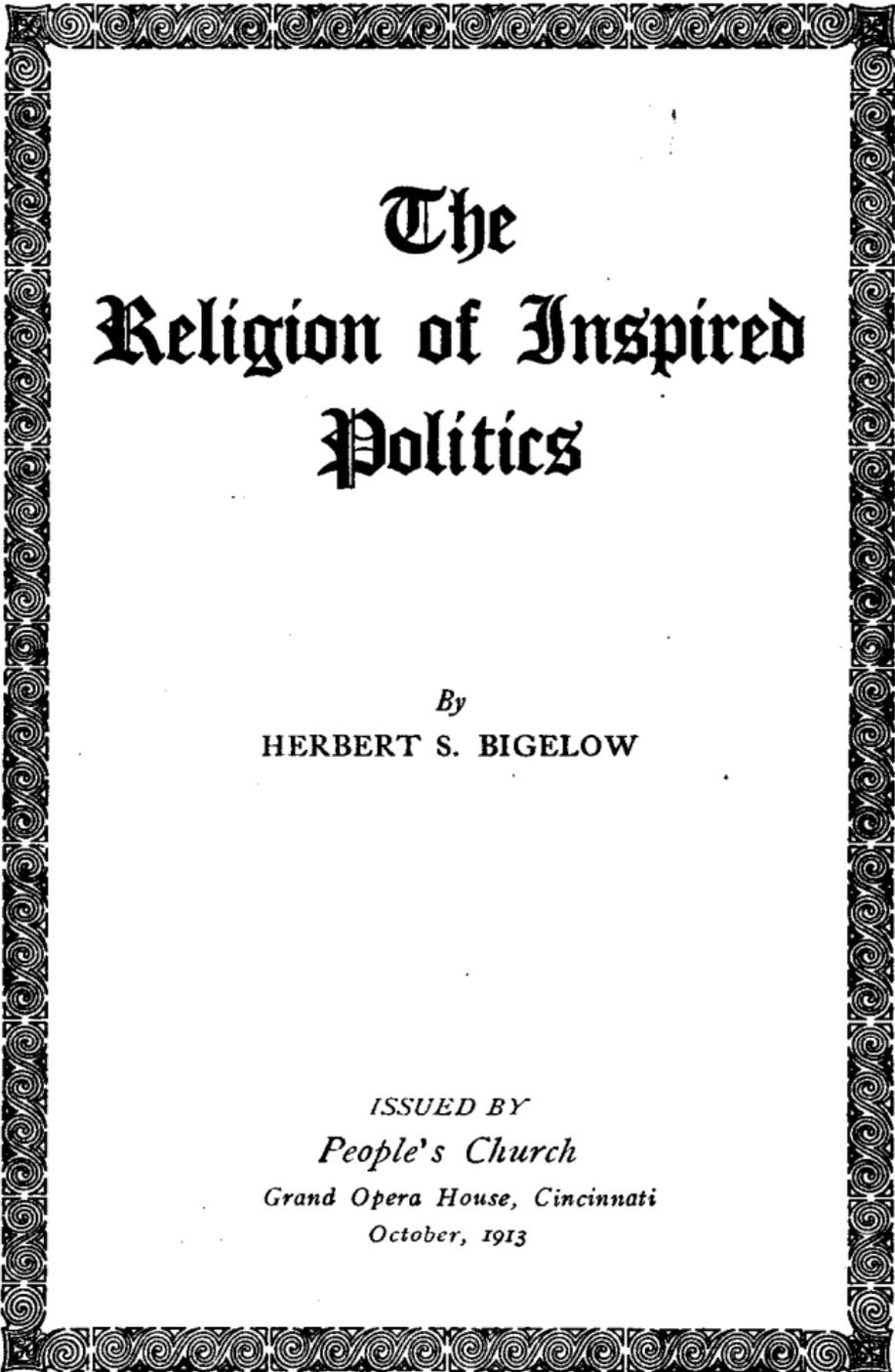


OSCAR FDEI MAN



The Religion of Inspired Politics

By
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The Religion of Inspired Politics

One hundred and twenty-five years ago last May, the land on which Cincinnati is located was sold by the Continental Congress to John Symmes, for the sum of sixty cents an acre. Symmes purchased, at that price, two million acres, lying on the north bank of the Ohio, between the Little and the Big Miami Rivers.

