December 15, 1932.

His Excellency,
Herbert H. Lehman, Lieut. Governor,
State Capitol, Albany, N.Y.

Your Excellency:

The same sentiments, which prompted me a short time ago to congratulate you on your election as Governor, move me now to express to you my views in reference to a proposed innovation in the inaugural ceremonies, namely friendship for you and desire for a successful administration. Let me explain.

I was informed yesterday that the opening invocation and concluding benediction by the two bishops, one Episcopal and the other Catholic, residing in Albany were to be augmented by a prayer from a Jewish rabbi of New York. The long standing custom of designating the two abovementioned prelates to add a spiritual note to the exercises has, so far as I know, been generally satisfactory to all classes and creeds. It merely happens that these bishops are Episcopalian and Catholic. If Albany had been the residence of two bishops of any other faiths, it would without doubt have fallen to the latter to discharge this duty. In other words, the question of their religion was never considered. They were chosen for this task simply and solely on account of their high ecclesiastical office. It seems to me that it would be unwise, and might give rise to much criticism, if this age old custom were now to be changed, and a representative, not local, of the Jewish faith brought forward to supplement, as it would appear, the invocation of the Christian bishop simply and solely because the incoming Governor professed the Jewish religion.

Personally, it is to me a matter of supreme indifference who prays or gives benediction at the inaugural ceremonies. If I consulted my own tastes and inclinations,
I should be glad to be omitted from the program. What Bishop Oldham would think if he knew of this proposed arrangement I do not know nor is it my concern. But I can easily conjecture that the average man or woman who voted for your Excellency without a thought of whether you were Jew or Gentile, and there were hundreds of thousands who did so, might, to say the least, question the propriety of emphasizing your religious affiliations by the innovation to which I have referred. I cannot recall a civic ceremony, either state or national, in which it was not regarded as amply sufficient that two clergymen take part.

I regret to disturb your Excellency in the midst of the important duties in which you are now engaged, with what might seem to some quite an unimportant matter. But I know from experience that it is dangerous to raise religious issues, and I would not like to see an administration which promises so much for the welfare of the State prejudiced at the outset by an untactful move.

Trusting you will fully understand my motives, I remain

Yours sincerely,

Edmund F. Gibbons
Bishop of Albany.