

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTER
Kenneth W. Morgan

(On March 3, 1976, in connection with celebrating the settlement of the Annette Lewis estate, Professor Kenneth Morgan gave a delightful and also thought provoking account of how the Center came to be. We are most pleased to publish the text of that talk here.)

The whole thing goes back to a little lady -- we always called her the Little Lady because she never wanted her name to be used -- the reason was, she said, "I'm almost 90, and soon I'll go to the other side and see all my friends there and if I did something for the Lord, and added my name on it, I'd be ashamed to see them." It is possible to find out her name here because there has been some carelessness, but if you do know her name, please forget it for her sake. I think her friends must be satisfied by now, since she's been dead for quite a few years. . . she died in 1958 -- almost 90.

Around the end of the 19th century there was a group of young people, mostly Protestant, well to do, rather self-consciously from 'old' New York families, who decided that they wanted to live their Christian faith in a way that would make a difference in the community. So they decided to find one of the most deplorable blocks in the city of New York and to bring Christ to that block. They went to the Village, but very soon ran out of steam. They were worried because they were convinced that their ideas were right -- they decided that they were not worshiping enough to maintain the fervor of their religious faith. So they made a little chapel as part of their building and spent a great deal of time there in prayer, so much so that it became for them a very sacred place. Then, because they saw that they were not wise enough to answer all the questions that they needed to answer, they began to study, first in the Bible and then in devotional writings. They made the discovery -- remember they were Protestant, mostly Episcopalian -- that the Catholics had more devotional writings that were worth studying than the Protestants, and so they turned to Catholic materials, and through chance they began to study Asian sacred writings, and became quite excited about the Bhagavad Gita and some of the Buddhist writings. They developed a library and their work

in the Village went on -- until about 1950, when the chapel was finally closed. Some of the people remained there right through -- one of them was Annette Lewis. Others, as they got married and had children, moved out of the building or would come back to the building occasionally to work.

The Little Lady had become clearly the head of the group -- a remarkable woman, very sure of herself, regarded almost with awe by the members. In addition to the project in the Village they developed a place they called Chapel Farm, on a rocky hill on the outskirts of New York City, with a high fence around it; there the Little Lady built a big house and others built little cottages nearby. At first it was a place they used in the summer, and later they lived there all year. At the end of her life, the Little Lady lived in a cottage and only went to the big house when she was going to meet someone. I had seen her quite a few times before I was allowed to go to the little cottage where she lived. To get to the big house she would call Charles the chauffeur and if it was someone really important she would go down in the Rolls Royce, but she much preferred her other car. She had had a gorgeous Hispano-Suiza in the First World War which she gave to the French army. After the War she bought another Hispano-Suiza. Now the nice thing about her Hispano-Suiza was that since she was a little lady she could walk into the car with dignity. The Rolls Royce wasn't so convenient. When the Hispano-Suiza wore out she bought a Cadillac chassis and had them put the Hispano-Suiza body on it and that was the car she preferred to come to the house in. I felt accepted when she quit coming down in her Rolls Royce and started coming down in the Hispano-Suiza. It was fun to talk with her about cars, and places she had seen, and old New York -- at 89 she was knowledgeable, keenly observant, and an interesting conversationalist. As members of the group grew older they didn't recruit the younger people and finally they closed down the chapel. One of the last people to leave the chapel was Miss Lewis, who came up to live at Chapel Farm in a house just a little way from the Little Lady's cottage -- I didn't ever meet Annette there. Now the problem was: as the people who had been part of the group died they had such confidence in the Little Lady that they would leave their estates to her -- they didn't know what she would do with their money but they knew that whatever she

did would be agreeable to them. When she was a little girl she had met J. P. Morgan, and thought he was a very able person, and she put the money in a fund in J. P. Morgan's bank. A brother of one of the most faithful followers was a broker on Wall Street who helped her invest wisely; working with the Morgan Bank they did rather well. You may wonder about the money that Annette Lewis had -- at first, she didn't have a great deal, but if you had a modest fund in 1910 and you had a good broker and Morgan's bank to take care of it for you, and you didn't spend much of the money on yourself, it would grow. I think it likely that Miss Lewis expected to die before the Little Lady and to leave her estate to the Little Lady too, so she wouldn't have to decide what to do with it.