The Naming of Cincinnati.

He sold one-third of this territory, to a pedantic school-teacher, by the name of Filson. To the settlement of rude huts opposite the mouth of the Licking River, Filson gave the fantastic name of "Losantiville." The name was a compound of Greek, French and Latin, and enabled the school-teacher founder of Cincinnati to exhibit his scholastic accomplishments. The historian relates, apparently with some satisfaction, that soon after Filson invented this name, he was scalped by the Indians.

In course of time, one little parcel of this land which Filson purchased came into the possession of an organization, which is now known as "The People's Church of Cincinnati." The lot to which I refer is the one formerly occupied by the Vine

Street Church building, which is now the Empress Theatre, on Vine Street, between Eighth and Ninth Streets. This lot is one-tenth of an acre. John Symmes paid six cents for it. The People's Church sold it for \$75,000.00.

There is a good deal of difference between six cents and \$75,000.00. The present generation of men must pay for the privilege of living and working here a rental equivalent to the current rate of interest upon the capitalized value of the land.

Microscopic Figuring.

It would take some microscopic figuring to find what the generation of John Symmes and Filson would have had to pay a year for the use of the particular lot in question. It would have been about ten per cent a year, upon six cents. But the people who are born into the world today must pay for the use of this land, not ten per cent on six cents, but six per cent on \$75,000.00, or \$4,500.00 a year. That is to say, the annual interest charge for the use of this land is seventy-five thousand times greater than the purchase price, one hundred and twenty-five years ago.

Of course, the people who patronize the Empress Theatre have to pay that tribute. It

is something they cannot escape. Whenever they go to a theatre, attend a church, buy a pair of shoes, eat a meal at a restaurant, ride on a street car, or employ the services of an undertaker, they are consciously or unconsciously paying an enormous annual tax to the owners of the land which John Symmes purchased for sixty cents an acre in 1788.

One cannot admire the intelligence of a man who cannot see that it was the growth of the community as a whole that created the difference between a land value of six cents in 1788 and a land value of \$75,000.00 in 1909. The proposal to gradually readjust matters so that these enormous social values shall accrue to the benefit of the people who create them, and thereby set the industry of mankind free from all the present burdens of taxation—this we maintain is the most important proposal now challenging the attention of mankind.

A New Declaration of Independence.

The members of The People's Church agree with this statement. They have in mind a new Declaration of Independence. If they should write it, it would read something like this:—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their

Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and that these fruits of human freedom can never be enjoyed so long as mankind are required to pay increasing sums for the use of the land which is necessary to their life and the value of which they themselves have created.

An Ethical Problem.

It is therefore an ethical problem with the members of The People's Church; what shall they do with this \$75,000.00 of community value? This ethical problem is no different than that of the individual member of society, who comes to realize that he is in possession of privileges which enable him to reap where he has not sown. What should such an individual do? He might retain his privilege and continue to enjoy the fruits of it, while defending the system, maligning those who point out the viciousness of it, and resisting all efforts to change it. Possibly there are men who know that the system is wrong, and yet who seek to prevent its change because they are the beneficiaries of it. But I am inclined to doubt if there are many such. I have too much faith in human nature to believe that any considerable number of men deliberately defend that which they know to be wrong. Is it not true,

as has been said, that the greatest, divinest words that were ever spoken were those by the dying Nazarene? "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." If they had known, they would not have done it. **The men of our times do not defend present conditions, in the wickedness of their hearts, because they know them to be wrong. They defend them because, in the ignorance of their minds, they think them to be right.**

But we are now considering what should be the course of the organization or individual, who benefits from a system he knows to be wrong. There will be those who will say that he should surrender the privilege, that he should wash his hands of the social guilt, that he should at least free his soul of the taint by casting away from him the fruits of an institution, the injustice of which he has come to see. The act of the master in freeing his slaves, or that of a Russian prince in returning to the toil of a peasant, is readily appreciated because of its directness and simplicity. It may, however, be questioned whether such an act is always as useful as it may be spectacular.

I could hand in my resignation today and urge the members of this Church organization to disband, throwing back into the hands of the

courts the trust fund which we possess, on the ground that this is the only course open to us if we would keep ourselves unspotted from the world.

A Millionaire Tramp.

