

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



3 2449 0309968 E

EUGENE WILLIAM LYMAN LECTURE

NOVEMBER 9, 1956

ARCHIVES BULLETIN OF SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

SWEET BRIAR, VIRGINIA

BL

50

.L96

NO. 5

BULLETIN OF SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE. VOL. 40, NO. 1, FEB. 1957
PUBLISHED BY THE COLLEGE IN FEBRUARY, MARCH, JULY, NOVEMBER
(2 issues), DECEMBER. Entered as second-class matter at the Post
Office, Sweet Briar, Va.

Eugene William Lyman Lecture
"GOD'S MAN OF THE NEW AGE"

by

MARTHA B. LUCAS, PH. D.

President of Sweet Briar College, 1946-1950

BULLETIN OF SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE

FEBRUARY 1957

Archives

BL

50

.L96

no. 5

The Eugene William Lyman Lectureship in the Philosophy of Religion was established at Sweet Briar College in 1948, in loving memory of a great teacher, scholar, and author. Dr. Lyman lived at Sweet Briar from the time of his retirement from Union Theological Seminary in 1940 until his death eight years later. It is the hope of his friends and admirers that this Lectureship may fittingly honor his memory by carrying forward his lifelong and devoted quest for truth.

President Seelye Bixler of Colby College, once a student of Dr. Lyman, gave the first Lyman Lecture at Sweet Briar College on February 4, 1949, on the subject, "The Deeper Ranges of Authority." The second lecture was given October 20, 1950, by Dr. Charles Earle Raven of Cambridge University, on "The Present Position and Prospects of Liberal Theology." Professor Walter Marshall Horton of Oberlin Graduate School of Theology delivered the third Eugene William Lyman Lecture on November 14, 1952, on the subject, "Liberalism Old and New." Dr. Howard Schomer of the World Council of Churches gave the fourth lecture October 8, 1954, on "Living in the Church Universal Now." The present lecture is the fifth in the series.

GOD'S MAN OF THE NEW AGE

My coming here today holds particular significance for me, returning as I am to Sweet Briar to give the Eugene William Lyman Lecture. It so happened that I first came to know Sweet Briar College because of the name of Lyman. I grew up in Kentucky, steeped in southern prejudice or in what some euphemists prefer to call "southern tradition." Oddly enough one of these traditions among the people I knew concerned college education. Only in the northeast was it possible, they said, to get a liberal education. A southern college and truly liberal education were considered by these blue-stockings to be a contradiction in terms. Whatever a woman's institution might be called in the South, it was simply a finishing school, fine for a little language and clavichord, but nothing more. It finished you once and for all, for any clear thinking and decisive acting in life.

That was the prejudice I grew up with, and no exceptions were allowed. Thus, in the fulness of time, I went north and east to college, first to a border state, with Baltimore, and then, whole hog, to Poughkeepsie. During those four years, and in two pre-eminent colleges, my mind and I had great adventures. But I was to learn that it is not where you go but what personalities touch yours, what minds kindle yours into leaping fires, through writing as well as teaching, not through the spoken word only but through the written word as well. For it was actually in the year of my graduation from college, 1933, that a very great book was published, *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*. This book was written by the philosopher, Eugene William Lyman. It was a book about religion, by one of the world's most prominent professors of religion. But it was also a book about science and philosophy and history and politics and poetry and sociology and economics and psychology. Here, in one volume of 465 pages, was a comprehensive

liberal education. For not only was the volume crammed with carefully documented facts about man and his universe; but Professor Lyman had so correlated and interpreted his material as to bring the vastness into focus, without ever violating his reader's right to his own deductions. In this as well as in his earlier books, I found that rarest of theologians, one who declined to dogmatize, one who decried the authoritarian claims of religious creeds, a man for whom religion was truly a service of perfect freedom. I was not meeting many of his kind in those years of my early graduate study, for I was concerned, in both my master's and doctoral work in philosophy, with 17th and 18th century pundits whose worst habit among many was calling anyone who didn't agree with them or accept their particular system of metaphysics "a black atheist." What a bracer it was for me then to read E. W. Lyman's conciliatory plea for an open-minded coöperation among all religionists, to replace the mutually exclusive authoritarianisms of the past.¹ To his way of thinking, the urgent needs of human beings in our century require a new, free examination of religious questions. In his words, the "neatly constructed and minutely wrought" theological systems of the past are now "objects in a museum . . . their language is archaic and foreign."² How well I knew! They were being my daily diet as I worked on my doctor's thesis in the British Museum. Then unto my need came another Lyman bracer: *The Christian Epic*, published in 1936, still, to my way of thinking, the most dependable and readable account of the beginnings of the Christian movement through its literature. This time the author was a Mary Ely Lyman. And my young romantic soul thrilled to the information, gleaned from a *Who's Who*, that these two wonderful minds and great spirits were "man and wife." Just like the Brownings, I thought, except better. I was studying in England then,

¹*The Experience of God in Modern Life*, (1918), pages 4 and 50.

²*Theology and Human Problems*, (1910), pages 1-2.

during the last years of the 1930's; and I thought of the Lymans in their northern tower of learning, wise and free, imparting to young seminarians of America the brave new world of religion-wed-to-philosophy, unshackled from ignorance, fear and vituperative dogmatism.

