EUGENE WILLIAM LYMAN LECTURE

October 8, 1954

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE
Sweet Briar, Virginia

Eugene William Lyman Lecture

LIVING IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL NOW

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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." The present lecture by Dr. Howard Schomer is the fourth in the series.

LIVING IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL NOW

Early last summer on the coast of Maine I had the exciting privilege of taking part in an intimate international Christian seminar. Medical workers, educators, church leaders—both lay and ministerial, men and women—came apart in a simple retreat-house prior to the great ecumenical assembly at Evanston for the purpose of listening, of asking each other, "What is the Spirit today saying to the churches, all over the world?" The fifty or more participants came from Europe, the Near-East, Africa, India, Ceylon, China, Japan, the Philippines, Mexico, and several parts of the United States, including the state of Virginia. Many of the earth's peoples, with their burdens and their hopes, were vividly present in the minds of all as we discussed the plight and the privilege of the Christian Church in this revolutionary age.

Through these days of candid and earnest sharing we were led to talk not only of world conditions and of the Church as an objective organization—something outside of ourselves to be observed and described—but also to speak of the sources of our personal convictions, of the miracle of our coming together from such diverse racial and social backgrounds into such a natural and trustful fellowship.

One evening, the Dean of a Japanese theological school confided to us how the shock of a serious illness in his student days had shaken the unruffled and worldly atheism which was his family heritage, had given him the lonely quiet in which he discovered the aesthetic and spiritual depths of his own being.

Seeking better to understand the new life which opened before him after his convalescence, he came to New York, shortly after the first World War, and began study at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. There he discovered, through the personality and the teaching of him whom we gratefully commemorate in this lecture-hour, the guiding force of all his later years. Our Japanese

friend told us that Dr. Eugene William Lyman's conviction that at the very heart of the universe is "creative good will" became the unshatterable foundation of his own life and faith. He confessed that this belief set up great tension in his soul as, with his people, he lived through the years of vainglorious militarism, total war, total defeat, and then national conversion to the ways of peace, only to find that at present many of his American friends urge the Japanese to deny their hard-bought pacifism and unhesitatingly to re-arm. "If I were still an atheist, if I were a Shintoist or a Buddhist," concluded the Dean, "I should not know such a tension in my soul, such moral suffering and spiritual anguish. It is because I became a Christian, convinced that 'creative good will' *is* ultimate in all life, that the contradictions of our time hurt me so deeply. But what I saw of the mind of Christ in those years at Dr. Lyman's feet—these things I can never deny!"

I am sure that in our generation there are creatively suffering Christians like my Japanese friend in many lands and in many parts of the United States. Such men and women are incapable of making a comfortable spiritual peace with a morally unstable world by simply adapting to each of its successive contradictions. In their utter honesty about the vast chasm which separates the ways of God and the ways of men, their lives are beacon-lights by which humanity is perpetually warned against that final treason of which it is capable—the calling of evil good and good evil, the worship of Satan as the Son of God. We gratefully remember in this hour one who for decades unwaveringly reflected across the realm of theological education in the United States the pure light of that faith which holds that God is not made in the image of men but that men may be born again in the image of God. Dr. Lyman believed that the ultimate character of the universe itself is neither vain nor demonic but Christly. We can be sure that we truly honor Eugene William Lyman when, rising above mere veneration of a spiritual forebear, we seek, as he did, to read the signs of our times with radiant confidence in the Lord of Life.

I. Called into His Marvelous Light

All of us know something of the spiritual anguish of which the Dean of the Japanese seminary spoke. We are convinced that in its source and in its destiny the universe belongs to God. But as the storms of history buffet us about, we too are overwhelmed by the avoidable tragedy which, helplessly, we observe on every hand. We are forced to recognize that, while the ultimate issues are without any doubt safely in God's hands, here in our human realm Christ-likeness just is not native, is no more at home now than it was when the Christ himself walked our common earth. It may be that sometimes, puzzled and perplexed, we ask ourselves what belonging to Christ's Church, in such a refractory world—and especially in such a violent epoch as this twentieth century—can possibly mean.

