

William Dwight Porter Bliss (1856-1926), priest
and Richard Theodore Ely (1854-1943), economist

Observed 8 October

Bliss was born into a family of Christian missionaries in Turkey, but educated in New England. He studied for ordination and was first a minister in the Congregational Church, but after just a few years left for the Episcopal Church where he was later ordained and served a number of congregations.

Ely was born in New York, where he was raised a Presbyterian, but during college he, too, became an Episcopalian. After graduating from Columbia, he went on to a doctorate in economics at Heidelberg. He became a professor and activist, seeking to reform society on Christian principles and teaching at Johns Hopkins and then Northwestern University.

Both Bliss and Ely found themselves concerned by what they saw as the unjust ordering of society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They took to heart Jesus' challenge to care for 'the least of these' and felt that responsibility for those in need belonged to society as a whole. While they rejected the socialist pattern of government control of everything, their conscientious efforts to cooperate in the building of God's Kingdom led them to found organizations dedicated to what they called Christian Socialism – condemned as dangerously radical by conservative, but equally rejected by traditional socialists. (as Ely said, "I condemn alike that individualism that would allow the state no room for industrial activity, and that socialism which would absorb in the state the functions of the individual.") Their work and impulses challenged Christian people to work for justice at all levels of human society. Bliss was the founder of the first Christian Socialist Society in the United States and Ely of the first Christian Social Union. They were both vocal and courageous in their efforts to challenge everyone to build a society of true Shalom 'with liberty and justice for all'. – Raggs Ragan+



Lessons Isaiah 61:1-4; Psalm 18:21-31; Acts 2:41-47; Luke 16:19-31

Collect Blessed God, whose Son Jesus came as servant to all: We thank you for William Bliss and Richard Ely, whose dedication to the commonweal through economic justice led them to be bold reformers of the world and the Church; and we pray that we, with them, may find our true happiness through self-sacrifice in service of your reign, where all the hungry are fed and the downtrodden are raised up through Jesus Christ our Liberator; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.