

THE RELIGION OF JOSEPH FELS

____ Theological School,

____,
Mr. Joseph Fels, Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Sir—Having read much of you and your many acts of charity and philanthropy, I write to ask for a donation from you for our institution.

It may seem strange that I ask this of one who is not of our faith, yet I have read in some of your speeches that you make no distinction of race, creed or color; and that you regard all men as your brothers; that you believe in the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God. Thus you are teaching what our institution teaches, and our school is doing, as best it can with limited means, the work you are trying to do.

We are sadly in need of money. Many young men who wish to enter our school and prepare themselves to teach the Gospel of Christ are without means to pay their board and buy books, and our means are so limited that we can not help them. These young men, trained in our school to preach the gospel, would, many of them, be fitted to carry the Word to the heathen of foreign lands, and thus be instrumental in dispelling the darkness that reigns among millions of our brethren in other lands.

Can you not help us? What would be a very little to you would be a great deal to us, and might be the means of saving many souls.

Yours respectfully,

Dean.

Rev. _____,

Dean _____ Theological School.

Dear Sir—Replying to your communication, I am at a loss to know where you have read of my "*acts of charity and philanthropy*." I am not a philanthropist and give nothing to charity.

When you say I am not of your "*faith*," I suppose you mean of your creed. Let me state my faith and we can see wherein we differ.

I believe in the Fatherhood of God and therefore in the Brotherhood of Man. By "*Man*" I mean all men. So far I suppose we agree.

I believe that the Creator freely gave the earth to all of His children that all may have equal rights to its use. Do you agree to that?

I believe that the injunction, "*in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread*" necessarily implies "*Thou shalt not eat bread in the sweat of thy brother's brow.*" Do you agree?

I believe that all are violating the divine law who live in idleness on wealth produced by others since they eat bread in the sweat of their brothers' brows. Do you agree to that?

I believe that no man should have power to take wealth he has not produced or earned unless freely given to him by the producer. Do you agree?

I believe that Brotherhood requires giving an equivalent for every service received from a brother. Do you agree?

I believe it is blasphemous to assert or insinuate that God has condemned some of His children to hopeless poverty

and to the crimes, want and misery resulting therefrom and has at the same time awarded to others lives of ease and luxury without labor. Do you agree?

I believe that involuntary poverty and involuntary idleness are unnatural and are due to the denial by some of the right of others to use freely the gifts of God to all. Do you agree?

Since labor products are needed to sustain life and since labor must be applied to land in order to produce, I believe that every child comes into life with Divine permission to use land without the consent of any other child of God. Do you agree?

Where men congregate in organized society, land has a value apart from the value of things produced by labor; as population and industry increase the value of land increases, but the value of labor products does not. That increase in land value is community-made value. Inasmuch as your power to labor is a gift of God all the wealth produced by your labor is yours, and no man nor collection of men has a right to take any of it from you. Do you agree to that?

I believe the community-made value of land belongs to the community just as the wealth produced by you belongs to you. Do you agree to that?

Therefore I believe that the fundamental evil, the great God-denying crime of society, is the iniquitous system under which men are permitted to put into their pockets, confiscate in fact, the community-made values of land, while organized society confiscates for public purposes a part of the wealth created by individuals. Do you agree to that?

Using a concrete illustration: I own in the city of Phila-

delphia 11½ acres of land for which I paid \$32,500 a few years ago. On account of increase of population and industry in Philadelphia, that land is now worth about \$125,000. I have expended no labor or money upon it. So I have done nothing to cause that increase of \$92,500 in a few years. My fellow citizens in Philadelphia created it and I believe it therefore belongs to them, not to me. I believe that the man-made law which gives to me and other landlords values we have not created is a violation of Divine law. I believe that Justice demands that these community-made values be taken by the community for common purposes instead of taxing enterprise and industry. Do you agree?

That is my creed, my faith, my religion. Do you teach that or anything like it, in your theological school? If not, why not? I have a right to ask since you have asked me for money. If you agree to my propositions but do not teach them, tell me why. If I am in error show me in what respect.

I am using all the money I have to teach my creed, my faith, my religion as best I can. I am using it as best I know how to abolish the Hell of civilization, which is want and fear of want. I am using it to bring in the will of our Father, to establish the Brotherhood of man by giving each of my brothers an equal opportunity to have and use the gifts of our Father. Am I misusing that money? If so, why and how?

If my teaching is wrong and contrary to true religion I want to know it. I take it that if you are not teaching religion in its fullness, you wish to know it. Am I correct?