At length I was back in America with the scarlet hood of my philosophy doctorate and a growing interest in the field in which I had especially labored, the philosophy of religion. Even as I was setting about to find a teaching position in America, I thought how much I would like to stay on for a while in the sylvan glades of Academus, learning all I could of the latest facts and theories in the exciting field of religion. I thought of the University of Chicago, of Yale, and of Union, all connected with the Lymans and with those among their colleagues who shared this glorious emancipation of the mind. Some people never get enough! This insatiability is usually called "intellectual curiosity." Some call it "neurotic compulsion." In any case my practical, unneurotic side won out. I went ahead with those letters of application for a job, with the conclusion that I would do the post-doctoral studies on my own, for the rest of my life. After all, time was a-wasting. I was already an old crone of 27. I should be self supporting by now. And so I put me and my mind up for hire, miserable sophist that I was, willing and reasonably able to teach philosophy and religion at any stage of undergraduate study.

Among the "regrets" which poured in was a letter from the President of one of the most respected of the New England colleges. It fell with a dull thud upon my fledgling aspirations and upon some of my old illusions too. The letter said in effect, "I thank you for your inquiry, but we have no opening such as you mention. At this college only especially trained persons teach in our different departments. And there is no

connection between our Philosophy and our Bible courses." Could anything be more benighted; I thought. And from a northern college too—one of the most respected. Well, I would just have to write to the Lymans and get their advice about teaching in America, teaching philosophy and religion. I composed a letter to Mrs. Eugene William Lyman—and looked up her current address (this was in the Spring of 1941). The address was—I looked again—I could not believe it—a southern college, with the roseate name of Sweet Briar! The Lymans? This was almost more than I could bear. Would life never give me a moment's peaceful coexistence with my illusions? The information was literally staggering. I checked and rechecked my sources. There was no doubt about it. The Lymans were in residence at Sweet Briar College, in Virginia. Dr. Eugene Lyman had retired from his professorial chair at Union Theological Seminary in New York, in 1940. And Dr. Mary Lyman had resigned from her lectureship at Barnard and Union in that same year to accept the post of Dean and Professor of Religion at Sweet Briar College. Well!

After a necessary period of mental and emotional re-adjustment, and consequent realigning of values, I sent off that letter to Dean Lyman. Since that day, fifteen years ago, I have had considerable personal correspondence with deans and professors and presidents of American colleges. And I have long since reached that stage in life when one simply must throw out ballast of accumulated memorabilia. One letter, however, which I shall always keep is the response Dean Lyman wrote to my letter of inquiry. When I later had occasion to know her schedule of work at Sweet Briar College, I realized that that long and helpful letter of advice to a stranger-in-need must have been written after midnight, and probably following an eighteen-hour day of student conferences, religion classes, committee meetings, with probably a faculty meeting and one or two emergency sessions of the College Council thrown in.

Of course it was the old story which I was to learn in the years ahead, that it is the truly great human beings who, no matter how heavy their burden and how time-consuming their responsibilities, somehow find time to go the second mile, to do the little things which can mean so much to others.

And so it happened that I was brought forth out of the land of darkness and saw at last that liberal education and southern colleges are not mutually exclusive. At last I could see my prejudice face to face and know it for the ignorance and inverted snobbery it was. I learned my lesson, I learned about Sweet Briar College through the renown of two great scholars and teachers, Mary and Eugene Lyman. It was because of their excellence that I came to know of the excellence of this college. But only because I am, in this experience, "e pluribus" do I think this is of significance and wish to record it here. Indeed I am only one among many to have come to know the quality of this college because of its connection with the celebrated name of Lyman. How often in the years after I came to know Sweet Briar College did I hear other university people say "Sweet Briar—oh, yes—the college where the Lymans are." I heard this not only in America but in England and on the Continent, time and time again. In all honesty I must admit that I got to feeling a little irascible about this, and I thought to myself, "Why don't they just call it 'Lyman College' and have done with it?" As these same august academicians not infrequently put the question to me, "Why is your college called Sweet Briar? . . . That doesn't sound like a college!"—my irascible thought was possibly not without merit.

Dr. Eugene William Lyman lived at Sweet Briar for eight years. He was very much a part of the college community during those years, preaching often in our chapel and church services and participating in both student and faculty discussions on religion and philoso-

phy. Thus our college shone not only in his reflected glory but in the radiant warmth of his presence, as he walked among us here. Because he was here I think we were all a little wiser, a little kinder, even a little more creative than we might otherwise have been. Because he was so generous in his judgment of others, I think he helped us to be somehow better than we were.