Well, coming up to 1950, the lawyer for the Little Lady was nervous because she didn't have a proper will, and the bank, which is conscientious about its trust accounts, was increasingly concerned, so they sent handsome young men to explain to her that she should make clear how she wanted them to encourage the study of the great religions of the world because, as she said to me later, "When we were starting the chapel in the Village and were discouraged, and seemed to be losing our way, we found that by prayer and studying the devotional writings from all different parts of the world we gained a new insight and power that we hadn't had before and we feel that people ought to be encouraged to study the great religions of the world." That was her dream, but she had not decided how to carry it out.

About the time that the bank and her lawyer were pressing her to decide how the funds at her disposal should be used, the Little Lady heard of a new organization in England, the Union for the Study of the Great Religions of the World, created by H. N. Spalding of Oxford, and she decided that she would like to do something like that. Spalding had endowed the World Religions chair at Oxford occupied by Radhakrishnan at that time, and his organization was making small grants for research and publication in religion, particularly the religions of Asia. Since the Little Lady, in 1954, was about 85 years old and not able to travel about, she asked a good friend, Dr. Godfrey Dewey of Lake Placid, New York, to help her explore the possibilities for encouraging the study of the great religions of the world. He visited England that year for talks with

Spalding, with Professor Thacker at Durham and with D. D. Henderson who was executive secretary for the Spalding Trust; later, Thacker and Henderson were in this country for further consultations and recommended that whatever funds might be available should be used in this country. Godfrey Dewey was then asked to explore the various academic centers to see if one would be a suitable place for encouraging a program in the study of Asian religions. He traveled from coast to coast, interviewed many people, and decided that Harvard would be the best place. (Some of his friends have suggested that he was biased because he is a Harvard man, but he insists that his judgment concerning Harvard has always been affectionately objective.)

I came into the picture by chance. Someone, I can't remember who, had suggested that when I was in England on my way to India I should visit Dr. Spalding at Oxford since we shared an interest in the study of Asian religions. We had an interesting conversation and I remember his saying that he had some friends in the States who shared our interests and that he would write to them. In 1954, when I was back at Colgate University, I received a letter inviting me to come to the University Club, in New York to talk with a Wall Street broker concerning Asian religions. He did not mention any names, but told me that he had friends who had been studying Asian religions and had some funds they would like to use to encourage a better understanding of the great religions of the world. He said they were thinking of starting a library of Asian religious books, perhaps starting with their own collections, and maybe with a place where people could come together to discuss religious ideas. I suggested that such a plan would be futile, that if they wanted to encourage the study of the religions of the world they should be connected with an educational institution so the work would go on even when the people involved were changed, and all the resources of the university, the books, the scholars in related fields, the museums and galleries, would support the program without the expense of duplicating them. I suggested that the serious study of the religions of the world is just beginning, that we need a graduate center to train teachers and encourage research, one that would bring people from different parts of the world to work and study together; and related with that we should be encouraging the study of Asian religions in undergraduate programs so we

would have more students coming up for graduate study in the field and would introduce the Asian perspective more effectively into the educational experience of college students.

The Wall Street broker reported our conversations to the Little Lady, she asked Godfrey Dewey to carry out numerous inquiries for her, and finally I was taken to meet her and to discuss possible ways to encourage understanding of the great religions of the world. She was persuaded that Harvard would be the best place for the graduate program, even though she was suspicious that Harvard was not sufficiently interested in the study of religion and would almost certainly attempt to divert to other uses the funds she might contribute. I met her several times, and to my surprise the first move she made (this was in 1956) was to endow at Colgate University the Fund for the Study of the Great Religions of the World; to pay the salary of a teacher of Asian religions who would spend half-time encouraging more effective teaching of the religions of the world in other undergraduate institutions. She was sure that universities tend to accept endowment happily and then spend it according to the whims of the trustees and faculty without remembering the purposes for which the money was given, so she had me write out the terms of the gift explicitly to make as sure as possible that the funds would be used only in ways that would encourage undergraduate understanding of the religions of the world.

This part about the developments at Colgate University is recalled here because it leads up to the establishment of this Center for the Study of the Great Religions at Harvard, and our gathering this evening to recognize the recent bequest of Annette Lewis.