What I teach may be criticized as mixing politics with

religion, but can I be successfully attacked on that ground? Politics, in its true meaning, is the science of government. Is government a thing entirely apart from religion or from righteousness? Is not just government founded upon right doing?

If my religion is true, if it accords with the basic principles of morality taught by Jesus, how is it possible for your school to teach Christianity when it ignores the science of government? Or is your school so different from other theological schools that it does teach the fundamental moral principles upon which men associate themselves in organized government?

Do you question the relation between taxation and righteousness? Let us see. If government is a natural growth then surely God's natural law provides food and sustenance for government as that food is needed; for, where in nature do we find a creature coming into the world without timely provision of natural food for it? It is in our system of taxation that we find the most emphatic denial of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, because first, in order to meet our common needs we take from individuals what does not belong to us in common; second, we permit individuals to take for themselves what does belong to us in common; and thus, third, under the pretext of taxation for public purposes we have established a system that permits some men to tax other men for private profit.

Does not that violate the natural, the divine law? Does it not surely beget wolfish greed on the one hand and gaunt poverty on the other? Does it not surely breed millionaires on one end of the social scale and tramps on the other end?

Has it not brought into civilization a hell of which the savage can have no conception? Could any better system be devised for convincing men that God is the father of a few and the step-father of the many? Is not that destructive of the sentiment of brotherhood? With such a condition how is it possible for men in masses to obey the new commandment *"that ye love one another?"* What could more surely thrust men apart, what could more surely divide them into warring classes?

You say that you need money to train young men and fit them *"to carry the word to the heathen of foreign lands, and thus be instrumental in dispelling the darkness that reigns among millions of our brethren in other lands."* That is a noble purpose. But what message would your school give to these young men to take to the benighted brethren that would stand a fire of questions from an intelligent heathen? Suppose, for example, your school sends to some pagan country an intelligent young man who delivers his message; and suppose an intelligent man in the audience asks these questions:

"You come from America, where your religion has been taught for about 400 years, where every small village has one of your churches, and the great cities have scores upon scores. Do all the people attend these churches? Do your countrymen generally practice what you preach to us? Does even a considerable minority practice it? Are your laws consistent with or contrary to the religion you preach to us? Are your cities clean morally in proportion to the number of churches they contain?"

Do your courts administer justice impartially between man and man, between rich and poor? Is it as easy for a poor man as for a rich one to get his rights in your courts?

"You have great and powerful millionaires. How did they get their money? Have they more influence than the poor in your churches and in your Congress, your legislatures and courts? Do they, in dealing with their employees, observe the moral law that 'the laborer is worthy of his hire'? Do they treat their hired laborers as brothers? Do they put children to work who ought to be at play or at school?

"Do your churches protest when the militia is called out during a strike, or do they forget at such times what Jesus said about the use of the sword?

"After four centuries of teaching and preaching of your religion in your country, has crime disappeared or diminished, have you less use for jails, are fewer and fewer of your people driven into mad-houses, and have suicides decreased? Is there a larger proportion of crime among Jews and infidels than among those who profess the Christian religion?"

What answers would your missionary return to these questions? How would you answer them?

I do not attack Christianity. The foregoing questions are not intended as criticism of the great moral code underlying Christianity, but as criticism of the men who preach but do not practice that code. You may accuse me of "unbelief," but that is no answer. If you have any criticism

to make of me or any accusation to bring against me, answer the questions first. Give me straight answers, and I will give straight answers to any questions you may put to me. My contention is that the code of morals taught by Jesus is a code of justice, of right living and right doing; that the simple code of morals taught to the fishermen of Gallilee by the Carpenter of Nazareth is all embracing and all sufficient for our social life.

I shall be glad to contribute to your theological school or to any other that gets down to the bed rock of that social and moral code, accepts it in its fullness, and trains its students to teach and preach it regardless of the raiment, the bank accounts, the social standing or political position of the persons in the pews.

Very truly yours,

JOSEPH FELS.



JOSEPH FELS, HIS RELIGION:

I BELIEVE—

—in the Fatherhood of God and therefore in the Brotherhood of Man. By "*Man*" I mean all men.

—that the Creator freely gave the earth to all His children that all may have equal rights to its use.

—that the injunction, "*in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,*" necessarily implies "*thou shalt not eat bread in the sweat of thy brother's brow.*"

—that all are violating the divine law who live in idleness on wealth produced by others since they eat bread in the sweat of their brothers' brows.

