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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

THE BLESSED WORD "EXISTENTIAL"

There is no doubt that the reader of the *Christian Century* (Nov. 30, 1955) will be grateful for the clear and precise explanation of "the blessed word 'existential,'" which he finds in the editorial submitted under the title given above. The term "existential" is being used today not only in theological and philosophical articles but also in everyday press reports and colloquial speech so that one hears it almost *ad nauseam*, especially since many who use or misuse the word do not seem to know what it really means. The article goes back to Sören Kierkegaard, through whom—in particular, through whose works recently translated into English—the term has become posthumously popular. We quote a few statements: "Dr. Tillich calls 'existential knowledge' 'deciding knowledge.' The truth which the whole person seeks in the evidence of his whole existence becomes the truth *for* that person when he bets his whole existence on its being the truth. And so it is that existential thinking has for its end the remaking, the re-orientation of the existential thinker. Existential knowledge is not a proposition you can hold in your head: it is a decision that quite literally makes all the difference in the world." Again: "The truth we seek within the existential context in existential moments by existential thinking is not a I-should-worry-take-it-or-leave-it truth. It is the truth about God and me and about what we have to do with each other. And that is not optional truth. That is the truth that matters most because it decides whether I matter at all." In closing the editorial, the writer says: "So, at least, it has appeared to us when reading between the lines in manuscripts that take it for granted we all know by now how 'existential' is used today. If we have it wrong, we know we'll be set right." The subtle humor in these closing words pervades the whole article and makes it delightful reading.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE IN THEOLOGY?

Under this heading, Dr. Nels F. S. Ferré in the winter issue (1955 to 1956) of *Religion in Life* discusses the varying present-day trends of theological thought brought to light especially during the convention at Evanston. Dr. Ferré himself speaks as a liberal, though as one who has moved as far to the right as his convictions permit. Much of what he writes is couched in language that apparently is thoroughly orthodox. In addition to his own views, he discusses fundamentalism, the High Church wing in Episcopalianism, and "Barthian" existen-

tialism. For students of present-day theological thought his discussions are so valuable that we warmly recommend this issue to our pastors. Three outstanding theologians and authors were appointed to question and criticize Dr. Ferré's views. Among these are Paul Tillich, whose chief questions are in the field of existentialism; Cornelius Van Til, professor of apologetics at the Westminster Theological Seminary, who asks Dr. Ferré whether his theological trend allows the retention of the orthodox Christian doctrines on Scripture, God, Christ, His vicarious atonement, and so forth; and Aldon Drew Kelley, president and dean of Seabury Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill., and member of the Joint Commission on Approaches to Unity, whose questions lie within the area of ecumenical theology. The four articles are fair, lucid, and full of revealing insights into present-day theological thought. For Lutherans the question arises what sound Lutheran and biblical theology can do to aid the present-day swing to the right. As a distinctive theological school they are relatively unknown. Only Dr. Van Til refers to them in his fine article.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

GRUNDTVIG AND KIERKEGAARD: THEIR VIEWS OF THE CHURCH

Theology Today has dedicated its October issue (1955) to the memory of Søren Kierkegaard, who died in 1855 and whose influence today is perhaps greater than it was during his lifetime. Among its several readable articles is one which under the heading given compares the views of the two outstanding religious thinkers on the church. Both opposed the rationalism, formalism, and secularism of the Danish state church, which then was greatly influenced by the rationalism and Hegelianism of Germany. Grundtvig came to be personally offended by the rationalistic misuse of the Scriptures. Since he thought that under the existing conditions they could no longer avail as the source and norm of doctrine, he conceived of the formal principle of Lutheranism as the creative words of Christ addressed to His disciples in the Apostles' Creed and in the Sacraments. The church, he taught, is there where through Baptism and faith in the Creed the Holy Spirit unites men with Christ, our King, and with one another. The article does not discuss other deviations of Grundtvig from sound Lutheranism as defended, for example, by Rudelbach. But despite his deviations he held to the fundamentals of Christian theology and wielded a widespread wholesome influence by his popular sermons, writings, and poems. Kierkegaard bitterly attacked Grundtvig for seeking objective reality in history. The church, he maintained, belongs not in time, but in eternity. The emphasis lies not on "church," but on the fact that we

receive Christ as our Example and Atoner, who is pure mercy when we humble ourselves. Kierkegaard's principal fault was that he intermingled Law and Gospel, in fact, that he disregarded the Gospel almost entirely, which Grundtvig, despite his deviations, maintained in its essentials. The failure of both was due to their neglect of Scripture as the only norm of faith.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