We have one conspicuous example of an individual who has felt that it was ethically necessary for him to take this course. I refer to the so-called millionaire tramp, Eads Howe, of St. Louis. Here is a man who inherited a portion of the Eads estate, a monument to which is the great Eads bridge across the Mississippi River. This man having given away his inheritance, refusing himself to enjoy a penny which he has not earned, labors with his hands for that which he needs, and employs his spare time going about among the humblest of the earth, preaching the gospel of brotherhood.

Occasionally in his travels he comes to Cincinnati. He always does me the honor of sending a postal card, and arranging for a visit with me. I regard that man as a saint. But most everybody else says he is crazy!

Meets a Leading Citizen.

One day I received a card to meet him at the Palace Hotel. I called at the desk, but he was

not registered. I might have known it. This scion of the Eads estate had renounced his wealth, and could not afford such accommodations. However, I found the man. Where do you think he was? He was down in the lavatory on his hands and knees, scrubbing the marble floor. Suppose that I had chanced to meet on my way there the President of the Business Men's Club, and had asked him to step into the hotel and allow me to present him to a member of one of the richest families of St. Louis; and suppose I had taken him down the stairs, into the lavatory, and to this floor scrubber on his knees, and had said: "Mr. Howe, Mr. H——.; shake hands." The President of the Business Men's Club is a gentleman, and I am sure he would have shaken his hand, even though it had been taken out of the dirty water and hastily wiped. But I am equally sure that he would have gone back to the Business Men's Club and told how he had found one man in Cincinnati crazier even than Bigelow. But if the President of the Business Men's Club had been rude enough to have stalked away indignant that I should invite him to shake hands with a floor mopper, whose clothes, if not his aesthetic face, were in keeping with his menial occupation, I am sure that this rudeness would not have

offended my gentle friend. He would have returned to his humble work with the reflection: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven."

I honor Mr. Howe. That is his way to bear witness to the truth that he sees. Neither am I sure that for him there could be any better way.

The Problem Differently Solved.

To the holders of special privileges in our day, I cannot preach the duty of an individual sacrifice. We have all sinned together and together we must be saved. When enough people feel the tragedy of the present social order, and when enough of those who feel its tragedy know how to change it, the change will come. I hold that a man does right who takes the world as he finds it, and who does the best he can to make a living for himself and for those dependent upon him, by adapting himself to such legal and social conditions are forced upon him. **But he should love his neighbor as himself. He should want others provided for as well as the members of his own household. He should never be content with a social order which starves the bodies, and what is infinitely worse, which starves the souls of so many of his fellow creatures.**

He should be willing to take his chances in the world under juster conditions. I do not ask him in the spirit of self-renunciation to practice the principles of a better social order, before the community in which he lives is willing to do so. I ask him to provide decently for those who are dependent upon him, if he can, but to avoid the sin of luxury, in a world that is so full as ours of misery, and moderate his wants, and live a simple life, that he may, without injustice to any one, contribute something of his time and thought and substance to the great work of creating a new social conscience, a new public opinion, which shall finally sweep away the present order and substitute in its place a juster civilization than the world has yet seen.

This then is the way that we of The People's Church have solved our ethical problem. We have decided to keep this money, this land value, which the growth of this community has added to that six penny lot which John Symmes bought. The law has left it in our hands, and we have decided that it is morally right for us to keep it, to preserve it intact as a trust fund, and to strive, by an intelligent use of it, **to do what we can in our day to raise the standard of social justice and to teach men the truth that will make them free.**

But, we are told that there is another question involved. We are told that this money was left to a church. It is said that in using the fund, even though it is admitted that we are keeping it intact, we are not using it for religious purposes.

No matter how worthy the reforms may be for which we contend, we are charged with having improperly appropriated for a social and political propaganda, a property that was left as an endowment for a religious institution. We may answer to this, no doubt honest criticism, that the institution in question was a Congregational Church. Now, a Congregational Church is, in its form of government, democratic. It is clearly within the right of the majority of such a Church to govern its internal affairs. We could, if we desired, come together and by a majority vote decide to resolve ourselves into a Unitarian Church. We could become a Mormon Church if we liked.

What is Religion?

Now, what is religion?