Eugene Lyman died at Sweet Briar in March of 1948. Our thought, in establishing the Lyman Lectureship at that time was—humbly to honor him who needed no added honor from us. It was, I suppose, our way of saying to the world “This is the kind of human being we hold in greatest esteem.” We were, of course, paying ourselves a considerable compliment. It might even have been thought presumptuous of us to have proposed a lectureship here at our college in his great name. We knew that in establishing the Lyman Lectureship we placed before ourselves a tremendous challenge, a challenge to keep moving “onward and upward,” to work with all our minds and hearts to be worthy of the name of Lyman. But that is not without abundant precedent in the history of education. Think of St. Hilda’s and St. Hugh’s, St. Andrews and St. Paul’s, and the other hundred saintly establishments, each bearing witness to a lofty ideal, rather than calipering the spiritual excellence of any resident personnel. If we, in our tradition, were more at home with Saints, we could certainly not find a more suitable Patron Saint for a liberal arts college than Eugene Lyman. Our establishing a lectureship here in his name was perhaps a fumbling, twentieth century way of doing just that. We in our time are so awkward, so ill at ease, with spiritual concepts.

The Lyman Lecture was established eight and a half years ago. A few years later, your lectureship committee invited me to give the Lyman lecture. I declined on the obvious grounds that I was unworthy. No more forthright and accurate reason for declining to give an

address has ever been given a committee in search of a speaker. In amplification, however, I said that some day maybe I would be less unable to accept. Well, when Sweet Briar's Fiftieth rolled around, they very kindly asked me again. The truth is that I am just as unworthy now as I was then. And you have every right to ask why I am here. I'll give you as forthrightly my reason for coming tonight as I gave your lecture committee, some years ago, my reason for not coming. I have come because I have something important to say. It is important because Eugene Lyman is important and because what he taught and what he was are, I believe, of inestimable importance for us now and in the years ahead. I want to say it now, during this anniversary year, because it seems to me imperative that this college, as it sets its sights for the next 50 years, be ever mindful of what Eugene Lyman taught and what he was.

What I am about to say may not sound at all like a memorial lecture. I have heard and read a myriad memorial lectures, in my long and misspent life. And I must say that only in a few cases has the lecture seemed intended for the audience to which it was presented. I have frequently had a feeling that the lecturer was speaking out over the heads of the immediate cloud of witnesses, addressing some far-off Learned Society or the appointments committee of some more renowned institution, or perhaps the selection board of a distinguished university press. Even the strategically inserted paragraph, designed to tie in the subject matter with the immediate occasion, somehow failed its catalytic office. I must state quite frankly: I have no ulterior audience. As your Lyman lecturer for this semi-centennial of Sweet Briar College, I want to address myself to you, to the students and teachers and friends of this college. I want to speak personally, out of my own experience, as a student and as a teacher, because I think that that is the way to say most clearly what I have to say. And

I want to talk specifically about Eugene William Lyman, whom I believe to be God's man of the new age.

Two years before I was born (that is, in the year 1910), an article of Eugene Lyman's was published, entitled *The Ultimate Test of Religious Truth*. "One of the fundamental proofs of the truth of a religion," wrote this Bangor professor, is its "capacity to undergo progressive reconstruction," to be reinterpreted (like democracy) with the new needs of the changing times. . . . "Christianity," he said, is "bigger than its creeds." And in that same year his first major book, *Theology and Human Problems*, set forth an interpretation of Christianity as a truly living religion, wholly in keeping with an evolutionary philosophy, consistent with new scientific theories about the world. Six years after I was born (that is, in the year 1918), Professor Lyman, now of Oberlin, published two books. One he called *The God of the New Age*, which he described in the subtitle as "a tract for the times." We might more accurately describe it as "a tract for *our* times," for the world as he saw it then is so precisely ours now. He saw the God of the New Age as the God known in experience through informed, constructive thinking and spiritual intuition. He saw God as a creative personality, a universal and eternal good will, striving with human beings as co-workers to build a better world. In Lyman's words, "God is working through all our institutional life to overcome whatever is unbrotherly and unprogressive."¹ In that book of 1918, written actually before the end of the first world war, he said this:

"The God of the new age sets before us the ideal of a social democracy within our nation and a federal world republic above all nations as goals toward which we must think and work if human brotherhood is to become a reality and human progress is to go on."²

¹ Lyman, E. W., *The God of The New Age*, page 35.

² *Ibid.*, page 39.

Published also in 1918 was Professor Lyman's book *The Experience of God in Modern Life*. Again he presented Christianity as a living religion, unshackled from the limitations of the past. The religion of the new age he described in these words, back in 1918:

"It is not the religion of any authoritative creed, though it can produce great guiding convictions. It is not the religion of a revelation finished in the remote past, though it has its roots deep in the past. It is the religion of the Hebrew prophetic consciousness, of Jesus' filial consciousness, of the modern Christian experience of co-working with an Eternal Creative Good Will."¹

When I consider that all of this was thought and written before I was seven years old, I can only conclude that communication in our culture was non-existent at the time. Though I grew up in a literate society, of a church-going community, in a city which was the proud home of several Protestant theological schools, I had not the slightest inkling of any new religion anywhere. In fact I was given the unmistakable impression by my culture that the old religion was good enough for someone named Silas and was therefore good enough for me. If any of the winds of controversy from the Fundamentalist Battle (so brilliantly described by Harry Emerson Fosdick in his autobiography just published) blew about our bailiwick, I can only assume that some self appointed shepherd was sheltering us shorn lambs from the blast.

