THE LANGUAGES OF A RENAISSANCE MAN

Harvey Potthoff

Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place, give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one.

Prayer of Socrates, Phaedrus

I decided I would make my life my argument . . . I would attempt to have my life and work say what I believed.

Albert Schweitzer

It has been my privilege to know Charles Milligan for almost fifty years--as student, colleague and friend. It is a high honor to be asked to contribute an article for this issue of *The Iliff Review*, paying tribute to Dr. Milligan as he moves toward retirement from the Iliff faculty.

He is indeed a rare human being, combining scholastic brilliance, human concern, artistic sensitivity, a delicious sense of humor and deep insight into what human life is all about. Iliff will always be a more vital school of theology because of his numerous contributions to this institution.

In reflecting on Dr. Milligan's distinguished career I am impressed with the quality of integrity which marks his life. There is a wholeness emerging from a unique synthesis of the cognitive, the affective, and active.

By profession he is a philosopher of religion and a minister of the Christian church. He demonstrates how one's philosophy of

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religion and one's personal faith can be translated into a many-faceted life. His vision is expressed in many languages. Those languages give expression to underlying philosophical and theological themes.

In what follows I should like to share what I perceive to be some of the underlying philosophical/theological perspectives and themes which give shape to his character and life style. These themes keep getting expressed in the languages of the classroom and seminary community, the church, local and world communities, the arts. We shall endeavor to "see" and "hear" Charles Milligan in those settings.

A Philosophical/Theological Frame of Orientation John Gardner has written:

The human being has shown a compelling need to arrive at conceptions of the universe in terms of which he could regard his own life as meaningful... He seeks some kind of meaningful framework in which to understand (or at least reconcile himself to) the indignities of chance and circumstance and the fact of death... He seeks conceptions of the universe that give dignity, purpose and sense to his own existence.

Charles Milligan's philosophy of religion issues in a meaningful framework. He perceives the human being as an interpreting/re-interpreting creature who seeks to locate himself on a map of meaning. Philosophy of religion and theology are tools in the construction of such a map of meaning. Milligan's work is highly significant in pointing the way to a frame of orientation which is both credible and relevant. Such a contribution is indeed an important one in a period of history marked by the shaking of foundations, the increasingly important role of science in contemporary life, the emergence of many new ways of seeing things, the quest for visions and values which contribute to a realistic life-orientation.

Milligan believes that reality is "to a significant degree reliably knowable." Methods of empirical investigation, rational

and critical examination are of crucial importance. He holds that "this does not rule out the dimension of subjectivity; it merely affirms the possibility of objectivity to a degree sufficient for differentiation between warranted assertions and demonstrable error." 2

Milligan's philosophical orientation is that of naturalistic Although he departs from Whitehead's thinking at empiricism. some important points, he draws in significant ways from the "philosophy of organism." He has much in common with those process thinkers who hold "that the constitutive elemental reality is dynamic in nature" and that events or realities "are characterized by movement, pervasive interrelatedness, qualitative change and diverse levels of emergent being." One of his distinctive contributions is in showing how this philosophical perspective lends itself to religious interests and to a meaningful frame of orientation. In an era when many thoughtful persons no longer subscribe to a supernaturalistic frame of orientation, Milligan points to rich possibilities in a one-order vision of reality.

Norman Cousins has written, "The essential philosophical quest in the world is for integration--which is to say, the need to bring together rational philosophy, spiritual belief, scientific knowledge, personal experience, and direct observation into an organic whole." Charles Milligan is one of the significant guides in our time available to those who would share in this quest. In varied ways he keeps saying, "Do you see . . . do you hear . . . can you feel . . . had you thought of this possibility . . .?" There is little room for boredom in that approach.

The Human Creature

As one who has reflected long and deeply on human history, on human experience and on various theories of human nature, Professor Milligan emerges with a view of the human being which combines elements of fascination, amusement, sympathy, wonder,

respect, hope, profound concern.