Now the central affirmation of this lecture is that the anguished followers of Jesus Christ in our generation, recognizing that they are surrounded by the ruins of historic Christendom, are called to a wondrous mission: theirs to live brokenly, steadfastly, expectantly as fellow-members of the universal Church which the Spirit of God is gathering together from all the nations, through the centuries. This, if we say "Yes" to Jesus Christ, is our high calling and awesome task. Awakening to its challenge, do we not already find our orthodox liberalism or our liberal orthodoxy in theological matters, the one no less than the other, surpassed by the glory of the faith by which we actually live? Only a more vital, a more loving theology than any upon which we may at present rely will do justice to our exciting contemporary experience as members of the emerging world-wide Christian community. To this ecumenical theology of fellowship we would contribute these groping reflections, asking forgiveness for their evident inadequacy in the face of the Apostle Peter's ringing appeal:

> "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual

> house. . . . You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."
>
> (I Peter 2:4,5a,9)

Our endeavor is simply to work out, in the Apostle's terms, a description of the real situation of Christ's Church in this mid-twentieth-century world.

II. The End of the Christian Era

When our great-grandparents read these words of Peter about the "living stone," Christ, being "rejected by men," it is very possible that they saw in their mind's-eye the corrupt Sanhedrin of the Jews judging Jesus a blasphemer, deserving of the death penalty. If they thought of his "rejection" in contemporary terms at all, probably they conceived of the guilty parties as composed primarily of heathen peoples abroad and certain notorious infidels or immoral persons at home in the Christian West. Through more than fifteen hundred years most of the Western World had paid obeisance to Christ's Name, one nation after another making his Gospel its official credo, or at least taking a very benevolent attitude toward the Christian religion. After King Clovis' conversion in 496 and the resultant entry of the whole French nation into the Christian fold, France becoming "the eldest daughter of the Church," each century saw whole new societies baptized into the faith. After all this, how could Europeans help but feel that they were obviously "birthright Christians"? Only a tiny group of extremists, in the nineteenth-century West, considered the "rejection" of Christ as other than a first-century incident for which certain Jews and Romans were entirely to blame.

It is the long chapters of European history thus rapidly evoked, and not anything in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, which gave birth to the unconscious but basic assumption of almost all of Western religious thought down to the very recent past: *Christendom.* Christian monarchs, Chris-

tian nations, Christian society—a total Christian civilization —were included in this fundamental notion. For all conventional thinking, to be a European man was undistinguishable from being a Christian; if you were not European, you certainly were not a Christian, and it was by no means sure that you were a man!

The first wide-spread contacts between the European peoples and other human groups—Marco Polo, the Crusades, and the exploration of the New World—seemed only to confirm this dogmatic conviction: Europe=civilization= Christendom, whereas Outside-Europe=barbary=heathendom. Since most contacts with this disagreeable Outside-Europe were clashes of one sort or another, the auxiliary notions of Christian territorial states, Christian armies to protect them, and Christian conquest to extend them very naturally took form. At the center of this vast fortified power-block which was Christendom, reigning spiritually—and in a measure temporally also—over a larger part of the awakened world than any other emperor before or after, sat enthroned the self-proclaimed Vicar-of-Christ-upon-earth, the Pope at Rome. Having thus annexed most accessible space, it was natural that the concept of Christendom should annex time as well. Progressively throughout the early Middle Ages the calendars of the civilized world discarded all merely local or national ways of computing the passage of the years, and five centuries after the death of Jesus Christ the *Christian era,* the calendar A.D. and B.C., was born.

When the fire of the Reformation suddenly broke out a thousand years later, we might expect to find that this all-embracing idea of Christendom would be a target for the Reformers' bitter attack. Did they not sound the trumpet call for the return to the Scriptures, to decisive personal faith, denouncing all mere formalism in matters of religion? Yes, this they did, and violent was their argument against the Catholic *form* of unity, which they found *imperial* and despotic in its Roman centralization. Yet the great Reformers, dependent for the protection of themselves and their cause upon the support of various princes, seem never to

have put in doubt the *national* form of Christian unity. They largely accepted and based their church organization on the old juridical principle upon which political Christendom had been built: *Cuius regio, eius religio*—"Whosesoever the kingdom, his the religion of the realm."

Kierkegaard's celebrated story of the mid-nineteenth-century Danish storekeeper who, stirred to his depths by a new-style evangelistic sermon, began to ask himself if he were really saved, is a wonderful evidence of how ingrained even in Protestantism the notion of Christendom long remained. The storekeeper's wife thought it quite sufficient to put an end to her husband's absurd doubts to make him look at the religious map of Europe: he was a Dane, Denmark was colored "Lutheran," Lutherans are Christians—so of course he was saved!