Communication was noticeably lacking between regular school and Sunday school. There was a tacit understanding, I think, that tales should not be carried from one to the other. What one learned in one school did not bear repeating in the other. And with good reason! For there were appalling differences in what the two schools were teaching about human beings and the world we

¹Ibid., page 50.

live in. As Professor Erwin Goodenough of Yale has written of his own intellectual growing up, "The metaphysics of our Sunday Schools was in primeval chaos."¹ Some of my contemporaries did not seem disturbed by the situation. But others of us were. And we talked a lot about it. We even did shocking things to try to force our world to make sense. I think I was twelve when I borrowed a volume of the Koran from a library and took it to Sunday School for class examination. I was promptly advised that I was worshipping false gods and was indubitably damned to eternal torment by the one true, jealous God. There was, as a matter of fact, a certain torment. But my friends and I went right on borrowing books from libraries and then buying books of our own—and talking and listening—on through school and college, until at length, we had solved our problem, after our fashion. We had learned a good deal about our world in physics, chemistry, geology, biology and astronomy and a good deal about human beings in the study of man's history, literatures, languages, art and music, in courses in sociology, economics, psychology, philosophy and religion. It all added up to a radically different view of the human situation than that presented by the churches of our childhood. We had brave true things to say: we had sought the truth, we said, and the truth had set us free, free of the tyranny and the torment of primitive religion. And we had a good laugh over a book of boners first published about that time. Our favorite boner was, "Faith is believing what you know isn't true."

Gone was the old religion and its tyranny over our minds, at least on the surface of our thinking. But it did not take a psychoanalysis to tell us that something was missing. You know that Carl Jung, one of the world's foremost analysts, in speaking of his work with mature patients, has written:

¹Goodenough, Erwin, *Toward a Mature Faith*, (1955), page 37.

“There has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say,” he goes on, “that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers, and none of them has really been healed who did not regain his religious outlook.”¹

Jung made that statement in 1933, and has apparently seen no reason to change his conclusions in the years since. I have been thinking recently that a good analogy for Jung’s findings would be the condition of a human being on an interplanetary flight. Apparently those of us who go (I hope there will be a good representation from this college on the early trips) will have to contend with a certain tendency while in the rocket to drift in mid-air, tossing and turning without a friendly gravitational pull to help us keep our feet on the floor. We shall have to be magnetically shod to enable us to have any sense of direction at all. I think Jung would agree that his patients are adrift in a world they never made and that all of us, to the extent that we share in what Karen Horney has called “the neurotic personality of our time,” are adrift until we gain a foothold through a sense of spiritual direction. The question for me in 1933 was what *kind* of religion can provide direction in a world so vastly more complex, so essentially different, from the world as seen by the earlier formulators of religious doctrines and faiths. To my way of thinking the old answers were wholly inadequate. Conveniently enough a famous philosopher summed up, in that same year of 1933, exactly how I felt about the need of new ways of thinking. Alfred North Whitehead wrote this in his book, *Adventures of Ideas*:

“The whole of [our] tradition is warped by the vicious assumption that each generation will substantially live amid the conditions governing the

¹Jung, Carl, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, page 264.

lives of its fathers and will transmit those conditions to mould with equal force the lives of its children. We are living in the first period of human history for which this assumption is false.”¹

But the question for me was how shall the new conditions of our century shape our future world-view and the traditions by which we shall live. As there are in the starry heavens wondrous conjunctions of bodies in space, (at least from our limited viewpoint), so there was for me, in that year of 1933, a marvelous conjunction of a great question and a great answer. To the overwhelming need of my time came the magnum opus of the philosopher, Eugene Lyman, in *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, certainly one of the world's Great Books, a classic for all time. And there was I, and the others like me, in the pages of Lyman's book. He used Thomas Hardy's tender little poem to describe us who were in search of moorings to replace the ones we had lost:

“If someone said on Christmas Eve
‘Come, see the oxen kneel,
In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,’
I should go with him in the gloom
Hoping it might be so.”

Such indeed was our longing, but the someone we would follow-after would have to show us wonders beyond the fairy tale world of childhood. He would have to lead us to the wonders of our new age and help us to see in them and through them the reality we sought. Such a man, this man of the new age, was Eugene William Lyman.

Of his great book, *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, every page of the nearly 500 was a step toward the light. “The philosophy of religion,” he said in his prefatory remarks, “is by no means external to religion. On the contrary, it may be and rightfully is, a vital

¹Op. cit., page 117.

part of religion.”¹ “Religion,” he said, “is able to produce courage and intellect. Many of the free thinkers of the world have been genuinely religious men. Indeed wherever free thought is not mere revolt and scorn, or merely a cheap pose, but is an expression of humaneness and of ardent belief in the power of the human mind to get truth, and of the universe to yield it, such thought is of the essence of religion.”²

Could I believe my eyes? Here was a famous theologian setting me free to think, to discover all I could about the universe, without the haunting fear that my deductions might condemn me to the limbo of lost souls.

