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## AMERICAN NOTES

### A Kingly Prayer

The prayers at the Presidential Inauguration are meant to be mildly inspiring, a celebration of national virtues. At President Nixon's Inauguration, the Baptist, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox prayers all fitted snugly into this tradition, but the Jewish prayer strayed into unfamiliar terrain. Rabbi Seymour Siegel, a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and an ardent Nixon campaign worker, delivered a prayer that is customarily reserved for the presence of kings. Its text: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast given us of thy glory and flesh and blood."

The unusual use of the prayer troubled Reform Rabbi Edgar Magnin, who also participated in the Inaugural celebration. "This blessing," the rabbi commented, "reflects the age of monarchy, when a king was high and mighty and you kowtowed to him. There's nothing in it that could apply to an elected official." Nobody is ever high and mighty in a democracy, of course, and nobody ever kowtows in Washington.

Aside from its intimations of monarchy, though, Rabbi Siegel's prayer was appropriate to Inaugural traditions. Said he: "We need harmony, vision, peace to be able to fulfill our responsibilities to You and to our fellow men."