On one occasion, a smart young lawyer, who thought to put a poser to Jesus, said: "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And He said unto him, "What is written in the law, how

readest thou?" and he answering, said, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, and with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." And He said unto him, "Thou hath answered right, this do, and thou shalt live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance, a certain priest was going down that way, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. And when a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion and came to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine. And he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him, and on the morrow he took out two shillings, and gave them to the host and said, 'Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back, will repay thee.' Which of these thinkest thou, proved neighbor unto him that fell among the robbers?" And he said, "He

that showed mercy on him." And Jesus said unto him, "Go and do thou likewise."

A Despised Heretic.

Remember that the priest and the Levite were the representatives of the orthodox religion of their time. The Samaritan was a despised heretic. This was the most striking way Jesus could take to burn into the minds of his hearers his thought that the people who strive to relieve oppressed humanity, even though their religious opinions are in error and they may not go to church, are nevertheless truer disciples of His than they who with all their observance of the forms of religion, close their ears to the cries of human need.

Probably never in our lives will ever occur to us such an experience as the traveler had going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. It was perhaps not an uncommon experience in those days, when the police powers of government were poorly organized and the highways of travel were infested with robber bands. The wrongs which men suffer today are those that are committed chiefly in the name of law. It is not from acts of violence in defiance of law, that humanity suffers today, but rather from the

subtle refinements of injustice and cruelty which are the by-products of our established institutions. Jesus flatly told that smart young lawyer **that the real test of a man's religion was not the creed of the priest, but the deed of the Samaritan.**

It requires no imagination to comprehend the situation of a man who lies bleeding in a ditch. But it takes some imagination to interpret the following facts.

Among the Robbers.

The U. S. Census makes this report with reference to social conditions in a typical American city, Greater Pittsburgh. Of those who die, eighty-nine per cent leave no property whatever. Three and one-half per cent leave only just enough to pay their debts and bury them. Four and one-half per cent have less than five thousand dollars, and one and one-half per cent between five and ten thousand dollars. This leaves one and one-half per cent of the people who own practically all of the property in what is the wealthiest community per capita on earth. Of that one and one-half per cent of the population, there are eight hundred millionaires, including Carnegie, with seven hundred million, Frick and Phipps with three hundred millions each, a dozen

others with from fifty to one hundred millions, and over a hundred with five millions each. Such a social condition is, I declare, the result of wholesale robbery, sanctioned by law.

Suppose we could strew along the highway all the people of that Pittsburgh district who are beaten and maimed and robbed and killed by these terrible conditions. Suppose we could bring them out of their hiding, out of the slums, out of the hospitals, out of the alms houses, out of the insane asylums, and expose them to view. Why there isn't a priest or a Levite in Pittsburgh, neither was there ever one in ancient Jerusalem who could see all that suffering and not be moved. **If there were some way of bringing that suffering out into the light of day, so that the world could get just one look at it, the Christian conscience of mankind would explode into a thousand French Revolutions.** The cry of that one man on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho would be as nothing. Whoever in the face of that suffering would remain unmoved, and walk off and leave it all, and sit down and say his devotions in peace in a church and call that religion, he would be looked upon as a monster.

The Chief Trouble.

It is said that we should save men individually and allow social righteousness to come of its own accord. Here is the fallacy of that. It is assumed that men's hearts are wrong, and that the reason we do not have social justice is because men are personally wicked. It follows according to this logic that if men's hearts are made good, social righteousness must of necessity come. But this is all a mistake. **The chief trouble is not that men's hearts are wrong. The chief trouble is that they are mentally lazy. They are "morally unwitted."**

It was Carlyle who said that there were scores of millions of people in Great Britain, mostly fools. Mind you, he didn't say they were mostly knaves. He said they were mostly fools, and he told the truth. What else can we call men, who, having the power to win freedom for themselves, still remain in slavery. **The heart of a man does not need changing so much as his mind needs instruction.**

The man who sits in the temple and prays has no monopoly of religion. There are ten thousand ways to pray. Wasn't Algernon Sidney worshiping God when he offered his head on the block for republican principles in those days of the ruthlessness of kings? Wasn't Rienzi pray-

ing when he led the waking democracy in the streets of mediaeval Rome? Priests and preachers don't make religion. It is the inborn religion of man that builds the churches and employs the priests. What is the most excellent expression of this religious nature in man? Jesus said that the finest expression of it was in acts like the good Samaritan, that the purest worship of God, was a kind of God-conscious devotion to humanity.