In the fall of 1956 I wrote to the Little Lady a long letter suggesting that I would like to create at Colgate a place where anyone from anywhere in the world, of any religious persuasion or none, could not only study religion but could practice, even experiment with, any form of meditation, worship, or personal devotion of their choice. Such a center would be based on the premise that a person who seeks to express a religious insight that is considered worth transmitting to others will write a book, create a work of art, or compose music: therefore, we should make available the books people have found most helpful, the

best works of religious art we can get, and recordings of the great religious music of all traditions. We should also provide a chapel where guests could meditate, or pray. And since it would take time to use those facilities, there should be rooms and meals for guests. It should not be a conference center, but a place where each person comes as an individual, promised privacy and quiet, and promising not to bother other guests. I had proposed such a center to some of the leading theological schools in this country, thinking that a period of time in such a place should be part of the training of anyone interested in religion, a kind of laboratory or discipline for scholars and clergy -- but the general reaction was that it was too odd-ball to be considered seriously. The Little Lady, however, was quite excited by the idea and gave us the funds for Chapel House at Colgate University. Students from the Harvard Center have from time to time been guests at Chapel House, some of them for as long as two months.

Work was started on Chapel House early in 1957, and in February of that year the Little Lady asked me to talk with people at Harvard about the possibility of creating here a Center for the Study of the Great Religions of the World. She said that if Harvard were interested she would start with a gift of \$500,000, provided that Harvard would agree to the terms of gift which she and I had worked out together, and provided that she approved of the first Director of the program who would be chosen and appointed by Harvard. (In her opinion, the Director should be not only a good scholar, but also a sincerely religious person committed to his own faith and open and appreciative of other religions.) We said that we were interested in helping to establish at Harvard a center where graduate work would be offered in the great religious traditions, where people could study a religion other than their own. We said we would like to see those religious traditions first presented as they are seen by the people who follow them. We hoped that such a center would be a part of the Divinity School, rather than the College, because the Divinity School is more concerned with the religious way of life, and because such a location would imply that for Americans it is desirable to know one's own tradition before studying traditions other than one's own; and because it would make it possible for students from other traditions to know more about the religious ways of this part of the world.

When I talked with President Pusey I found him rather cool to the idea, but not opposed. Dean Horton at the Divinity School was much more favorable, but aware, as Deans must be, of many problems. The faculty committee seemed to me to be surprisingly uneasy, even somewhat negative at first, and suspicious. In the course of our discussions it was suggested that they might be willing to accept the gift with the understanding that the religions would be taught from the point of view of phenomenology. I said that if that were a condition we would not make the gift, for that would tie the teaching for all time to a particular approach, one that is popular at the moment but might well be considered quaint some generations from now. All we were asking was that the religions of the world be taught according to the best lights of the people who are here, according to the best insights of people of integrity. They might approach the study in ways we have not dreamed of, even in ways we might not approve, but they must be free to teach and do research as best they can. Finally, we reached agreement. I wrote out the terms of the gift, the Little Lady approved the draft, and it is now in the files of the Center and has governed all subsequent gifts from the Little Lady, her trust through the Morgan Guarantee Trust Company, and her friends.

Let me digress here a bit to make clear that although I was involved in the negotiations for the original grant, and for some of the subsequent funding of the Center, I have not had anything to do with shaping its later developments. Let me record some of my biases, which do not characterize the Center programs. I distrust the comparative study of religions for I do not see how it is possible to point out parallels between two religions until one has equal competence in both, based on first-hand experience -- and I don't think there are many scholars in the world who have such competence in two religions. . . . I am uneasy about scholarly efforts to fit any religions, and particularly a religions other than one's own, into a particular theory (Jungian or Marxist, or Thomist) or into the methodology of one's own academic discipline. . . . It seems to me that we ask the wrong question when we ask whether a particular religion is unique, and we are in danger of spiritual pride when we say our way is better. We can ask whether or not it is true, and then say why it seems so. . . . I was here at Harvard Divinity School in the class of 1935,

with considerable benefit and no great distinction, which is long enough ago to have seen several theological and academic fads accepted and then ignored by students and faculty. When I was here at the Divinity School, no one ever mentioned to me the desirability of getting to know the devotional writings of our, or any other, tradition. It may be that a sense of that lack is what led me to leave here to spend the better part of a year living in Hindu ashrams in India reading and re-reading Augustine's Confessions, Theologia Germanica, The Imitation of Christ, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Bible as a devotional rather than a scholarly exercise. To that bias in favor of devotional writings was added a belief that in order to understand a religion other than one's own it is necessary to know and appreciate the music and painting and sculpture of that tradition -- and this assertion comes from a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School who cannot recall that either religious music or religious art were ever mentioned in his presence.

All that bit about my biases may sound defensive. It is brought in only to show that although I may have been involved in some of the early negotiations, I have not in any way influenced the policies of the Center.