It is a measure of the persistence of this all-conditioning cultural view of Christianity that only a small minority of Kierkegaard's contemporaries found him and the storekeeper right, whereas most readers considered the storekeeper's wife eminently sound. The un-Scriptural myth of Christendom had only begun to explode with the appearance of the "fringe-groups" of the Reformation, such as the Anabaptists on the Continent and the English Independents. Their courageous insistence that there are no *birthright* Christians, but only *converted* ones, that a man's religion cannot be determined by his king but only by the work of the Holy Spirit in his individual soul, was not without effect. The persecution that fell upon them when they proclaimed that no church exists except where converted people gather, and that *mutatis mutandis* wherever converted people gather, there is Christ's church no matter what princes and bishops might say, did not keep them from serving as heralds of a still far-distant deliverance of the Christian faith from Christendom's illusions of worldly grandeur. Their feeling that they served society best not by baptizing its existent way of life "Christian" but through forming within the sinful body of society of their time a close community in which the Gospel should be practiced with thorough-going radicalism is doubtless too

advanced for the mind of most church people still today. Nevertheless, the present-day renewal of pure spirituality and true universality in the Christian movement has its historic origins in the work of the minority churches and outright sects of the Age of the Reformation.

Although the root-cause of the disintegration of that dazzling hodge-podge called Christendom is thus the return from the Christ of the cathedrals to the Christ of the Scriptures, the recovery of the inwardness of faith, Christian civilization suffered its most devastating attacks on the political and cultural, rather than the spiritual, planes. It was in the New World outpost of that civilization that, for the first time since our era became officially "Christian," a nation of Europeans openly denied that their national state had *a* religion. The founding fathers of the Republic of the United States of America, faced with the fact that church-goers among the American people were a minority, and that among this minority were held many different ecclesiastical convictions, provided in the Constitution itself that the Congress should make no laws whatsoever with regard to the establishment of any official form of religion. The Christian West has thus had in its midst ever since 1787 at least one nation-state whose official policy is benevolent non-partisanship with respect to all religions. This was the first great breach in that illusion of Christendom which had given rise to the hoary fiction that every state must have an official religion, even when it tolerated dissent, in order to insure the basic unity of its people. Such a breach also let it clearly be seen that the obverse side of the same fiction—that the faith of the people is whatever faith their state professes—is not necessarily so. When faith flourishes in a non-confessional state, one can safely conclude that the faith of the people is not all dependent upon the faith of their prince. Then the reality of religion and the true nature of the church are not by any means indissolubly linked up with the vast politico-cultural power-block which is Christendom.

At the beginning of the twentieth century France took the step which a modern nation, keenly aware of the sanctity

of individual conscience in matters of religion, is bound sooner or later to take, if the dominant church in that country continues to maintain aggressively the pretentions of an all-embracing Christendom: the complete separation of church and state, the formation of an officially a-religious government. The *Etat laïc,* the "lay State," makes a still wider breach in the façade of Christendom than the American type of constitution, non-partisan but generally benevolent with regard to all religions. The "lay" or secular state heralds and even pre-supposes, a nation in which many people look upon faith as an intensely personal matter, whereas many others have simply ceased to look upon religion at all.

The final stage in the dissolution of the political structure of Christendom is, of course, the advent of the so-called "scientific state" of the Soviet type. The American "Founding Fathers" respected the religious principle but denied the state any power of regimentation in matters of faith. The French anticlericals, themselves fundamentally agnostic, affirmed the sovereignty of personal convictions in all spiritual matters, requiring the government to observe with regard to such questions a cold, strict neutrality. But the architects of the Soviet "scientific state," convinced of the truth of dialectical materialism and the harmfulness of all "religious superstitions," proclaim the coming of world-wide anti-Christendom, the rise of a new, economically "scientific" and thus anti-religious civilization. If the state, for tactical reasons, still permits "religious propaganda," it actively promotes anti-religious propaganda. The new "scientific state," like the old "Christian state," constitutes itself a guardian of the people's faith, and both are in agreement in ignoring the inwardness of faith, seeking rather mass-indoctrination and conformity.

How important it is to see this last stage in the political decomposition of Christendom in the full historical context we have rapidly sketched! Official religiosity could in the long run only lead to official irreligion, as any careful reading of the Bible clearly discloses. The sins of the "scientific state" are but those of the "Christian state" turned inside out.

It is likely (some observers would say even certain) that the hypocrisy of the Christian state destroyed the faith of many, whereas the spiritual barrenness of the "scientific state" may yet quicken multitudes to an independent quest for personal religious conviction. Whatever tomorrow may bring forth, we must however face the stern fact that today we in the West have, by and large, come up hard against the end of "the Christian era."