To those of us who felt that the religion we saw around us was mostly superstition and dogma, he reminded us that “superstition and dogma are general human failings” . . . that “in the field of medicine there is much superstition which has no connection with religion,” that “our most dangerous dogmas today belong to the economic, political, and social realms.”³ Yes, he said to us, that kind of religion, “which involves only the non-rational side of man’s nature” is full of superstition and dogma, like the rest of mankind’s ventures. But religion, in its fullest manifestations, is a synthesis, an “integration of human life and experience.” Religious judgments to be tenable must conform to evidence from reason and experience. “Religion,” he said, “can make a genuine contribution to the knowledge of reality.” If our intuition, our religious experience, our faith, are compatible with reason and experience, they should be accepted as dependable reports on reality. In answer to the basic question which our scientific age has pressed upon religious tradition, Eugene Lyman felt that “religion and science should supplement each other rather than seek to displace each other as they often

¹Lyman, E. W., *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, page 14.

²*Ibid.*, page 17.

³*Ibid.*, page 151.

tend to do.”¹ But he makes it clear that science cannot tell the whole story. The whole self must enter the search for the whole of reality: our “intuitive apprehension, our powers of rational synthesis, our imagination” and what Lyman calls our “practical fidelity.”² Now I must be perfectly candid about this and admit that when I first read Lyman’s ways of knowing reality, I was skeptical. But I also had a hunch that my skepticism was based on my ignorance. And indeed I do deeply believe that the years which bring experience bring also understanding, which is no more possible for fledgling minds than is inter-hemispheric flight for baby birds. But this philosopher made such good sense in what he said that I could understand that he inspired in me a faith which was, in the sense of Hebrews, “conviction of things not seen.”

And from time to time I even began to see, as if I had been brought out of darkness into light. For example, Mysticism. From what little I had read of mystics, up to that point, they seemed to me a sorry lot of psychopaths; and I felt all too confident that Santayana was right in calling mysticism “a normal disease, a recurrent manifestation of lost equilibrium and interrupted growth.”³ Yet here in Lyman’s great book I met a mystic whose experience of reality I deeply understood. It was the story of Margaret Prescott Montague’s *twenty minutes of reality*, which had taken place during her post-operative convalescence in a hospital. Her experience had been one of illumination, of joyous hypersensitivity to everything around her, twenty minutes in which she felt she looked into the heart of Reality and saw that it was Beauty. For Professor Lyman this “swift vision of reality as beauty” is as truly mysticism as is the practice of the presence of God. And both are ways of knowing the Ultimate Reality which is God.

¹Ibid., page 153.

²Ibid., page 224.

³Santayana, G., *Reason in Religion*, page 279.

This was my first introduction to a writer who later became my cherished friend, when I came to live in Richmond, Virginia. But it was important to me also in that Lyman's words introduced me to myself—for I, even I, skeptical rejector of dogma that I was, even I had known, in my own small way, that sense of a presence that is "immediately felt to be Divine" and that "apprehension of truth that is immediately felt to be valid and momentous,"¹ the experience which Lyman identified as mysticism.

I think I can best describe the effect that Professor Lyman's book had on me by saying that he seemed to be throwing bridges across a chasm to where I stood, cut off from the opposite side by a dangerous fissure of man's own making, into which the unwary might tumble to destruction. I had gotten where I was by observation and reason, the way of scientific evaluation. On the opposite side were those who had come the way of intuition and the acceptance of tradition. From what I could tell of the situation, each side seemed confident of occupying the mainland of existence, to the exclusion and ultimate condemnation of the other. Yet, here was a human being who dared to step forth from the crowd and throw bridges of understanding, even of co-existence, across the crevasse.

First there was that business of experiencing Reality first hand. As Eugene Lyman presented it, I found a bridge of crossing. I knew that at least in this I belonged to both worlds. My inability to accept a large part of the claims of Christian tradition did not isolate me completely from the religious fold. But then there was my big problem about Greek Philosophy. My first budget-shattering purchase as a teen-ager had been the five vasty volumes of Plato, as translated and annotated by Benjamin Jowett. And throughout my college years, in the courses I chose, as well as in my private reading

¹Lyman, E. W., *op. cit.*, page 112.

(when I was not reading poetry) it was the philosophers of Greece with whom I lived and moved and had my being. Their restless quest to understand the universe was mine; their courageous seeking after the best way of life and of salvation was to me the voyage of highest adventure—and their discoveries, the land of greatest promise. How ill it set upon me then to have a celebrated Father of the Early Church condemn the philosophy of Greece as devils' whisperings, designed for the express purpose of prejudicing the mind against accepting Christian Doctrine as the one and only revelation of truth. If the Christian Church accepted that sort of nonsense and called the man a saint who dreamed it up, I'd have none of it. How stupid could human beings be?

And then I read the words of Eugene Lyman in *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*:

“ . . . the chief source from which Christianity drew, in addition to its origin in Jesus and in Judaism, was the religious philosophy of the Greeks, which was the product of the marvelous capacity of the Greek mind for speculative wonder. Out of the ponderings upon the elements of nature, the meaning of number, the problems of permanence and change, the truths underlying myths, the nature of justice, the strangeness of human destiny, came that body of Greek religious speculation which, when blended with the spiritual insights of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus, has resulted in the full development of ethical monotheism.”¹

As for Plato, Eugene Lyman saw him as the founder of theistic philosophy, indeed as the ultimate source of all theology of our western world. Said Lyman:

“Philosophical religion—religion as an integration of thought and experience—receives its first developed and universally significant expression in

¹Ibid., page 71.