He is interested in more than a scientific analysis or description of the human creature. He asks the philosophical/theological question, "What is the human being in the context of the divine matrix? What is the meaning of human life? What is this assemblage of complexes, behavior and thinking when viewed in its fullness and totality?"

He finds meaning in the Christian doctrine of sin, pointing to the fact that "the best efforts go awry, the best intentions become infected with the worst, the good that we know we do not, and the evil we loathe, we do." If we knew the full life story of any human being we would probably know that he/she "has desired the forbidden and rejoiced in evil, has remained silent when wrong flourished around him, and deceived himself with explanations that were not true; and more important, that he probably was unaware of the worst times when unknowingly he had hurled the hurtful word or unseeing passed by on the other side."5

He affirms the view that the human being has "some degree of self-determination with regard to some of the crucial questions of life and some degree of self-control in choosing from among the alternatives that face him at the crossroads of life." In affirming a form of "responsible freedom" Milligan insists that a human being can have something to say about how external forces will be received into one's being, and something about the direction in which they will impel one. The human being is subject not only to coercion; he is subject to persuasion and has some voice in determining one's response to the "calls" and "lures" in one's experienced world. The human person is a creature of potential.

In endeavoring to see the human being in philosophical/theological perspective Professor Milligan reflects on the role of persons in the cosmic processes--the more inclusive matrix of human existence--the order of nature. He ventures the opinion that "the dimension of justice and humane caring is a distinctively human contribution to the 'natural' way of things. It is not ingrained in the 'nature' of things. . . but I would claim as John Dewey did, that it has potential for support in the nature of things. We humans stand at a decisive juncture of cosmic development on this planet. Our contribution is not something opposed to previous natural processes, but by the same token it is not something ordered or guaranteed by that 'natural' development or fiat."

Milligan is convinced that a person's self-image plays a major role in that person's response to the problems and challenges of life. He offers a vision of human personhood which is both realistic and hopeful. He would discourage persons from thinking more highly or less highly of themselves than they ought to think. He has a healthy view of human finitude along with an encouraging view of human potentiality. Human life is potential for meaning. Milligan's philosophy of religion is life-affirming. The human being is a creature capable of responding to "the claim of what ought to be."

Religion in Human Experience

One possible way of getting at Professor Milligan's vision of religion at its best is by reflecting on statements about religion gleaned from lectures, articles and sermons.⁸ Following are several such statements:

Your religion is most truly discovered in the way that you bind the strands of life together.

Life is a tapestry—in the making. And a tapestry, after all, is an interweaving of many cords. Faith is to behold this tapestry in its wholeness and beauty. It is not the wish to escape from the tension and tautness, the pull and twist of the threads, but recognition that the strength and integrity of the whole arise out of them.

How strange that religion is sometimes put into a compartment separated from other aspects of life, when it has to do with a perspective that enables us to live

in a milieu of faith, hope and love. It is the beholding of our existence-of the context of nature and the span of time--as a tapestry of relationships. And to do so with an awareness of the holiness, the preciousness, and awesomeness of life as a gift. This is the sort of faith that calls for deeper involvement rather than escape; to behold the unfinished tapestry with wonder and gratitude, immersed in the abiding Presence that sanctifies and sustains.

. . . the religious perspective, however spelled out, is one of both realism and hope, but it is a vision of grandeur, not of triviality.

There is something irreligious and atheistic about being soured on life.

The presentation of refuge in the presence of great tragedy and sorrow has been an outstanding contribution of religion to great living.

. . . we have to construct our religious views in terms that carry meaning, with reference to what we believe is credible about life, experience, and the universe we live in.

The task of religion is so to discover how divine processes operate in connection with human life, and what the divine order is within this level of existence, so as to know how to cooperate with that order and to have the will to do it.

These quotations obviously do not capture the full range of Milligan's reflections on religion in human experience. However, they do provide clues to what Milligan thinks mature religion is and is not. It is not magic. It is not simply a projection of wishes and a humanizing of the universe to satisfy those wishes. It is not a competitor to science in offering explanations of how and why things happen as they do. It is not an escape from hard thinking and from responsible involvement in the world. It is not to be equated with morality, although morality is often a part of it.

