

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

ALEXANDER MILLER (1908 – 1960)

With the death of Alexander Miller on May 15, 1960, Stanford University lost one of its most effective teachers, a beloved and respected colleague, and a doughty champion of the University's duty to truth.

Lex Miller followed a career dedicated to three ends the clear and compelling articulation of the Christian faith in the academic setting, the service of the Christian Church, both his own Presbyterian denomination and Protestant Christianity at large, and the bringing of Christianity to bear on the social, economic, and political spheres of secular life.

Of these three ends, the last is a thread running throughout his life. In a day when passions ran high over pacifism, the labor movement, and unemployment, he accumulated an impressive jail record in New Zealand from picketing and pacifist demonstrations. He often remarked that it was one of God's graces that he did not become a Communist. But his thought on social ethics felt the impact of Marxist theory, as demonstrated by one of his best-known books, The Christian Significance of Karl Marx (1946). He was disposed to admit the possibility, but felt the unlikelihood, of anyone's being a Republican or a Tory and a Christian at once. The problems of Christian vocation in a secular world occupied him intensely. An early book, Christian Faith and My Job (1946; recently issued in a second edition), showed the path which he would expand in his doctoral dissertation at Columbia University and in numerous articles. Students who asked his advice on entering the ministry were sharply queried about their training for secular vocation, for he felt keenly the necessity for Christians to be committed to secular work out of a high appreciation of the dignity of human labor and a passion for the integrity of human society.

For all that, Lex Miller did not denigrate the office of the ministry. Ordained in the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in 1937, he occupied pastorates there, in England, and in Scotland. His pastorate at Stepney, East London, earned him a notable name among working and waterfront folk during the blitz. From 1943 to 1945 he was associated with Sir George MacLeod in the Iona Community in Scotland, where a fresh effort was being made to reappropriate the great tradition of Presbyterianism in the modern day. During his pastorate in Napier, New Zealand (1945-1948), he married Jean C. MacLaren, and in 1947 their only son, David, was born. While at Stanford he was a member of the Presbytery of San Jose of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. But his devotion to his chosen Presbyterianism led him to wider service to the church at large. He was much in demand as lecturer and preacher in churches and church groups of all denominations. From his earliest ministry he was intimately connected with the world-wide Student Christian Movement, first as General Secretary of the New Zealand SCM, later as a representative of the World Student Christian Federation, and with close contact with YMCA leaders throughout the world. At his death, he was a member-at-large of the Central Committee of the National Student Christian Federation, a member of the Message Committee of the National Council of Churches, and a fellow of the National Council on

Religion in Higher Education. He was also preparing to present a new series of TV broadcasts for nation-wide distribution, on the order of those presented so successfully over Station KPIX in 1959 and 1960.

His interest in student work, his gifts of language and speech, and a profound concern for theological communication led him into the academic life. Brought to Stanford in 1950 to inaugurate the Curriculum in Religious Studies, his vision quickly made this first effort to teach religion in the Stanford curriculum a unique experiment in undergraduate education. This concern flowered in his last book, in the press at the time of his death, Faith and Learning, a thorough study of the relation between religion and higher education. But these were the considerations of one who was first of all a great teacher of theology. He led his students through an unusually wide gamut of theological subject-matter, conveying to them the vitality of a theology concerned with the real affairs of real men, seeking to illuminate all of human life by the affirmations of the Christian Gospel. His theology, rooted in the great Reformation traditions and enlivened by the work and personal influence of Reinhold Niebuhr, sought always a responsible and intelligible articulation of the Biblical heritage. Two books--perhaps his best--demonstrated his central theological concerns and his capacity for communication: The Renewal of Man: A 20th Century Essay on Justification by Faith (1955), and The Man in the Mirror (1958), delivered in 1957 as the William Belden Noble Lectures at Harvard University. The conferral of the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity by the Pacific School of Religion in 1958 was recognition of his contributions, both personal and theological, to theological education.

Through a life of success and influence, Lex Miller retained a rare humility of spirits informed by a study faith and accompanied by a nonchalance about himself. He liked to say that he was merely a simple Christian soul; and that he genuinely was. We will remember him as a colleague who combined wisdom with innocence, humor with piety, energetic support of academic freedom with unswerving devotion to Christian truth. His own life bore eloquent testimony to a quotation from Karl Barth, which he used as a motto for his Noble Lectures: "Man is the creature made visible in the mirror of Jesus Christ."

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