Americans are generally incredulous at recent reports about the religious temperature of the European lands in which most of the churches of the United States, as institutions, were cradled. Consecrated servants of the Gospel in France, Catholic and Protestant alike, judge their land largely "de-Christianized." Responsible British church-leaders refer to their country as "semi-pagan." Less dramatic Scandinavian churchmen reveal that church interest in their lands has rarely in the past been manifested by so few. German church-workers declare that, behind the façade of conservative conformity, there is among their people a very wide-spread failure of contact with the essential Gospel. In the various Western European nations, according to the estimates of church leaders, no more than ten to twenty-five per cent of the people are in good standing in their respective churches. And everybody knows that most churches do not feel it their duty to require high *minimum* standards for church membership.

If we would, therefore, live in the Church Universal *now,* the unique time in all the flow of the centuries which the Lord of the Church has reserved for *us,* we are bound to do so in utter realism and even in anguish. Notwithstanding the very recent revival of religious interest in the United States, seen in the total world-context Christianity is today riding no tidal wave of popularity among mankind. In spite of the spectacular Assembly of the World Council of Churches to which our country has so lately had the privilege of being host, ours is the epoch of massive desertion of almost all the historic churches of the world. If we expect, with Peter, to "be built into a spiritual house," to be "a holy nation,

God's own people, . . . to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light," we will have under us none of the comfortable props of the old and defunct political Christendom of bygone days. For the truth of Christ's Gospel, for the health of our souls, for the fidelity of this hopeful new ecumenical movement, for the only certain way of redemption open to embittered humanity, the hour has struck to renew the Reformers' proclamation of the eternal word: "The just shall live by faith alone!"

"Living in the Church Universal *Now*?" *Now* is the brashly post-Christian era!

III. Christendom Lost, Church Regained

The breakdown of the ancient structures of Christendom has not overwhelmed the awakened churchmen of the world nor smothered with its débris the fire which Jesus Christ kindled among men. On the contrary, the decline of "the Christian era" has seen the beginning of the recovery of the Christian Church. The gradual social disestablishment of Christianity has permitted men to regain some sense of the Church as a peculiar, a divine, Society, miraculously gathered together in the midst of rising and falling civilizations. As the familiar image of Christendom fades, the naked outline of the Church looms ever higher above man's desolate horizon. The Lord of the Church, in his boundless humility and infinite humanity, restores our hope.

Nothing in this happy development astonishes those who recall such chapters of Christian history as that engraved forever in the memories of French Huguenots. Perhaps their ancestors were among the very first Christians to emerge, consciously, from the web of illusions involved in Christendom. If the earliest Huguenots, like the first Puritans, were inclined uncritically to assume the existence of a "Christian country" which needed only to be removed from the corrupt Roman yoke and submitted to the pure Scriptural government of the Reformed faith, their children in the 17th

and 18th centuries moved far beyond the exiled Pilgrims in the rediscovery of the essential independence of the Church with regard to all human institutions. Their armies destroyed, their political rights abolished, their civil liberties annulled, they lived for a hundred years as outlaws in their own land. When their services and sacraments were absolutely forbidden, their parsonages seized, their church buildings razed, their pastors arrested on sight, their leading people burned at the stake or, worse still, chained for years to the oars of royal galleys, the Huguenots could scarcely conserve untarnished the vision of a total Christendom. In the "Church of the Desert," as they termed their great congregations assembled in wild mountain vales under the shelter of chestnut forests and at the feet of clandestine preachers who expounded God's Word from the modest height of a rickshaw-type of portable pulpit, the Huguenots rediscovered the *depth-dimension,* the rich inwardness of that Christian community which has been stripped of every exterior possession and so possesses only Christ.

Boys of that day, who in the teeth of blackest adversity answered a divine call to the ministry, had to make their way through two hundred miles of mountains to a sort of Huguenot theological seminary in free Protestant Switzerland. They came back bearing alias names rather than divinity hoods, taking up the exhausting and dangerous itinerant ministry which alone could preserve the great lines of the Reformed faith for the isolated "churches of the desert" scattered all across the mountainous southern-half of France. Rarely did such dangerous living continue far into their thirties, for hostile neighbors ultimately succeeded, in spite of the Huguenot sentinels, in guiding the King's police to the places where such forbidden meetings were held. Summarily imprisoned or executed for no other crime than the fact of their ministry in what the royal writs termed "the pretended reformed religion," these youths came to speak of their peaceful seminary on the shore of Lake Geneva as "the School of Death." In the same Cévenol region under the Nazi occupation, modern Boy Scouts—sometimes de-

scendants of 18th century martyrs—frequently chose to name their patrols not "Silver Fox" or "Black Bear" but "Désubas" or "Morel," in honor of some heroic pastor of the "Age of the Desert," the whole patrol proud of the alias under which he died and it now lives.