We solemnly proclaim that religion and politics are one. We cannot act the good Samaritan today in any large and vital sense, save through collective justice, through a politically expressed religion. The man who stands at the polls on election day, and fights for the cause which he thinks is just, that man is praying in a way that is practical.

Luther nailed ninety-five theses to his church door. Here are nine theses which we nail to our church door—here is a working creed for a church of inspired politics—a church which seeks to translate the parable of the good Samaritan into twentieth century terms.

A Confession of Faith.

We believe that the greatest need of the world is the abolition of poverty, and that what men need most to learn now is this, that poverty is not a divine institution; that it is caused by the laws of man and not by the laws of God.

We believe that the powers of government should be kept safely in the hands of the people by means of the initiative, referendum, recall and unrestricted suffrage; in a word, that democracy is the natural order and should be guarded and extended.

We believe that the people, through their Government, have the right to own and operate any business, even though not regarded as a public utility, if by so doing the safety or convenience of the public may be better served.

We believe in the Government ownership and operation of all interstate telegraph and railroad facilities, and in the municipal ownership and operation of all telephone, gas, electric light and power and street railway systems.

We believe that the social values of land, being created, as they are, by the community, should be taken for community purposes, and that all improvements upon land and all other forms of wealth and industry should be exempt from taxation.

We believe that war should cease; that strikes and industrial strife should give way to peaceful arbitration; that vice and crime and disease should be destroyed. But we affirm that these evils are chiefly the effects of poverty, and that poverty can be removed by the gradual and complete suppression of every form of special privilege.

We believe that those whose minds are illumined by the light of justice, whose hearts are moved by pity, and who act as justice directs and as pity prompts, that all such will find salvation—that is, they will find health and beauty of soul.

We believe in the spiritual value of social righteousness; that it is the religious duty of man to strive for a just social order, one in which neither by inheritance nor by monopoly privilege, shall any one who is able to work

be permitted to live upon the fruits of other men's labor; and we behold the progressive attainment of such a social order as the measure of the emergence of the race into the light of the mind of God and into the purity of His infinite purpose.

We believe that they who fight valiantly in the cause of freedom and humanity, which is none other than the cause of the kingdom of heaven on earth, will have their reward now and will win in the eternal years the fadeless remembrance and gratitude of God.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN. *If we have any claim upon thy favor or any right to call thee Father, may it be because we have not knowingly trampled upon the rights of any of thy children.*

HALLOWED BE THY NAME. *May the reverent heart find thy presence everywhere, and seek to work in harmony with the mighty forces that make for righteousness and peace.*

THY KINGDOM COME. *May we speed its coming by making the acts of our legislatures accord with the eternal laws of that moral government which is supreme above the nations.*

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN. *May we prove the sincerity of our faith by practicing in senate chambers the lofty precepts which we profess in the sanctuary.*

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. *We do not ask for the bread of others. Give us the bread that is ours by right of useful labor. May the claims of justice be satisfied in the laws of the land that all may have bread, that the starving millions may be fed, not by the hand of charity, but by the labor that wears no chains and owns no master.*