On the other hand, mature religion is a perspective on the life/death cycle. It is a way of seeing things. It is a vision

of human existence in the matrix of relationships. It is a vision of the life process as "tapestry in the making." It is a mode of existence, a way of living, inspired by a vision of wholeness, a sense of the possibility of experiencing meaning in the context of loss, disappointment, tragedy. Religion is a discernment of the redemptive processes which make for re-creation, transformation, wholeness. Religion is an affirmation of the human venture in faith, hope, and love.

The abiding elements in functioning religion are the experience of the holy, myth, and rite. In mature religion the holy is perceived not as separate from the raw materials of experience but as "the abiding presence that sanctifies and sustains." Myth enlarges the frame of orientation through stories "which provide an overarching and ruling pattern of interpretation." Rite provides a vehicle for acting out the vision implied in myth, serving to connect the unfolding experiences and chapters of life with meaning. Religion provides a language serving in explicating the secular events of human experience in terms of significance. Religious language gives "voice to our deepest feelings of celebration, commemoration, faith and hope." Religion endures because it provides a vision of pattern, meaning and hope, together with ways of responding to that vision in trust and devotion.

Theology, according to Milligan, is one aspect of religion-one perspective within it. He writes:

Theology is the systematic and critical study of the intellectual structure of a religion . . . In its critical task theology is the analysis of ideas and their relationship in a religion. In its constructive task it is the framework of ideas within which the saving and redeeming processes of life can be intellectually understood. . . I would propose as a definition of theology the systematic articulation of the significance of life in its total context.9

In distinguishing the roles of the poet and the theologian, Milligan has said:

I think of the poet as the person who articulates the significance of life in some particularity, takes a bit of life and makes all life become vivid and illumined because of that one thing that is articulated or is preciously vivified and polished there. . . . Whereas the theologian is someone who has the same task, articulating the signifiance of life, but in a systematic prosaic fashion, and so that it attempts to apply to all life in its fullest range and provides a framework or a scheme of interpretation and symbols out of some tradition or language or other and to make this all hang together and to be intelligible. 10

God and the Holy in Human Experience

The following quotations from various lectures, articles and sermons provide clues to Professor Milligan's images of God and the ${
m Holy}:11$

Now the word 'God' is a religious term and presupposes a religious perspective and orientation.

To return to the question, why call this God?, the reasons are first, that this reality is held to be objectively real . . . the concept of this reality is held in a perspective that is characterized by devoutness, gratitude and kinship . . . this perspective is articulated in relation to a particular heritage in fellowship with a community of shared values and commitments . . . it is the central and organizing concept when struggling with matters of meaning and ultimacy. These reasons do not add up to any reason why someone who disagrees, or who has no interest in religion, should call the organizing, creative, redeeming, indwelling character of reality 'God.'

God's effectual activity in the world is not destroyed by eliminating either the concept of a Cosmic Mr. Fixit or the Architect-Engineer of the Universe.

God is not limited to the theme of the still waters, but is discovered in the whole scope of life experiences depicted there.

Creation, then, is continuous, before our very eyes. It is the spirit of God moving over the face of the waters which otherwise would be without form and void; the Logos bringing meaning and shape to lives which otherwise would be fragmented and chaotic.

. . . if we do not place our trust in the laws of life, in the integrity of reality, in the essential goodness of the trend of the ages, in the power of the higher values for practical living, in the healing and regenerative power at work within all things--in the living God--, we can scarcely cultivate the method of peace.

The values which derive from the God concept may be grouped according to a fourfold division: intellectual, axiological, emotional, ethical... The doctrine provides an intellectual basis for interpreting existence, its vicissitudes, trials and enjoyment... The doctrine provides a value referent (in a variety of ways persons have believed that their God would uphold values which they cherished)... The doctrine is emotionally sustaining and evocative... The doctrine serves at times as an urge to ethical action.

. . . there is much that is consistent and supportive of this view in the unassailable integrity of God.

