

Review of the Book

*God of the New Age*

by Eugene William Lyman<sup>1</sup>

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Pittsfield, MA

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This little book of some forty-seven pages raises the very far reaching question as to the effect of the war upon our thought of God and our attitude towards religious life. Interesting as the book is at some points, as a whole it exhibits that confusion of thought and language that seems almost impossible to rid ourselves of. Just as the author seems to show something of a real grip on present day conceptions and values, he drags in some phrase from the past that results in confusion and fog. The total result is that [the book] takes on the character of a rather superficial apologia for Christianity as a special dispensation in the world's history. In other words, the book takes for granted in a rather naïve manner the very question that is at issue at the present moment in religious thought, namely, the question of the validity of the claim of the Christian Church as to a finality in the life and teachings of Jesus. We read, "Whereas in reality Christ so brought men into relation with God that his saving work is finding expression in ever more manifold and powerful forms."<sup>2</sup> That may be said by Dr. Lyman concerning "the Christ" that Dr. Lyman finds in the New Testament, but who is to judge between the conception of the Christ who would be found in the front line trenches, and the conception of a Christ who would be in prison as a pacifist

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript reviews the book, *God of the New Age: A Tract for the Times*, Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1918, by Eugene William Lyman. Lyman (1872-1948) was a professor of philosophy and religion at Oberlin School of Theology when this book was published, and subsequently at the Union Theological Seminary from 1918 until his retirement in 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene W. Lyman, *God of the New Age: A Tract for the Times*, Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1918, p. 24.

and conscientious objector? We speak of God as operating in history, but we relieve ourselves of embarrassing predicaments by precisely the same method that the Pope permits himself to maintain his infallibility. He is infallible only when he speaks *ex cathedra*. In precisely the same manner, we speak in a general way about the word of God in History, but we dodge the issue when we come face-to-face with unpleasant facts [word(s) missing] is precisely what is done in this book. Yet, in some of his conceptions of the future he touches upon values that most of us hope [word(s) missing] understanding in this universe we live in. For example, when he says [that] "The God of the New Age, then, is also the builder of a brotherly and progressive social order"<sup>3</sup> we hope and believe that he is on solid ground, but we have yet to demonstrate that such a faith is a valid one. The conflicting armies of Christendom at least cast a shadow over the idea that such a value is intimately related to what has passed for Christianity. Domestic strife and exploitation challenge our faith here. No. We have to go much deeper, and much more drastically at the task of re-estimating our religious values than this book does. Old phrases, painted with a camouflage of modern words, serve only to obscure and confuse. Yet, the book recognizes the existence of the problem, and touches the social significance of religion.

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene W. Lyman, *God of the New Age: A Tract for the Times*, Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1918, p. 31.