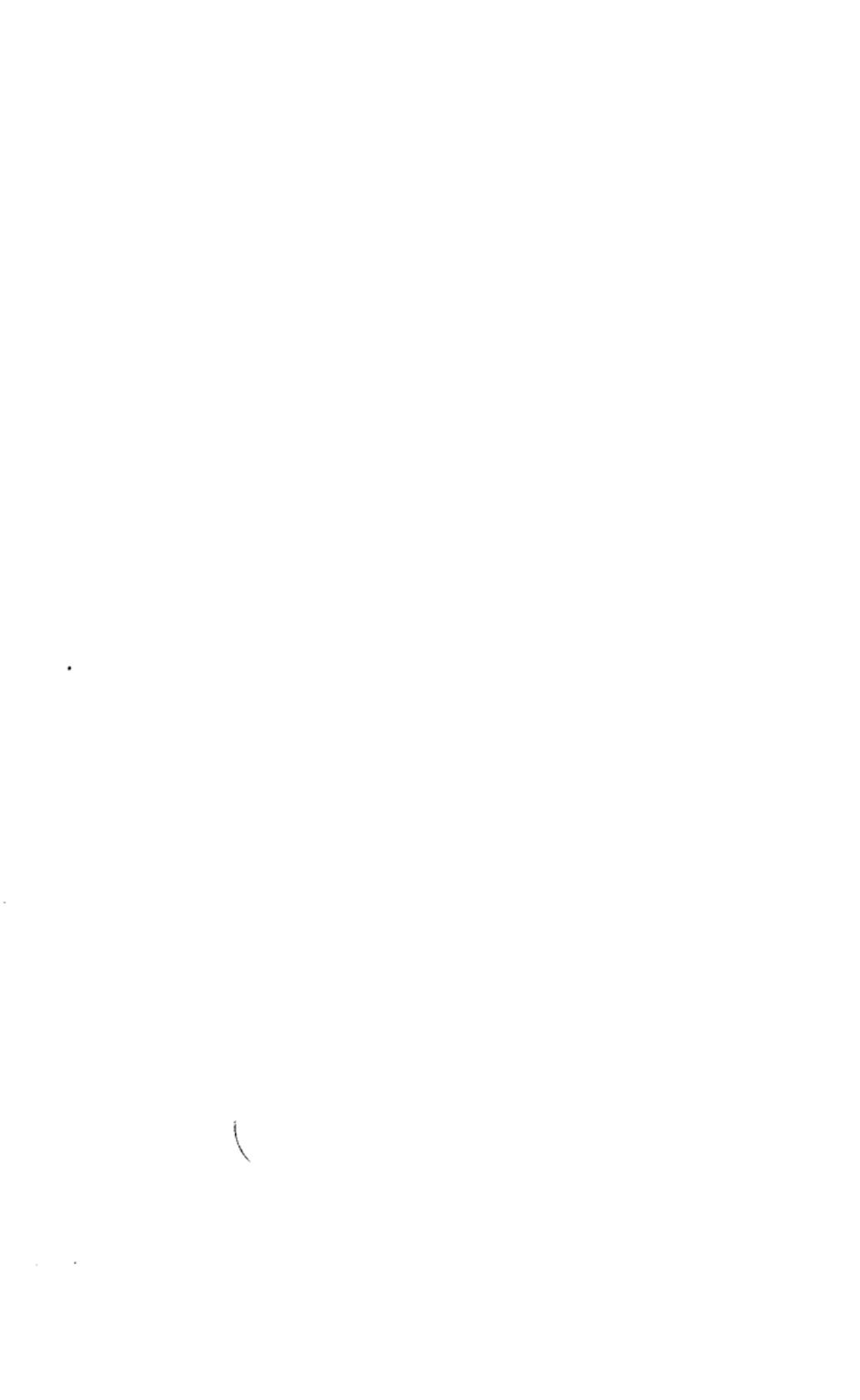
FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS. *Save us from that egotism which magnifies the faults of others while blinded to our own. Grant us in the name of eternal justice, grant us only that measure of liberty which we accord to the weakest of our neighbors.*

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION. *Grant us the moral courage to turn our back upon the alluring visions of the kingdoms of this world and their glory, remembering that righteousness alone exalteth a nation.*

DELIVER US FROM EVIL. *Now when the chains are being forged and the golden padlocks are being fashioned for our lips; now, when men are forgetting the faith of the fathers and putting their trust in the might of armies and the majesty of fleets; now, ere the choice goes by forever, deliver us from the greed that takes refuge in the sanction of law, save us from the thrice accursed murder that kills in the name of the Prince of Peace.*

We consecrate our hearts anew to the liberty which our fathers purchased with so great a price. Before the sacred altar of our fathers' God we pledge renewed devotion to the principles which have made the flag we love an emblem of hope to the oppressed of all the world. On that solemn day which comes to men and nations, when the seeds of our sowing shall have borne fruit in national character and the destiny shall be revealed which our hands are shaping, forbid that we shall then have to point for justification to thrones and altars founded upon the bodies and souls of our fellow men; standing before the tribunal of history, may we be able to point with confidence to the fact that we have followed the golden rule of justice.

May we never covet the gold that drips with the tears of bondsmen. May we never feel strong enough to do wrong. May we do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God, and to him shall be THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY, FOREVER. AMEN.



OSCAR EDELMAN