To this vision of a church whose living reality is so deep that it can survive the loss of every normal exterior advantage, the sons of the Huguenots, by their language, unconsciously testify still today. They never call their place of worship a "church." It is always "the temple." The "church" is people, Christ's people, gathered in his presence. How could the language of a church which existed for more than a century without any buildings whatsoever, a church which has vivid memories of "the Desert," ever return to the mistaken notion that a building is a "church," or that Christianity is inextricably attached to a given society, economy, country, or civilization?

Even where, humanly speaking, history appears to have treated churches more kindly than in the case of Huguenot France, the crumbling foundations of the old Christendom are apparent and not without happy repercussions. As various segments of Christendom become less sure of themselves and their security, they become more interested in each other's experiences, less bound by unchanging tradition and more open to the Spirit's leading. Churches can grow *in breadth* just as in depth.

For example, a different kind of government than the Serbs, Croats, Magyars and Montenegrins have ever known before shakes the century-old churches of what is now called Yugoslavia. Suddenly they are all, great and small alike, completely disestablished, Yugoslavia becoming the first country this side of Russia to follow in the path France opened up fifty years ago: sharp separation between church and state. The Yugoslav Protestants, a minority of but 100,000, wonder how they will ever get along in this strange new world where no tax-money is any longer available to meet expenses and churches have no rôle in public life.

French Protestants have hardly been aware of the existence of Yugoslav Protestants up until this point. Now *they* wonder if the latter would find encouragement in the history of French Protestantism over the last half-century. The Yugoslavs are eager for full reports on how the little French minority church has managed to survive, to evangelize, to carry on foreign missions, welfare and educational work, to publish, to influence French society in general. A team of French pastors is invited to visit Yugoslav Protestantism, to examine their similar problems, to address synods and parishes about French experience. Yugoslav pastors prepare to return the visitation. Two more churches have found new reality welling up in their liturgical prayers and petitions in behalf of the Church Universal.

As the old parochialism and provincialism give way before the growing breadth of concern abroad among the churches, as denomination after denomination feels increasingly that the old Christendom, with its largely compartmentalized national or confessional church-groups, is gone beyond repair, the deep thrust toward a more inclusive fellowship pushes churches into new and unheard of relations. For example, because the Reformation broke out at a moment in European history when the Turks were harassing the eastern borders of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whereas the Russian territories were (as so often before and since) almost hermetically closed to foreigners, the churches issuing from the Reformation and the Orthodox (or Oriental) churches had through many years little or no occasion to reflect upon each other's existence. But today Orthodoxy is even less firmly entrenched in the social order of some areas in the East than is Western Protestantism in certain of its ancient strongholds. Vast numbers of refugees from the East are a constant reminder to Western Protestants that their sympathies would be narrow indeed if they did not care for the Orthodox refugee just as lovingly as for the Protestant refugee. But such spontaneous growth in breadth of concern, developing ties of suffering and service not only between those churches which are immediate sisters but even between some churches which

have never before had contact with each other, cannot help but lead to the fresh discovery of another dimension of the Christian Church at large: *its very great length,* its ramified history.

It is not that we had not known before, in a bookish way, that just as Protestants continue their dialogue with Luther, Calvin and George Fox, just as Roman Catholics sit in grateful admiration at St. Thomas Aquinas' feet, so the Orthodox commune with St. John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen. The difference is that, in the widespread disruption of our times, we are coming to know members of various traditions other than our own as living individuals, and their special heritage is becoming, at least a little, our own. Slowly there dawns in our hearts, and not only in our minds, the recognition that in the Church Universal we embrace in fellowship not only the multi-colored mass of our brethren in Christ all over today's troubled world, but also our brethren in all the centuries behind us and in all the years to come. It is even possible, when we have come to know them better, that in St. John Chrysostom, or St. Dominic, or John Woolman we may find a kindred spirit, a guide, a beloved brother in Christ, such as, for us, no one of our own generation may yet have become. Still more moving than such spiritual companionship with Christian leaders of other times is the personal discovery of the whole corporate reality of the Church in ancient cities and unknown lands. Our "home church" comes to include not only the folks among whom we grew up, the generation before our own, a Reformer or two, and a sympathetic "saint" of a far-gone day, but all the fallible, sinful and yet desperately hopeful followers Christ has ever known, in all times and places—people very like ourselves as they moved blindly toward death, trustfully toward Him. The Church Universal in which we would live *now* did not begin *yesterday.*

Nor is it likely that it will end tomorrow, although we *are* all learning to observe a certain modesty in our pronouncements upon even the immediate future of this earthly globe, let alone the total destiny of the universe. Come what may,

we know that as long as men exist, here on this planet or at any other point where the heavenly Father may have set them down in his limitless kingdom of space, He will be leading still others, fundamentally like ourselves, out of their sinful night into the warm light of fellowship in His Son. They too are one with us in the shelter of the Church Universal, for the sweep of its universality is surely commensurate with the vastness of the universe itself:

> "The Father of glory," writes Paul, "raised Christ from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far beyond all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come, and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all."

