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**Allen C. Guelzo. *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. xii + 516. \$29.00 (Cloth).**

[1] Allen Guelzo drew his title for this book from a question raised by the poet Walt Whitman in the *Brooklyn Eagle* during the presidential election of 1856: "When are we going to get a redeemer president?" Both Whitman and Guelzo, indeed the nation, soon found their "redeemer president" in Abraham Lincoln.

[2] The volume of literature on Lincoln exceeds that published in the United States on any other American figure. Guelzo, professor of history at Eastern College, has added to that literature an excellent intellectual biography. It is not limited to Lincoln's religious views, as the title suggests. Rather, it provides as comprehensive a study of the man and his ideas, religious and secular, as has ever been written - all properly contextualized in nineteenth-century America. Guelzo dedicated *Redeemer President* to Jack Kemp, who wishes the Republican party to recover the tradition of Lincoln. It won Gettysburg College's prestigious Lincoln Prize.

[3] Lincoln is best known for pouring public policy into the molds of religious thought, thereby earning him in death the title "the Christian president." Guelzo argues that Lincoln took religious ideas seriously and combined religion and policy more than any other American president, but that he was not a Christian in the traditional sense of the word. Lincoln admitted as much and never joined a church. Guelzo establishes Lincoln as a Deist, but in doing so shows that Lincoln's religious views are much more complex than that single term implies.

[4] Lincoln was born into a Separatist Baptist family, but he rebelled against that influence and turned toward the Enlightenment as his intellectual guide, toward "infidelity" and "atheism" in religion. Nevertheless, Guelzo argues, Lincoln inherited from his childhood Baptist experience a predestinarian instinct or belief in necessity, that caused him to become a fatalist and to reject the idea of free will. If Lincoln came close to being associated with any particular denomination, it was the Old School Presbyterians, in whose Calvinist thought he found some common ground. Beyond that, Guelzo shows, Lincoln's religious views were shifting and not always consistent, but nevertheless comprehensible.

[5] Much the same can be said for Lincoln's political philosophy that underscored his public policy. Guelzo argues that Lincoln became one of the most determined and eloquent apostles of liberal capitalism in nineteenth-century America, most often employing Benthamite utilitarianism as his guide. Nevertheless, much as might be said of his religious views, if Lincoln was committed to "reason, all conquering reason," similar inconsistencies mark his political philosophy as well. While liberal capitalism was supposed to expand the horizons of one's choices and opportunities, for example, Lincoln insisted that he did not believe in free choice, but rather in a "doctrine of necessity."

[6] It is difficult to reconcile Lincoln's lack of belief in Christianity with the image of his being the "Redeemer President." As the Illinois Presbyterian Samuel Baldrige lamented after Lincoln's assassination and the lionizing began: "It is to be bitterly regretted that he did not make a public profession of . . . faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (441). Guelzo finds that in their quest to Christianize him, those who would apotheosize Lincoln failed to penetrate to "the real heart of Lincoln's personal religious anguish, his deep sense of helplessness before a distant and implacable Judge who revealed himself only through crisis and death, whom Lincoln would have waned to love if only the Judge had given him the grace to do the loving" (446).

[7] Therein, Guelzo concludes, we find that which allowed Lincoln to become the "Redeemer President." Lincoln's own peculiar providentialism, he finds, played a controlling role in the outcome of the Civil War. His appeal to the mysteries of providence in the fall of 1862, for example, gave him permission to ignore all signs that the Union was fighting the war to no better than a draw, and that any resort to emancipation was folly. It also allowed him to overrule the moral limitations of liberalism. To do liberalism's greatest dead - the emancipation of the slaves - Guelzo concludes: "Lincoln had to step outside liberalism and surrender himself to the direction of an overruling divine providence whose conclusions he had by no means prejudged" (447).

[8] Lincoln was a professional politician. He was not an intellectual. Though perhaps made too much of in elevating him to the nation's pantheon of demigods, reflecting those human traits Americans hold most dear, Lincoln was poorly schooled. He received little formal education and was forced to rely on his own, often untutored reading. Nevertheless, what Guelzo contributes to our understanding of Abraham Lincoln is his doing something no other biographer has managed to do, namely to read Lincoln seriously as a man of ideas.

[9] Lincoln biographies tend to travel either the road of personality-history, in which Lincoln's achievements are explained in terms of temperament or genealogy, or the road of public-history in which Lincoln is lauded mostly for his public management skills as a president, politician, or commander-in-chief. Guelzo takes Lincoln at his word, when he declared in the spring of 1860 that great political questions could not be answered by mere political solutions. "Whenever this question shall be settled," Lincoln wrote about slavery, "it must be settled on some philosophical basis. No polity that does not rest upon some philosophical public opinion can be permanently maintained" (19).

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