After it was agreed that there would be at Harvard a Center for the Study of World Religions there was the delicate problem of finding a first Director who would be acceptable to the University and to the Little Lady. After an extensive search Harvard chose Dr. Robert Slater, an Englishman, graduate of Cambridge University, with a Ph.D. in Buddhist thought from Columbia, and recommended by Professor Arthur Darby Nock as a fellow student at Cambridge whose First was higher than Nock's. The Little Lady was favorably disposed toward him, having a liking for Englishmen and preferring Anglicans to Episcopalians, and after a friendly interview he was approved.

The record of the growth of the Center under the Robert Slater administration, and then under Wilfred Cantwell Smith, is told elsewhere. Our concern here is only with the origins.

The Little Lady died in 1958, leaving her estate in trust in the hands of the Morgan Guarantee Trust Company,

to be disbursed for the purposes she had approved and supported in her lifetime. The trustees at the Bank gave the funds for the Center building, and from time to time made grants to the program of the Center. Their trust came from the Little Lady's estate which was made up of her own funds and the funds given to her by members of the original group who had worked in the Village. The trustees at the Morgan Guarantee bank were guided in their grants by the written terms for the original gifts to Colgate and to Harvard, interpreted by the lawyers, trust officers, and others who had known the Little Lady in the last years of her life.

One friend of the Little Lady, who was not a close member of the original group but who had worked at the chapel in the Village for a time, was Miss Marjorie Kilpatrick, whose fortune came from her father's investment in support of Eastman when he was inventing his Kodak. She had admired the Little Lady for many years and shared the concern for encouraging the study of the religions of the world. She attended the inaugural ceremonies when Wilfred Cantwell Smith came to the Center, and after that I kept her regularly informed of what was happening at Harvard. Around 1965 or 1966, she gave \$500,000 to the Center with the understanding that the Morgan Guarantee trustees would give a similar amount, which they were happy to do. She was a delightful person, keenly interested in knowing about the people who were at the Center and the work they were doing after their studies at Harvard were ended. She died in 1970.

Now you have the last gift from the friends of the Little Lady, the estate of Annette Lewis. She, also, delayed writing her will, probably intending to leave everything to the Little Lady. She was a friend of Marjorie Kilpatrick, and in 1962 Marjorie invited me to her home on Long Island to spend an evening telling Miss Lewis about the developments at Harvard (she was not interested in Colgate's program). About the time that Marjorie Kilpatrick gave \$500,000 to Harvard, Miss Lewis signed her will giving her estate to the Center. She died in 1971 and the estate has finally been settled. I did not know anything about the will until some time after she died for I never saw her nor heard from her after that evening. I had told her about the professors at the Center, the courses they were teaching, the books and articles they had writ-

ten, the conferences they were attending; and about the students, where they came from, where they had gone from Harvard, what they were accomplishing. I told her that the Center would be here for a long time and that all of us were very happy about it. Evidently she decided that what is happening here is worth supporting.

So much for the past. Just a word about the future.

Many years ago I had an instructive conversation with Arthur Dunham, former head of the Business School at Harvard and a skillful fund raiser. He told me how he helped develop the China program at Harvard from a small initial gift to a substantial endowment. He said, "Remember this, young man: if a person has money to invest he can either seek a large return on his funds in stocks or bonds or real estate, or look for his returns in accomplishing things he thinks should be done. Either way, you must be sure that he is told what the income is: it is disgraceful to accept someone's money and then never report to them what has been accomplished." We don't have many people to report to now, for most of the people who knew the Little Lady and her friends are dead. Of course, if the Little Lady's theories about heaven are correct, she undoubtedly knows all about what is going on here; I'm not sure that is how things work, but I wouldn't want to quibble about it. Either way, we have invested over \$3,000,000 in the Center and now we are getting the income. The dividends are in a doctor's thesis, in the classroom, in counseling, in articles written, books read, new ideas shared as you live together here, and in the teaching and research going on in many parts of the world by people who have lived here for awhile. The income on this investment is compounded in the lives of many people whose religious insight has been sharpened, broadened, and deepened because they have had opportunities to study religious ways other than their own here at the Center. The Little Lady, and her crusty old lawyer, and the trustees at the Morgan bank and Marjorie Kilpatrick, and Annette Lewis would be happy that they had invested so wisely here, and that their investments have been so able nurtured at the Center.

Having gone on so long about the past, I must ask your indulgence for a few final words about the future. About the time the Center started we wrote to all the colleges

and universities in the country asking for the names of the professors teaching courses dealing with the religions of Asia: we listed 225 names. Now, there are more than 1300. We have now come to the point where we need more people to work on detailed bibliographies, and to produce abstracts of the articles in journals throughout the world. There is a great deal to be done in translations, not only into English, but back and forth in the many languages involved in religious studies, translations of contemporary writings as well as the classics.