The Emperor Constantine, even more than the early bishops, gave the Church of Christ the stamp of organizational, territorial cohesion. That stamp is now broken, leaving but jagged traces of the exterior unity it once imposed. But God has blessed us with a stronger unity than any which the princes of this world could possibly bequeath. The depth, the breadth, the length and *the height* of this unity we, as yet, only faintly perceive. But we know that it is grounded in Him who is One, and that it will therefore surely abide.

IV. The Glory of the Church and the Misery of the Churches

Those who once have glimpsed the pure glory of the authentic Church of Christ, delivered from its ancient bondage to the conglomerate ideal of Christendom, breathlessly seek to live in this Universal Church *now*. The rational mind can conceive of no new world order, the moral sense can envisage no just society, the artistic soul can imagine no natural harmony which elicits a devotion as strong as that which men of faith would proffer to the Lord Christ. Grasp-

ing the utter wonder of God's eternal reign, looking to the Church for its translation into the mortal language of time, Christians are awakening from their spiritual sloth. Christendom, exalting priestly domination and rabbinical casuistry, had deadened the religion of multitudes. The renewal of the vision of Christ's perfect Church—inward, unitive, age-old and even cosmic—has quickened the faith of many.

As long as modern men were content to assume the reality of Christian civilization and to consider the churches as pillars of civilized society, fundamental criticism of the life of those churches was rarely heard. They seemed to be doing their duty when they baptized, confirmed, married and buried the peoples born within their territories, describing to them essential Christian beliefs and values. Depositaries of certain records and guardians of certain customs, churches were not expected to be terribly unlike a Bureau of Weights and Standards, functioning within the total administration of Christendom. Only as the pristine image of a Church radically true to its divine Lord was recaptured in this twentieth-century, did vanguard Christians realize fully the frightful misery of their actual churches.

We owe the ongoing subjects of present ecumenical study, the objectives of ecumenical travail, to the first anguished outcries of those awakened to the real state of the churches through their consecrated effort to live already here and now in the Church Universal. Today we share their discoveries, and, like them, we too can never again slumber and sleep.

After decisive personal experience of the grace of Christ, the individual believer can never be the same person he once was. In the same way, after even the first tentative steps in living as a conscious part of the Church Universal, the individual church can never again be content with itself or its time-honored compromise between Christ's way and the world's.

For we *know* now that all things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's: but we guiltily recognize that,

in certain cases, our several churches are not simply distinctive but hostilely divisive, blatant denials of the unity of their one Lord.

In the marvelous light of Christ's world-wide mission, we see clearly how closed our fellowship has unwittingly become, how tremendous is the evangelizing task before us—reaching the unreached in *every* land.

When we meditate upon the fullness of the call which Jesus Christ addresses to every member of his Church, the single-standard of discipleship which his Gospel reveals, we are convinced that all of our churches, renouncing their various forms of clericalism, *must* become indivisible communities in which the faith articulated in the sanctuary and the faith lived in the city are one and the same.

As we contemplate the warm, fraternal communion of the saints, the power of reconciliation which is at the heart of Christ's Church, conflicts between Christians are intolerable to our conscience, and must be overcome through deeds of justice, mercy and love.

Patient, serious and often inspired work is being carried on by Christians in many parts of the world, aiming at the relief of all this misery within the life of the churches themselves. The ringing declarations of a great ecumenical assembly like that at Evanston derive their only validity from the fact that they give public expression to those points of repentance and reform upon which the churches, in their day-by-day work, have honestly reached effective consensus. Happily, once such formulations have been made publicly, they encourage many of the timorous to let themselves go, to abandon their traditional positions to the grace and mercy of God. Thus the churches of Christ, always sinful but ever in process of reformation, move toward their unique, their divine calling.

Pastor Marc Boegner, president of the Protestant Federation of France, has reminded us all that the beginning of the movement of the churches toward unity and renewal

is an act of prayer. The Lord's Prayer is already the prayer of the Church Universal, learned and loved by every child of Christian parents, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant alike. Churches that consciously pray the great prayer with each other and for each other cannot interminably ignore each other or the hunger of the world.

