

A SPOKESMAN FOR INTER-GROUP UNDERSTANDING

Rabbi Manuel Laderman

Our community has had contradictory extremes of inter-group relationships. On the one hand, we had some of the most blatant exponents of the Ku Klux Klan, which terrified Jews and Blacks and Catholics over a considerable period of time. On the other hand, we were the initiators of the wonderful system of cooperation which was represented by the establishment of the Community Chest, which now is called the United Fund. It was in Denver that Rabbi William S. Friedman of Temple Emanuel joined with a Catholic priest and a Protestant minister to bring together the diverse religious elements of the community into a joint effort for providing the social services, charitable opportunities and other civic purposes that was called Community Chest, and that idea spread throughout America and helped to create a climate of cooperation which has become a model for people all over the world.

Somewhat later in the history of our community there was another manifestation of understanding among different faith communities when the University of Denver, a Methodist-founded school, invited Rabbi Charles E. H. Kauvar to teach on its faculty and to bring the riches of Jewish thought to the student body. That precedent carried over for many years, and other rabbis succeeded Rabbi Kauvar. I had the privilege of being one of them for a short period.

Conversely, The Iliff School of Theology has many manifestations of bringing together varieties of religious expression on its faculty and in its programs. I had the honor once of giving

Rabbi Manuel Laderman was for many years a well-known rabbi at the Hebrew Educational Alliance Congregation in Denver. He has remained active in ecumenical affairs, and a friend of Iliff for many decades. He is now retired in West Denver.

the Wilkerson lectures, an extra-curricular activity which Iliff conducted in a number of areas outside the confines of its own theological training.

Among the finest of the exponents of this kind of liberal approach has been Charles Milligan while serving as professor of Philosophy of Religion. Possibly because he is not himself a Methodist, he brought a wide ranging interest in community concerns that did credit to the school and brought honor to his own ecumenical interests.

There have been many signs of Charles' wide-spread concerns. At a time when many liberal Protestant spokesmen were less than devoted to the idea of Zionism and the restoration of a Jewish state, Dr. Milligan never hesitated to join in all public efforts for identifying himself and his own Christian views with the hopes of many Jewish people for understanding about the rebirth of Zion. That took considerable courage because liberal Protestantism was not the greatest advocate of the Jewish aspirations in the Holy Land. For many different reasons, it was often felt in liberal circles that the side of the Arabs opposing the Zionist dream was to be preferred. That Professor Milligan did not hesitate, even under what were probably many pressures, is one of the signs of his forthrightness and courage.

One of the great interests of the Jewish community is its concern about the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union. Various kinds of programs exist in Denver to manifest the deep interest of Jewish people in the prejudice against Jews in Russia, the efforts of the Refuseniks to be allowed to emigrate, and the hopes that the Helsinki Accord will be implemented. Milligan has been in the forefront of public meetings, civic demonstrations and very warm relationships with the Committee of Concern and other such efforts to bring public attention to the problem of Jews in Russia.

He has been equally forthcoming in the areas of Black and Chicano relations, so that he has been an ardent spokesman for

joining hands with minority audiences throughout the years that he has served on the Iliff faculty.

Years ago, the Denver civic leadership sought to present a sense of unity through a public Thanksgiving service in the City Auditorium on Thanksgiving Day. It was an annual rite when the governor and the mayor and the representatives of the major faiths appeared together on the public platform of the most obvious civic building to suggest that the old hatreds which had been represented by the KKK were no longer evident. That program has been discarded for a very long time. It is well that people like Charles Milligan, and others who are like-minded, have kept the banner of public interest in inter-religious and inter-racial efforts unfurled.

We cannot have too many such community spokesmen. As our city has grown, as our population has spread across a wider area, there has been a dissipation of public displays, community friendliness, and mutual relationships. It is well that there should be outstanding religious leaders like Charles Milligan to keep the torch burning.

Now that he is retiring from his active duty on the faculty of Iliff we pray that he will continue to have the opportunities for reminding all of us that loving God and loving His creatures are equal commandments. If there is one great lesson that the philosophy of religion ought to teach, it should be that we must never allow our individual vision of the truth to blur our appreciation of the vision of others. May the example of Charles Milligan continue to be reflected in the people associated with The Iliff School of Theology and in all of us who share his outlook.

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