provoked His righteous judgment, yet encouraged, in this day of trouble, by the assurance of His word, to seek Him for succor according to His appointed way, through Jesus Christ, the Senate of the United States do hereby request the President of the United States by his proclamation to designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation . . .
Consequent call to a day of Humiliation and Prayer
March 30, 1863.

Whereas the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the
supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in all the
affairs of men and nations, has by a resolution requested the President
to designate and set apart a day of prayer and humiliation; and

Whereas it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their
dependence upon the overruling power of God, to confess their sins and
transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine
repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime
truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven in all history, that
those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord; 1 Sam. 5:17.

And, inasmuch as we know that by His divine law nations, like individu-
als, are subjected to punishments in this world, may we not justly
fear that the avenging calamity of civil war which now desolates the land
may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our unpunitively sins, the
needful end of our national reformation as a whole people? We have been
the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved
these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers,
wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have for-
gotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us
in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have
vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these bless-
es were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. In-
toxicided with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel
the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace too proud to pray to
the God who made us.

It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power,
to confess our national sins, and to pray, for clemency and forgiveness . . .

A Call to Thanksgiving for Victory

July 15, 1863.

Now, therefore, be it known that I do set apart Thursday, the 6th
day of August next, to be observed as a day of national thanksgiving,
praise, and prayer, and I invite the people of the United States to as-
semble on that occasion in their customary places of worship and in the
forces approved by their own consciences to render the homage due to the
Divine Majesty for the wonderful things He has done in our nation's be-
half and to invoke the presence of His Holy Spirit to subdue the anger
which has produced and so long sustained a needless and cruel rebellion
to change the hearts of the insurgents, to guide the counsels of the
Government with wisdom adequate to so great a national emergency,
and to visit with tender care and consolation throughout the length and
breadth of our land all those who, through the vicissitudes of marches,
voiges, battles, and sieges, have been brought to suffer in mind, body,
or estate, and finally to lead the whole nation through the paths of
repentance and submission to the divine will back to the perfect enjoy-
ment of union and fraternal peace.

From a Thanksgiving Proclamation
October 3, 1863.

"No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked
out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High
God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless
remembered mercy." . . .

From Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural
March 4, 1865.

If we suppose that American slavery is one of those offences
which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having
continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that
He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to
those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure
from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always
ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this
mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God will that it
continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and
fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood
drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as
was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "the judg-
ments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." 2 Sam. 24:14.
Principles of National Religion

Found in the foregoing State Papers of Abraham Lincoln

1. God deals with nations as with individuals.
2. It is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to acknowledge their dependence upon the power and goodness of Almighty God.
3. Nations should not in their prosperity forget the God who made them prosperous.
4. Nations may and do sin against God and may suffer under divine judgments.
5. God punishes national sin with exact justice.
6. God punishes national sin to bring nations to repentance and reformation.
7. The Holy Spirit can change rebellious hearts, guide the counsels of the government and console the afflicted.
8. Humiliation, confession of sin and prayer are God’s way out of national judgments.
9. The united and sincere cry of a nation for pardon of sin will be heard on high and answered with forgiveness and peace.
10. Those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

The United States suffered greatly from the World War with all its cost of blood and treasure. We have had nine years of the most severe depression known in modern times. We have suffered from a great drought which has affected some of the most fertile parts of our country.

Is not God dealing with this nation to bring us to repentance for our sins?

The Witness Committee

Millvale, R. 4       Pittsburgh, Pa.