It is important to remember that we do not confront God in general any more than we do anything else. . . . We meet God as we do persons and events, in the specific and in part. The word must become flesh.

For a definition of what I understand God to be, I find it difficult to improve on a phrase of Einstein's: 'the rationality made manifest in existence.'

The question is whether the human being is now mature enough to rise to the dignity of co-worker with God in redeeming the times.

God is the character of the universe, not merely in spacial expanse and minuteness, but as revealed in human history and in the physical and spiritual nurture of a life. . . . I am not saying that God is history, but that valuative order exemplified, positively and negatively by history.

The holy, I submit, is that to which the soul resonates. That is to say, responds, and is set into motion in a way that reflects, and blends with, and is intensified by the Indwelling Presence. . . It occurs sometimes in nature. . . . Or it may occur in thought when an understanding dawns on us with a clarity and a penetrating insight that ties things together in a new way of depth. . . . That resonating

effect is what I mean by the holy, and it occurs in different places, and these are then disclosure events, some of them personal and individual, and some of them events that take place with others. . . . They sanctify existence itself, and that is my justification for calling them holy.

It is obvious, I think, that Professor Milligan is not concerned with talking about God as first cause, or the reason why there is something rather than nothing, or as an explanation for the phenomena with which science is concerned. He sees the word God belonging in the vocabulary of religion. Thus, he perceives the divine reality as referring to the ordering, the creative and the redemptive presence by virtue of which events come to be related in such ways that there is an emergence of value, meaning, pattern, wholeness. The faith, hope and love which mark mature religion are grounded in the reality of God.

Mature religion, in this perspective, is marked by a life response and a life style of gratitude, wonder, awe, reverence, responsibility. The vision of God yields a sense of sanctity in existence. The vision of the holy, in Milligan's view, brings together a basic trust in the divine integrity, a seriousness in the presence of the drama of life, an abiding curiosity, a sense of humor, a love of beauty, and an inner affirmation of the life/death journey. Thus, Milligan's philosophy of religion and theology are empirical in character, grounded in the data of experience, issuing in a vision of the meaningful life.

The Interweaving of Life's Varied Strands

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines the Renaissance man as "a present day man with many broad interests who has the opportunity to indulge himself in them so as to acquire a knowledge of each that is more than superficial." Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary offers this definition: "a person who has wide interests and is expert in several areas." Charles Milligan is a Renaissance man.

In his essay, The Aims of Education, Alfred North Whitehead wrote, "Style, in its finest sense, is the last acquirement of the educated mind. . . . It pervades the whole being. . . . Style is the ultimate morality of the mind."12 Charles Milligan's life-style is an interweaving of the varied strands of interest which contribute so richly to his life. He speaks in various languages all giving expression to the themes of integrity, aesthetic appreciation, curiosity, good humor, life-affirmation, the sense of wonder and sanctity in existence. The parts of his life are varied and significant, but the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

In what follows I would identify four major areas of interest and service in Professor Milligan's life.

The Classroom and Seminary Community

Charles Milligan is a teaching academician. His scholarship has a way of getting translated into the language of the classroom. For those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and the imagination to enter larger worlds, being in the same classroom with Charles Milligan is what Wieman would call a "creative event." For many students he has brought reason, language and faith together in such ways as to illuminate and deepen their ministries for years to come. His remarkable utilization of metaphors, his capacity to draw on the biographies of persons in various areas of study, his capacity to draw on insights from artists, poets, scientists, historians, his obvious curiosity, all contribute to a memorable teaching style. One former student has written:

To be a true student of Charles Milligan is to employ reason and logic not to one's own advantage, but to see truth and fairness and accuracy. To be a true student of Charles Milligan is to see humor even in confusion and difficulty but, having chuckled, to work the harder for clarity and progress. To be a true student of Charles Milligan is to seek with him and to make some dent in the characteristic, dysfunctional preoccupations of human beings--including our own-so that there is more light, more integrity, more renewal, more hope. 13

Like other faculty members, Charles Milligan has carried his full share of responsibility in committees and task forces--although not always with enthusiasm; but always he brings insight and a spark of insightful humor to the occasion at hand. When called upon to provide the minutes of a meeting, he makes the next meeting worth attending.