Plato . . . all the great aspects of religious experience are integrated by Plato and placed in the framework of a unified philosophy.”¹

As for Plato’s “Realm of Ideas,” which had seemed to *me* the very Kingdom of God, Eugene Lyman wrote, “In the contemplation of the Beautiful and the Good and the other Divine Ideas, Plato rises to the level of mystical religion.”² Well, here was a world I could understand; and religion, living religion, was beginning to make sense, as part of that world. Instead of Tertullian reasoning—that a religious doctrine is believable just because it is so absurd—here was a philosopher who talked sense, even about the realm beyond the senses. “Intuition,” said Eugene Lyman boldly, “has a distinctive function as a way of knowing objective reality.” And again he threw a bridge across to my side of the crevasse. If any companionship had fulfilled me during my college years as had that of the Greek Philosophers it had been with the poets of Europe and America whose intuitive leaps had seemed to me somehow to achieve contact with ultimate truth and beauty. And here was Eugene Lyman quoting Shelley and Edwin Arlington Robinson (and others whose poetry I had memorized by volume) as evidence of God’s continuing revelation. For said he, “When God is seen as Creator and active Lover of all, those who are creators of beauty and of love may be forever revealers of the glory hidden in the white radiance of his thought.”³

Oh, my! Home at last—to a world where sense was sense, and nonsense was nonsense, and never the twain need meet for God’s glory or the soul’s salvation. As it was with Greek philosophy and with poetry, so science became, as I followed Eugene Lyman, a bridge of understanding to religious truth, rather than a devilish human endeavor. Now it was that all that I had learned in a college curriculum replete with introductory courses in

¹Ibid., pages 138-140.

²Ibid., page 140.

³Ibid., page 199.

the sciences began to take on new life in my mind as I followed Lyman's thought. It seemed to me then that I knew a great deal about all those different sciences. (Surely one never knows so much about anything as when he has just completed the final exam of an introductory science course in college!) Yes, I was far short of wisdom if wisdom is, in Socrates' words, knowing how little you know. But as I read *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, I began to understand how much more there was to know in this incalculably complex world of modern science. Surely no philosopher of religion in any century has had a more comprehensive knowledge of the world as science could reveal it to him than did Eugene Lyman. I think that you would nowhere find a more clear and concise analysis of modern physical concepts, a more understandable explanation of the theory of relativity, the quantum theory, the principle of indeterminacy, and the philosophy of organic process, than in Lyman's great book. Left far behind is the mechanical universe of earlier science with its atomic particles, its strict causality, its inexorable laws governing the movement of bodies in space. In its place Lyman shows us the "new heaven and the new earth" as they are shaping up in the minds of modern scientists and philosophers. Gone are the days, apparently, when we can say with confidence that the course of nature is determined by physical laws. As Bertrand Russell has put it, "We cannot predict when a discontinuous change will take place in a given atom though we can predict statistical averages."¹ This new cosmology accepts a principle of indeterminacy and sees the universe as organism, rather than mechanism, a working whole in which there is throughout something akin to spontaneity and purposive action. And there is a tendency to believe with Alfred North Whitehead that, "in this newly conceived organism of the universe, physical and mental operations are inextricably intertwined," that the ultimate stuff of

¹Ibid., page 268 (quoted from Russell's *Philosophy*, page 294).

reality is best explained in panpsychic terms. For Lyman as for Whitehead the most satisfactory synthesis of the various aspects of the new cosmology was through the idea of a Cosmic Creative Purpose, Spirit, Intelligence. As Lyman puts it: "The new cosmology gives powerful intellectual support to belief in God. For it portrays to us a universe which has order, and organization, and organic character on such a scale as can be understood only by recognizing a Cosmic, Creative Spirit everywhere at work."¹

In what, I think, is one of the most thrilling passages ever written in the literature of philosophy, Lyman links the cosmos with our daily lives:

"The new theism will find in courageous attack upon our urgent human problems, in the applying of creative social intelligence to their solution, and in personal devotion to the building of the Beloved Community on earth, the living expression of the deepest reality of the cosmos. And it will find the fullest realization of God, the present experience of life eternal, in whatever increases the wisdom, good will, and joy of the world."²

And so Eugene Lyman proceeded in his *Meaning and Truth of Religion* to analyze the recent developments in the biological and social sciences, with the same encyclopedic knowledge and brilliant insights evident in his study of the physical sciences, and to suggest as exciting implications concerning the nature of man as he had for the nature of the cosmos. If I had time tonight to follow the development of his thought in this area, I might be depriving you the high adventure of studying his ideas first hand. I know no more exciting chapters in any book than Lyman's story of the development of ideas about life from theories of mechanistic evolution to those of emergent freedom and creativity, in which

¹Ibid., page 284.

²Ibid., page 287.