We have made a start in using audio-visual materials, but need to go much farther in presenting the music, art, architecture, and practices of the religions of the world. I've dreamt for years of having carrels for students, equipped with slides, tapes, and video-tapes so the beginning student could be sent to a carrel to work through all the basic material before taking part in classroom discussion, and undertaking research on a particular problem. Such carrels could also go into public libraries for serious adult education. The material developed for the carrels would also be useful for educational TV. The English Open University project is developing a series of TV programs for instruction in religion, and they are asking for help.

For many years I've had people writing to me for help in improving courses on Asian religions for secondary schools and community colleges and I have been unable to help them. Such courses are being taught, and people are preparing textbooks who do not know the field. We need people who are willing to take the time and trouble to help develop materials for secondary schools.

The Fund for the Great Religions at Colgate found support for some fifty-five fellowships for college teachers who are teaching courses in Asian religions but did not have graduate training in the field, fellowships enabling them to spend a year in study and travel in Asia. Many more such fellowships are needed, and now there is an even greater need for travel fellowships for experienced teachers who need to get back to Asia to carry on their research and study.

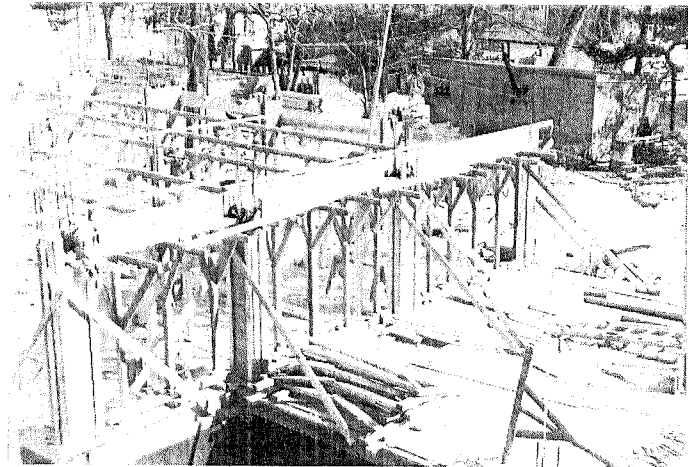
There are many problems raised by the study of a religion other than one's own that cry out for our attention. Epistemology is always with us, and even more pressing as

we work in this field. I'd like to see an in-depth study of karma so we could have a clearer understanding of the ways it is being used today and modified throughout Asia, and would no longer have it dismissed in one-sentence, inadequate definitions. And meditation is much more with us today than it was when I was a student here: the research in this field at Harvard should not have been left to Dr. Benson at the Medical School alone, and might properly have been undertaken at the Divinity School with the help of the medical, psychological, and sociological resources of the University. . . . The study of Asian religions raises many problems about the natural world, creation, order, purpose: we should be taking the lead in this area rather than leaving it to the ecology fad that people will play with for a time and then cast aside for a new attraction. Those who grew up in the Christian tradition see the natural world in a new perspective when we live for a time in Asia with people who follow a different religious path; we need to do much more work in this field. . . . When we look over the whole range of work being done in the religions of the world, it is evident that in this country we are particularly ignorant of Islam and this is the time when it should be getting special, and sympathetic attention.

Here at the Center there are still several aspects of the organization that have not yet been realized. We need several more chairs. Ideally, we would have two professors in Hinduism, two in Buddhism, two in Islam, and two in Confucianism-Taoism. Two, not only for the sake of the students, but so the professors would have the support and challenge of people who know their field -- it's lonely when you have no colleague who knows your field. In addition we should be able to bring at least two visiting scholars a year, sometimes to teach, sometimes for research, and always to participate in the community life. We also need more fellowships for students from the Americas, from Africa, from Asian countries, not only for their contributions to each other, but also to stimulate in Asia, Africa, and the Americas the development of critical studies such as we have here. This may be the time to explore the possibilities for working with the new United Nations University, just being started. They have announced that they are the greatest educational experiment in the history of man, but do not seem to have any plans for including reli-

gious studies. They say that they will work through research centers in various parts of the world; maybe this should be one of them.

Much has been accomplished here at the Center since the Little Lady decided in 1957 to offer Harvard University half a million dollars to get it started. The need was great, the Harvard indifference was not overwhelming, more has been done that we dared to hope could be done, and there is a greater need than ever for the Center for the Study of World Religions.



The Center under construction Winter 1960

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