In these past fifteen years of world-wide war and its disastrous consequences, churches which had been learning painfully, through the first decades of this century, to talk together about their serious disagreements have taken immense strides toward responsible family life. If by the time of the great Oxford and Edinburgh conferences in 1937 they had begun to taste the exquisite joy of uniting their diverse accents in a common hymn of praise and a common supplication, it has been through the challenge of unprecedented destruction and suffering that they have heard their Master's call to far-flung tasks of common service. The plight of war prisoners, the crisis of "orphaned missions," the desperation of Displaced Persons, the hunger of whole populations, the devastation of thousands of church-edifices and institutions, the disruption of existence for millions of refugees, and now the menace of atomic annihilation of all the world's peoples—these human situations of weakness and horror have been the occasion of the largest common *action* in which churches have cooperated since the Crusades. Unlike the latter undertaking, today's network of interchurch aid and refugee relief contains no slightest element of moral ambiguity: churches are pouring out funds and lending workers on a very important scale, with no other purpose than to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." They seek to help each other understand better what the Lord requires of each and of all together in this nothing less than an apocalyptic age. Through down-to-earth ecumenical programs of material relief, church reconstruction, refugee resettlement, and re-tooling of educational and evangelistic enterprises in key-areas, multitudes of Christians have, for the first time, beheld the vision of the Church Universal.

And yet——. The various commissions in the Evanston Assembly, in their final reports released to all the churches for their study and reaction, show us movingly how far our actual church practices still fall short of the glorious vision of the truly universal Church.

Our growing Christian unity is real, but Evanston shows the point at which it is now arrested:

> *"We ask each other whether we do not sin when we deny the sole lordship of Christ over the church by claiming the vineyard for our own, by possessing our 'church' for ourselves, by regarding our theology, order, history, nationality, etc., as our own valued treasures, thus involving ourselves more and more in the separation of sin. The point at which we are unable to renounce the things which divide us, because we believe that obedience to God Himself compels us to stand fast—this is the point at which we come together to ask for mercy and light."*

A sense of mission to the whole inhabited world—the true meaning of OIKOUMENE—is getting hold of the imagination of churches everywhere, but to carry out that mission:

> *"There must be encounter with the world. The church must break out of its isolation and introversion, meeting the individual where he is with the compassion and comprehension of Christ. . . . Too often our words have been impotent because they have not been embodied in works of service, compassion and identification. It is not enough for the church to speak out of its security. Following our incarnate and crucified Lord we must live in such identification with man, with his sin, his hopes and fears, his misery and needs, that we become his brother and can witness from his place and condition to God's love for him."*

The churches are slowly awaking to the obvious fact that the evangelization of the world can not be carried forward

in this generation by a professional clergy alone or supported only passively by the other members of the church:

> *"The real battles of the faith today are being fought in factories, shops, offices and farms, in political parties and government agencies, in countless homes, in the press, radio and television, in the relationship of nations. Very often it is said that the church* is *already in these spheres in the persons of its laity.*
>
> *"So far, although in varying degrees, our churches have failed to give their members the support they need to make them effective representatives of the church in their working life.... An immense opportunity is open to the churches in the world through their laity, not to be seized for ecclesiastical domination but for Christian witness."*

Churches have come to realize more fully that it is their duty to strive for ever greater justice and fraternity in society, on both the local and the world planes, but they seek with belated intensity their proper course in the epochal social struggle of our time:

> *"The conflict between communists and non-communists affects the political and economic life of nearly every nation in the world, and creates divisions even within the church regarding the right attitude toward communism. Only as Christians work for social justice and political freedom for all, and rise above both fear and resentment, will they be fully able to meet the challenge of this conflict. It is our concern for the brother for whom Christ died that should impel us to fulfill our obligations in the face of this conflict. In this way Christians living in different parts of our divided world may contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for different systems to live side by side. This concern of Christians does not alter the mission of the churches to bear witness in the face of all atheistic and self-righteous ideologies."*

As Christians everywhere look with consternation upon the explosive world scene, they measure the awesome responsibility which is theirs:

> *"The churches must, therefore, see in the international sphere a field of obedience to Jesus Christ. They cannot agree that it falls outside the range of his sovereignty or the scope of the moral law . . . The church must seek to be the kind of community which God wishes the world to become. . . . It must carry into the turmoil of international relations the real possibility of the reconciliation of all races, nationalities and classes in the love of Christ. It must witness to the creative power of forgiveness and spiritual renewal."*

But at Evanston the churches recognized their special guilt in that area of social concern where they *could* make their most direct contribution—racial relations:

