Mediation on THE DIVINE WILL, CA. September 1862

The thorny question of God’s will in relation to the Civil War nagged at Lincoln as the conflict mounted. In this private note, discovered only after his death, he staked out a theologically rigorous position. Notice how the tone changes in the second half, after the one strike-out (the word “this”) when he moved from declaring his certainties to wrestling with the ultimate question.

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be wrong. God can not be for, and against the same thing at the same time.

In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect this purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun, He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.