



Keeping the Faith Against Climate Change

By Jim Burklo

“If we shall suppose that human-caused global warming is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through God's appointed time, God now wills to remove, and that God gives catastrophe to China and America, Russia and India, the Maldives and Indonesia alike as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of catastrophic climate change may speedily pass away... With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the wounds wrought by global warming, to care for those who have borne its disastrous effects, to do all which may achieve and cherish a healthy planet for ourselves and all nations.”

Replace "slavery" with "global warming" and Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address in 1865 hits home not just in the ears but in the gut. Lincoln's rhetoric still reaches into the soul of America and swells it with emotion and conviction. And integral to its impact is its use of Judeo-Christian language.

People do not just vote their pocketbooks. They'll vote for a politician who would take bread off their tables if they felt like he or she reflected and honored their personal identities. Values mean more to voters than policy statements. Look at what's happening in the primary elections for the presidency in America now. Voters say, over and over again, that they aren't focused on the fine print of policy wonkery. They want simple messages. They want candidates who speak not to them, but for their very souls.

And for a lot of voters, faith is a major part of that identity. So in order to get politicians elected who will take real action against climate change, Christian identity must include a heartfelt commitment to save the planet from global warming. Humility before God and restraint from destructive self-gratification are inextricably woven into what it means to be a Christian, almost

universally. Fasting as much as possible from the use of fossil fuels must become a year-round Lenten discipline for all Christians, progressives and evangelicals alike. Then, when politicians speak in the language of faith to promise action against climate change, Christians across the theological spectrum will respond from the heart.

Lincoln's eternal, elegant words express a sophisticated theology that is needed now more than ever. This president, who never joined a church yet pondered and practiced a deep faith, understood that God and nature are one. Human history, as well as the cosmos as a whole, evolves over time. As did the dinosaur, slavery had its time, but evolution left it behind. Fossil fuels had their time, too, which passed as the God of nature beckoned us toward deeper respect for all life. In hindsight we might say that Lincoln was a process theologian who found God in the deepening interconnectivity among all beings.

But one need not be a process theologian, much less a theologically progressive Christian, to make a commitment to the survival of the planet integral to his or her Christian identity. Lincoln's rhetoric covers the whole Christian waterfront. There is a growing [“creation care” movement](#) working to make this cause part of evangelical identity, just as groups like [Progressive Christians Uniting](#) work to make it integral to a progressive Christian self-image.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, let us strive to make this cause part of who we are as Christians, and let our Christian identity be visible in the public square as we press our leaders to act on climate change.