God is conceived as being truly immanent in the evolutionary process. For Lyman the end product of creative evolution is that creative intelligence which is in communion with Divine Reality. "When creative religion and creative intelligence unite," he says, "we have the forces of progress at their maximum."¹ Such intelligence, in his thought, knows God both as immanent and transcendent. "The intuitions of the mystic and the courageous faith of the prophet become a veritable sharing in the life of God."²

In this view of human life and its relation to reality, there are implications for questioning minds which Lyman takes pains to examine. What for example, can be said of such persistent questions as that of Man's freedom versus God's foreknowledge, or of the presence of evil in the universe, or of the soul's immortality? As for freedom versus foreknowledge, Lyman believed that "omniscience in the sense of complete foreknowledge cannot be affirmed of God," but rather "complete knowledge of the actual universe and of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness in their eternal nature."³ For Lyman the very concept of morality presupposes metaphysical freedom. As he sees it, an idea of absolute foreknowledge denies the possibility of metaphysical freedom which he believes belongs, at least to some extent, to all finite spirits, to all human beings.

As for the age-old problem of evil in a universe where goodness is conceived as infinite, Lyman sees God as Creative Love expressing itself in those processes, both cosmic and historic, which embody such love. But in processes of destruction and degeneration, which resist God's purposes, God, he thinks, cannot be immanent but must, by his very nature, be in active resistance. For Lyman, Divine Love suffers as does human love. Nevertheless, he concludes, while evil necessarily exists

¹Ibid., page 341.

²Ibid., page 343.

³Ibid., page 432.

in a world where there is freedom and spontaneity, evil can, in a profound sense, be changed into good, through the healing power of love.

And what of immortality, that question which has been for man truly "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma"? As I have read and re-read this section of Lyman's great book over the years, I have always been glad that he used Dr. Seelye Bixler's thinking on immortality as a springboard for his discussion. (Dr. Bixler was, as some of you will recall, the first Lyman lecturer, in 1949.) It helped me because my own reasoning and experience had brought me to Bixler's conclusion (as stated in his book on immortality, published in 1931) that "immortality should stand not for an unending existence but for the realization in mortal life, of that by which mortality itself is transcended,"¹ that is, by man's apprehensions of timeless truths and values. Bixler would substitute for the idea of endless quantity of life a quality of life which transcends temporal limitations. Lyman went along with Bixler, but further. These are his words:

"Immortality, for ethical religion, does not mean mere prolongation of existence. It means first of all the attainment of a quality of life which may rightly be understood as a real union with God by those who attain to a life that is Christ-like in quality, a life controlled by the spirit of love. This means that the eternal life may be lived in the midst of time."²

But he goes on to say that "this present possession of eternal life is itself a true earnest of immortality." For Eugene Lyman the idea of God as a Cosmic Creative Spirit, bringing into being through emergent evolution finite creators, implies their continuing significance, for the universe, and the assurance "that they and the spir-

¹Bixler, S., *Immortality and the Present Mood*, page 54.

²Lyman, E. W., *The Meaning and Truth of Religion*, page 379.

itual community which they labor with God to achieve, will be immortal.”¹

“Well,” I said to myself a year or so ago, “I can go along with Bixler and hope along with Lyman.” Then experience intervened. Perhaps this is too personal. But I have already said that this is not at all a proper memorial lecture. The experiences which intervened were the anticipation and actuality of death of two cherished friends, in this year of 1956. Both, as it happened, had told me that they would be with me here at Sweet Briar for this lecture. One was Richmond’s Dr. Emily Gardner, a prominent leader of medical work in Virginia; and the other was Sweet Briar’s Terry Shaw McCurdy, who contributed immeasurably to this college as Alumnae Secretary from 1947 to 1950. I saw both, at the height of their useful lives, face death by cancer with such courage, such good humor, such magnificence of spirit that I can only say, quite simply, that for the first time in my own experience, I understood, in part, the meaning of Eugene Lyman’s “earnest of immortality.”

A moment ago I referred to Lyman’s reference to “a Christ-like life” as that kind of life which can be immortal in the midst of time. Despite the far horizons of his thought and the abstract nature of his reasoning, Lyman in his magnum opus, as well as in his earlier and later writings,² makes it clear that for him Jesus is truly the revelation of God, of Cosmic Moral Purposiveness, of Eternal Creative Good Will. In opposition to the Crisis-Theology, Lyman bases his Christian faith upon the historical content of Jesus’ life and not upon any dogma about him. For Lyman it was the way of life demonstrated by Jesus which most clearly revealed the Creative Love at the heart of Reality. In one of his first published articles he had asked which was central to Christianity, the historical Jesus or the Christian ideal.

¹Lyman, E. W., op. cit., page 378.

²See E. W. Lyman’s *Religion and the Issues of Life* (1943), page 45 et seq. for his later statements.

His answer then was this: "Truths embodied in life are always more luminous . . . An ideal gains a new radiance when it shines through a personality."¹

I do not know what specific experiences of personality gave Eugene Lyman, in his early years, that profound insight. But I do know that in the years which followed, Lyman's own personality gave a new radiance to the Christian ideal; and many there were who saw the mind of Christ in him. When Mary Ely Lyman in 1936 wrote her superb little book on Jesus, she posed the question, "What was unique in Jesus?" Not his teachings, for they were a part of his Jewish heritage. For her Jesus' unique contribution to religion was the dynamic of his personality. "Behind the teaching was the life, giving fresh and vital meaning to the teaching."² I wrote down these words a few weeks ago in the stacks of Yale's Divinity School Library, where I live and breathe and have a considerable part of my being. As I glanced along the numerous shelves borne down with centuries of writings about Jesus, with the literally thousands of books on the subject, I wondered if any interpreter has ever been more strategically situated than Mary Lyman for understanding the essential nature of Jesus' personality. Somehow it seemed a little unfair to so many others!