> *"The great majority of Christian churches affiliated with the World Council have declared that physical separation within the church on grounds of race is a denial of spiritual unity and of the brotherhood of man. Yet such separations persist within these very churches, and we often seek to justify them on other grounds than race; because in our own hearts we know that separation solely on the grounds of race is abhorrent in the eyes of God. . . . The church is called upon, therefore, to set aside such excuses and to declare God's will both in words and deeds. 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.' We believe it to be the will of God that such proof in word and deed now be given."*

How great is our gratitude to God for the advances marked by this courageous Evanston Assembly! Surely millions of men and women found and will continue to find in those

of its pronouncements where it spoke not from uneasy necessity but out of the depths of blazing conviction a whole series of rallying-points for living unity in this age of revolutionary upheaval. Major implications of our prayer for the Church Universal are now spelled out. Are there some who have heretofore felt that the ecumenical movement was largely a spiritual luxury for certain overly-cultivated churchmen? Now it becomes evident that belonging to the Church Universal inexorably leads to the radical transformation of many of our customary ways and those of our home churches. The "coming Great Church" bears in it the power of world revolution—that revolution which is born in repentance and grows in holiness, finding its ultimate goals realized only in the coming of the Kingdom.

V. Beyond the Church Universal

Term by term, we have probed the content of each word in our theme:

Now is the "post-Christian era."

Church Universal is deep inner fellowship with Christ's friends throughout time and space, independent of all passing social institutions.

Living in this universe of eternal meaning begins as an act of intercessory prayer, and becomes confident labor for the continuing reformation of the churches and of the world.

Yet the most important term in our theme, unexpressed but undergirding all the rest, we have not fully evoked: the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the real possibility of *living —in the Church Universal—now* only because Jesus Christ sustains his Church everlastingly.

This must be unmistakably clear. Ecumenism is not ecclesiasticism. The Church into which we have been called is no end in itself. It is a Body, at the service of a Head. It is a herald announcing a King. The "coming Great Church" is destined to foreshadow, in all humility, a coming

—and infinitely greater—Kingdom. The coming of the truly universal Church is no more than our eager response to the final coming of our glorious risen Lord.

When I was a student, I should have preferred to round off the unseemly edges of the awkward New Testament affirmation that Jesus Christ will return to judge the world and visibly inaugurate the definitive reign of God in the affairs of mankind. I liked much better the image of my own making—a Cathedral Universe—in which every valid aspect of human culture would eventually find its place, in spite of every set-back in the long process of this cathedral-construction. It seemed to me that, twenty centuries back, God had fully revealed His unchanging purposes for men in the life and teachings of His Son, and no further miracle would be in good taste. How could Jesus more fittingly return than through the gradual reshaping of all the reflective life of the world, than in the emergence of a universe that would show forth his moral likeness? When not only the natural world of the earth but even the farthest reaches of space should somehow become "humanized," graciously harmonizing their vaulted strength with the needs of a spiritually redeemed mankind, would not the Kingdom have come, as promised, with power and glory, forevermore?

In these present years of mounting catastrophe, such a dream appears to be a total misinterpretation of that "creative good will" which Dr. Lyman glimpsed at the very heart of the universe. We know with even greater certainty than before, if that were possible, that the core of life *is* infinitely creative and good: how else explain the dawn of Christmas, of hope, in a world as black as that we know? Nothing in human history can, by itself, be pointed to as an adequate source for the character and faith of Christ. But few are those today who believe that the ultimate victory of that creative good will in the human realm can any more come without a preliminary dénouement of the tangled web of history than Jesus could proceed from Christmas to Easter without passing through the decisive ordeal of Good Friday. Christianity simply cannot dispense with any of the cardinal

deeds and hopes of the New Testament without failing to answer our own twentieth-century questions.

The highest wisdom of the World Council Assembly in Evanston, in its closing Message, is a glad return to the heart of the faith by which we, like our spiritual forefathers, live:

> *"Here where we stand, Jesus Christ stood with us. He came to us, true God and true Man, to seek and to save. Though we were the enemies of God, Christ died for us. We crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. He is risen. He has overcome the powers of sin and death. A new life has begun. And in his risen and ascended power he has sent forth into the world a new community, bound together by his Spirit, sharing his divine life, and commissioned to make him known throughout the world. He will come again as Judge and King to bring all things to their consummation. Then we shall see him as he is and know as we are known. Together with the whole creation we wait for this with eager hope, knowing that God is faithful and that even now he holds all things in his hand. . . ."*
>
> *"We do not know what is coming to us. But we know who is coming. It is he who meets us every day and who will meet us at the end*
>
> —Jesus Christ our Lord."