—that no man should have power to take wealth he has not produced or earned unless freely given to him by the producer.

—that Brotherhood requires giving an equivalent for every service received from a brother.

—that it is blasphemous to assert or insinuate that God has condemned some of His children to hopeless poverty and to the crimes, want and misery resulting therefrom, and has at the same time awarded to others lives of ease and luxury without labor.

—that involuntary poverty and involuntary idleness are unnatural and are due to the denial by some of the right of others to use freely the gifts of God to all.

—that every child comes into life with Divine permission to use land without the consent of any other child of God.

—that as the power to labor is a gift of God all the wealth produced by your labor is yours, and no man nor collection of men has a right to take any of it from you.

—that the fundamental evil, the great God-denying crime of society, is the iniquitous system under which men are permitted to confiscate the community-made values of land, while organized society confiscates for public purposes a part of the wealth created by individuals.

—that Justice demands that these community-made values be taken by the community for common purposes instead of taxing enterprise and industry.

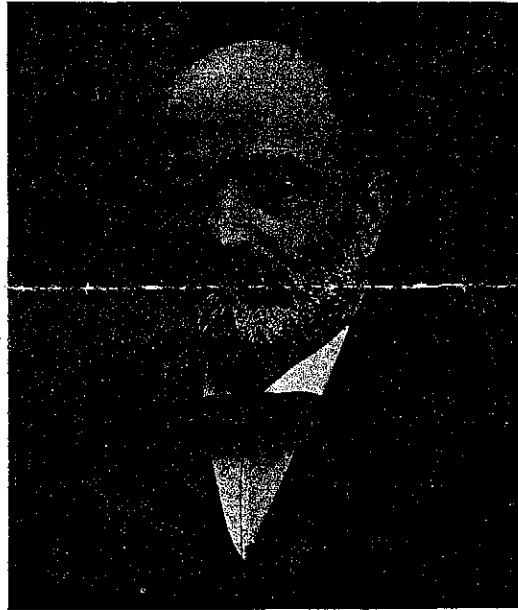
That is my creed, my faith, my religion.

Each of us is inevitable,
Each of us is limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here.

My spirit has pass'd in compassion and determination around the whole
earth,

I have look'd for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands,
I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them.

—WALT WHITMAN.



Mass Meeting to Honor the Memory of

JOSEPH FELS

1853-1914

Under the Auspices of the People's Institute
Cooper Union, Friday, March 13, 1914, at 8 P. M.

WHAT JESUS WOULD DO :

He would insist on observance of the Golden Rule. He would, therefore, abolish the army and navy. He would tolerate no discrimination against any person on account of race, color, nationality, ancestry, lack of wealth, or political, religious or other opinion. He would object to the maintenance of a government in the Philippines or elsewhere against the wishes of the inhabitants. He would object to legalized theft as strongly as to illegal stealing. He would consequently oppose all tariffs for any purpose, and all other taxes on industry or its products. He would demand that values created by all the people be taken for public purposes instead of by private individuals who have not created them. He would favor the Single Tax as the most practical method of accomplishing this result. He would abolish all privileges. He would not waste time with palliative or punitive legislation, but would remove the cause of economic evils.

CLASS PREJUDICE :

Economic injustice everywhere divides the people into social classes. The greatest beneficiaries of injustice form an aristocracy even where, as in this country, aristocracy is not recognized by law. It is to the interest of aristocracy to encourage each one of the classes below it to look with contempt on whatever classes are below them. As long as they do this, they will support the pretensions of aristocracy. Those who are too far down to have anyone financially below them may be encouraged to despise those who differ from them in creed, race or nationality. People who are conceded the privilege of looking down on some one may be depended upon to concede the superiority of someone else. Prejudice due to such conditions cannot be dispelled by arguments. To destroy prejudice, we must destroy privilege, the foundation of economic injustice and of aristocracy.

SOCIALISM AND THE CHURCH :

If the Church wants to abolish industrial wrong regardless of the opposition of powerful interests, it will look upon Socialism as an ally. It need not endorse the whole Socialist programme. It need but recognize the grand work that Socialists are doing in exposing economic and political evils and in arousing public opinion. If the Church is opposed to such work it should regard Socialism as a foe.

EQUAL SUFFRAGE :

Denial of suffrage to women is an inexcusable injustice. The effect of abolishing injustice must be good. So woman suffrage will surely have a tendency to improve matters. But we have no right to withhold it even if that should not be the case.