But now, with the translating of the Dead Sea Scrolls, will come a new flood of interpretation of Jesus. It is too early to tell how this tremendous archeological discovery will affect the world's thinking about Jesus. Already there are indications that apologetic and special pleading will tend to play down the astonishing similarities between the Covenanters and the early Christians, in both teaching and religious practice. But we may hope that sensitive and free minds like Eugene Lyman's will come forth to give informed and unbiased

¹Lyman, E. W., *The Ultimate Test of Religious Truth*, page 33 et seq.

²Lyman, M. E., *Jesus*, page 35

judgments, which I personally believe will add immeasurably to mankind's understanding of Jesus in history.

I want to bring to a close this homage to Eugene Lyman, as Lyman himself concluded his *Meaning and Truth of Religion*, with some thoughts about the Good Society or, as he called it, in Bergson's words, the "Beloved Community." He believed God to be "most fully manifested in human personalities completely dedicated to the building of the Beloved Community." Lyman conceived this community as world-wide, a true brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God, understood as Cosmic Creative Love. He saw racialism and nationalism as the chief foes of mankind's unity, with nationalism's predilection for war as the most serious threat to creative religion in its effort to build the Beloved Community. We must, he says, persistently seek the abolition of war and the promoting of organization for peace.

This great book of Lyman's, the product of some ten years' writing, was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* when it came out in 1933. It was news among publishers that year that religion had made the headlines. Now, a quarter of a century later, the agonized need of Lyman's Beloved Community is making headlines throughout the world. As mankind stands again—or still—or perhaps just more consciously—on the brink of annihilation, I wonder why we have made so little progress in the years between. In whatever other ways we have failed, I do most deeply believe that authoritarian ideas, especially authoritarian claims in religion, have been a serious barrier to progress toward the Beloved Community. In my experience in other cultures as well as in the studies which I have been doing in this field, I have seen how attempts to build a better world through the organizing of moral forces are continually frustrated by the bitter rivalries of authoritarian religions. The Indian philosopher, Sarvepalli Rad-

hakrishnan, long active in efforts to build a world community of understanding, complains in his latest book, *The Recovery of Faith*, that westerners have a habit, even as they talk of cooperation, of implying that Christianity is the one and only perfect religion for all men for all time.¹ He goes on to make the point that totalitarian faith, being essentially neither liberal nor democratic, overlooks "the value of individual freedom, of personal integrity" and naturally allies itself with totalitarian politics. He recalls that Karl Barth, of neo-orthodox fame, has gone on record as believing "Anti-semitism is right . . . Israel is an evil people." But I think no one has made the point more concisely than Samuel Taylor Coleridge when he somewhere said, in effect, "if you start by loving Christianity more than truth, you will next love a sect or church more than Christianity and end by loving yourself more than all."²

Just recently, the historian, Arnold Toynbee, admitted, after nearly thirty years' work on his *Study of History*, that religion is again taking the central place in his thought, though not from the viewpoint of his early training, in which Christianity was taught as *the* unique revelation. "I have now come," he says, "to believe that all the historic religions and philosophies are partial revelations of the truth. For each of us," he goes on, "the easiest approach to the mystery of the universe is, no doubt, his ancestral religion; but this does not mean that he ought to rule out the other approaches that the other religions offer. If one can enter into these," he concludes, "as well as into his own, it is gain, not loss."³

And I am reminded of Bernard Shaw's wonderful thought in *Major Barbara*: When you have *learned* something, it feels at first as though you have *lost* something.

¹Radhakrishnan, S., op. cit., (1955), page 35.

²Ibid., page 71 *et seq.*

³Toynbee, A., Essay in *Toynbee of History*, Edited by Ashley Montague (1956), pages 6-7.

Ah, well, time has run out—perhaps, for some of you, long since. But it has seemed to me of importance that I speak as I have on this occasion and in this year of Sweet Briar College's fiftieth anniversary. For ten of those fifty years this college was blessed by the Lyman presence, and the benefits to this college are incalculably greater than quantitative ratio can convey. For the next fifty years I commend to you for study and guidance, indeed for your own and the world's salvation, Eugene William Lyman's vision for the new age. Long ago he wrote, "We ourselves are genuinely saved only as we in turn become saviors."

¹Lyman, E. W., *The God of The New Age*, page 26.

BOOKS BY EUGENE WILLIAM LYMAN

THEOLOGY AND HUMAN PROBLEMS, a comparative study of absolute idealism and pragmatism as interpreters of religion. C. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1910.

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN MODERN LIFE. C. Scribner's Sons, New York, 1918.

THE GOD OF THE NEW AGE. Pilgrim Press, Boston, 1918.

THE MEANING OF SELFHOOD AND FAITH IN IMMORTALITY. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1928.

THE MEANING AND TRUTH OF RELIGION. C. Scribner's Sons, New York, London, 1933.

RELIGION AND THE ISSUES OF LIFE. Fleming H. Revell Co., New York, 1943.