BRIEF ITEMS FROM "RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE"

Geneva.—An all-Africa Lutheran conference held in Marangu, Tanganyika, was told repeatedly that the spread of Islam threatens the future of that continent. This was reported at a news conference here by two leaders of the Lutheran World Federation who returned from the Marangu meeting, the first of its kind. They are Dr. Carl E. Lund-Quist, executive secretary, and Dr. Fridtjov Birkeli, director of the World Missions Department.

At Marangu, some 150 delegates represented the nearly one million Lutherans of Africa and the Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, German, Norwegian, Swedish, and American missionaries serving them.

Dr. Lund-Quist said Communist influence over students in some African countries presented another danger. Many African students going to Paris and London, he said, "are creating real crises for themselves and their countries." He warned that the Communist party is paying major attention to such students.

Dr. Birkeli praised the interracial nature of the Marangu meeting. He said Africans and whites were lodged in the same dormitories, without any kind of color bar. A local hotel "abolished the color bar completely during the conference," he added.

The Lutheran missions leader said the delegates were primarily interested in higher training for African Christian leaders and proposed the establishment of a theological college in Ethiopia, Liberia, or Rhodesia. They also urged speeding up the handing-over of responsibilities by the missions to African leaders, he said, and called upon missionaries to take a bolder stand in the fight against all types of discrimination.

Dr. Birkeli reported a trend toward an administrative episcopate in African Lutheran churches.

BRIEF ITEMS FROM NEWS BUREAU OF THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL

New York.—Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hannover, Germany, president of the Lutheran World Federation, will address faculties and student bodies at five major American universities during a tour of the United States from February 19 to March 14. He will also appear on the

CBS-TV "Lamp unto My Feet" program on March 4, preach and speak at various rallies and services from coast to coast, and meet with a number of Lutheran and all-Protestant ministerial associations.

Minneapolis, Minn.—A referendum conducted among congregations of the Lutheran Free Church fell 35 votes short of attaining the three-fourths majority needed for the LFC's continued participation in union negotiations with three other Lutheran bodies.

Official results showed that of 327 congregations reporting valid ballots in the poll, 210, or 64 per cent, approved a proposed organizational basis of union, and 117 congregations, or 36 per cent, voted against it. About 30 congregations did not cast ballots or did not meet the December 15 deadline. Because of the large number of LFC congregations voting for the union, an effort is expected to be made at the denomination's annual conference at Fargo, N. Dak., next June to authorize the church to continue in the negotiations.

New York.—Lutheran educational and hospital institutions will benefit to the extent of \$9,635,370 in grants from the largest single gift in the history of philanthropy—\$500 million from the Ford Foundation.

Of this gigantic sum, \$210 million has been allocated to increase teacher salaries in 615 privately supported colleges and universities, \$200 million to extend services of 3,500 voluntary non-profit hospitals, and \$90 million to improve instruction in privately supported medical schools.

Twenty-eight Lutheran colleges and universities will receive \$5,415,300, in amounts ranging from \$71,600 to \$432,800, and ninety-five Lutheran hospitals will be given \$4,220,070, in amounts ranging from \$10,000 to \$216,200, according to a list of recipients issued by the Ford Foundation on December 12.

It was stressed that the final determination of the colleges and hospitals eligible for the grants and the exact amount of each grant will be made by the Ford Foundation, an indication that additional institutions may be added to the list of recipients. The special appropriations were made, it was announced, "to supplement and encourage the efforts of the American people in meeting problems affecting the progress of the whole nation."