A major and distinctive contribution to the seminary community and to a much wider audience has been as editor of *The Iliff Review* since 1958. Thus, at the time of his retirement, Professor Milligan will have served in this important capacity for thirty years. The thought of Iliff faculty members, as well as that of many other scholars, has been made available to a far-flung audience through *The Iliff Review*.

Some of Dr. Milligan's own writings have appeared in this publication. In some he has developed aspects of his own thought. In others he has discussed the thought of such varied persons as Teilhard de Chardin, Freud, Schweitzer, Bergson, Wieman, Whitehead, Bernhardt. Professor Milligan's distinctive role in the Iliff community will continue to be an influence of lasting importance.

The Church: Worshiping, Learning, Serving

Dr. Milligan has set forth an image of the church as "ecclesia" with "cathedra" dimensions. As "ecclesia" the church is "an inner community within the larger society, which is called and gathered by a central religious purpose . . . a covenanted group . . . living out the days of their years in a mutuality of caring and serving, as members one of another." As "cathedra" the church exercises institutional rule—the rule of discipline. While in the pastorate (he has served churches in Colorado, New Hampshire and Massachusetts) and since, Professor Milligan has spoken eloquently, by precept and example, of worship, preaching and the church as a learning-serving community.

The worship services for which he is responsible are models of theocentric worship, marked by simple dignity and the beauty

of holiness. His prayers are truly prayers giving expression to the God-ward aspirations of the human spirit. He has written, "Those who participate in an ecclesia do not say 'how holy is the church.' The church enables them to say 'how holy is life.'"15 Thus it is with a Milligan-led service of worship.

I would speak of Charles Milligan's sermons. To know this man one must hear him preach and read his sermons. They deal with issues of personal and social religion. They reflect on life and interpret it. Over the years he has preached sermons following topics: "Sanctuary," "Religious Living with the Includes Good-Humored Living," "When Life Blocks the Chosen Way," "The Cost of Vietnam," "Christianity Mixed with Economics Is Explosive!," "Seers and Soothsayers, Prophets and Ouacks." "Toward a World in One Peace." Anyone who would learn how a philosophy of religion and theology can be translated into the language of homiletics should study Dr. Milligan's sermons.

The Larger Community

As a churchman and as a citizen, Charles Milligan has been deeply involved in community activities. He thinks globally and acts locally.

Ethics has to do with more than rules and sanctions. It has to do with character and what is popularly called life-style, with the way we live in the world.

If there is anything which we can derive from the race's experience, surely it is this: that there are requirements for living together which demand consideration for others, and thus sheer self-centeredness is not an adequate basis for ethics. And equally that it is necessary for the individual to be self-concerned, self-directed, self-realized. Both of these are necessary from an ethical as well as a psychological and sociological viewpoint. The problem of life is to balance them out, to find the appropriate ways for self-realization and for social responsibility.

These two quotations come from a two-part series of articles which appeared in the Fall 1976 and Spring 1977 issues of The

Iliff Review entitled "Ethics, Ethos and Habitat." 16 They point to what is central in Charles Milligan's ethical theory—a theory which he has acted out in practice.

Professor Milligan's style of responsible citizenship has been evident on a variety of fronts. He has served as chair of the Colorado chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Colorado Council to Abolish Capital Punishment, and various other social action committees. He has served on the Denver Commission on Community Relations. He has been host for a radio talk show and a television interview program. He has been a leader in interfaith programs in the Denver area. Professor Milligan has spoken of value as that which sustains and enhances life. For many years he has sought the increase of value in the communities of which he has been a part. The language of human concern and reverence for life has been heard in his community participation.

