

“I Do Love Jesus”: The Final Evangelical Faith of Abraham Lincoln

From a letter written on Oct. 22, 1864, by a participant in the Massachusetts Sunday-School Teachers' Convention, identified only as “L.” from Haverhill:

The tenth anniversary of the Massachusetts Sunday-School Teachers' Convention was held on the 18th and 19th inst. in the Berkley-street church, Boston. ...

... a most interesting fact was related as having just come to light. A gentleman, known to the speaker, having recently visited Washington on business with the President, was, on leaving home, requested by a friend to ask Mr. Lincoln *whether he loved Jesus*. The business being completed, the question was kindly asked. The President buried his face in his handkerchief, turned away and wept. He then turned, and said, “When I left home to take this chair of State I requested my countrymen to pray for me, I was not then a Christian. When my son died, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg, and looked upon the graves of our dead heroes who had fallen in defence of their country, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ; *I do love Jesus*.” These words ought to be sounded throughout the land. (“Letter from Massachusetts: Sunday-School Teachers' Convention,” *The Chronicle*, Whole No. 951 [Nov. 3, 1864], p. 2. Emphases in original.)

From a letter written to Abraham Lincoln by Benjamin Talbot of Iowa City, Iowa, on Dec. 21, 1864:

I cannot refrain from expressing to you my joy, (& I doubt not the joy of every Christian heart throughout our land), at the statement recently made in the religious press that you have sought & found the Saviour, that you “do love Jesus.”

From a letter written by Rev. Phineas D. Gurley, Pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., in response to claims that Abraham Lincoln was an infidel even in his last years:

I do not believe a word of it. It could not have been true of him while here, for I have had frequent and intimate conversations with him on the Subject of the Bible and the Christian religion, when he could have had no motive to deceive me, and I considered him sound not only on the truth of the Christian religion but on all its fundamental doctrines and teachings. And more than that, in the latter days of his chastened and weary life, after the death of his son Willie, and his visit to the battlefield of Gettysburg, he said, with tears in his eyes, that he had lost confidence in everything but God, and that he now believed his heart was changed, and that he loved the Savior, and, if he was not deceived in himself, it was his intention soon to make a profession of religion. (quoted by J. A. Reed, “The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln,” *Scribner's Monthly*, Vol. VI, No. 3 [July 1873], p. 339)

Comments and observations: Talbot's letter informed Lincoln that an account of his testimony regarding his conversion had been published. There is no known reply from Lincoln to Talbot, but Lincoln is also not known ever to have corrected or repudiated this account. Gurley's reminiscence provides us with an independent confirmation of the essential details of this account, and adds a few more details.