The World of Music

A major dimension of Dr. Milligan's experience of self-realization comes through the arts, and particularly through music. In a memorable address at Nebraska Wesleyan University in the spring of 1987, Professor Milligan spoke of "The Beautiful and the Holy: Ambiguity and Necessity." In this presentation he spoke of art and its relation to the experience of the Holy in a world of ambiguity and necessity. He spoke of "this hunger, this appetite for beauty, for participation in processes of beauty or the creation of it or response to it." He defined beauty as "that which nourishes the soul." In defining the holy as "that to which the soul resonates" he illuminated the phrase "the beauty of holiness."

Professor Milligan has long had a particular interest in and appreciation of music. As a college student he played in the University of Denver band. He has played the French horn in the Denver Symphony orchestra. He has sung in choral groups and offered music-related courses in the Iliff-At-Aspen program. No

one can take courses from Charles Milligan without being introduced to his wide-ranging interest in music and the innumerable apt illustrations and analogies from the world and literature of music which he employs.

Professor Milligan has long been drawn to John Dewey's comment on the aesthetic experience in his book, Art as Experience. Dewey writes:

That which distinguishes an experience as aesthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close. 17

In agreeing with Dewey, Professor Milligan holds that "music which is merely tuneful is insipid--real music involves dissonance, modulation, contrast, tension . . . which are brought into an organic wholeness."

Theology, it seems to me, could do worse than to think of grace as the inward capacity to respond to a lilting flute music which transforms life into dance whenever novel splendors burst forth. And it is not only concord, but also dissonance, the struggling chaotic seeking form--that does this for us.18

Thus it appears that in Professor Milligan's philosophy of music the aesthetic experience partakes of the redemptive dimension of the Holv.

In a sermon preached November 21, 1976, in Whatley Chapel in Denver, as part of the premiere presentation of "A Festive Service for Organ" composed by Normand Lockwood, Professor Milligan spoke eloquently of the place of music in his own life:

Theologians and medicine men, as you know, have given a lot of thought to the definition of death, now that machines can keep us physically alive for a considerable time. But in a real sense, a true sense, I know what it is: it will be when my heart no longer sings in response to music: music of the spheres or of human invention. Then whether that heart beats or whether I breathe, I shall be dead indeed. 19

In Conclusion

We are told that Socrates prayed, " . . . give me beauty in

the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one." Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing Charles Milligan well over a period of many years would testify to the wholeness exemplified in his life--the blending of precept and example, the outward and the inward man. His "A Modern Canticle of Praise" reflects a blending of philosophy/theology and devotion, a concern for realism with a glad affirmation of life. 20

A Modern Canticle of Praise

O Thou who art from everlasting to everlasting; Life of all that lives, blending of all beauty, Destiny of all striving, power of all truth: Who giveth

The warm sun that there may be light,
The fertile soil that there may be life,
Onflowing hours that there may ever be creation;
Who blesseth all creatures

With changing season that there may be loveliness,
With discord that there may be harmony,
With death that all things may be made new;
Who bringeth forth

Perpetual yearning that there may be growth, The babbling tongue that there may be friendship, The subtle hand that there may be invention;

Who raiseth up within the human breast Silent awe that there may be worship, Joys inexpressible that there may be music, Selfless desires that there may be love;

Who settleth upon the earth
Invisible customs that there may be pathways,
Unceasing variation that there may be personality,
Unending change that there may be adventure;

Who sustaineth throughout the vast universe Unwritten laws that there may be wisdom, Fragile seedlings that there may be faith, Eternal stars that there may be humility:

Oh, to these things let us not be as those who have eyes but see not, and hear not though they have ears.

Neither let us misuse life and its ways.

Nor let us fear them.

Redeem our peevish longing for signs and wonders into an awesome beholding of the heavens, which declare thy glory, and the firmament, which showeth forth thy handiwork. Thou art source of all and doth indwell in all.

Into One Wondrous Life thou dost unite these holy things.

Let everything that hath breath praise thee.

And also the dust and the mists.

And dreams and silences.

For thou art dwelling place of all.

For thou art God.

ENDNOTES

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- 4. Christian Action, August 1962, p. 11.
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- "Introduction: Fritz Buri's Philosophical Theology," The Iliff Review, Winter 1983, pp. 10 ff.
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