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IMPLICATIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM FOR CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION.

No existentialism exists as a thought system as such. Not only are differences obvious between theistic and atheistic fields of thought as practised by the existentialist philosophers, but there are also fundamental differences between advocates of the system such as Heidegger and Sartre. Certain common characteristics can be distinguished. It deals with the existent human being as plunged into a situation, a rebellion against rationalization, the absolutization of human freedom, the incompleteness and transience of man, a denunciation of God and the Scriptures.

The above-mentioned characteristics of this philosophy exercise a profound influence on the thoughts of modern man and are therefore of immediate importance to education. As Christians we need to understand these existentialists because unlike other more complacent modern thinkers, they are honest enough to voice that sense of despair which is so widespread in our world. They speak for millions of our contemporaries for whom God is dead. They tear away the masks of optimism, self-confidence and indifference.

To our mind this philosophy has contributed to a large extent to the moral decline of this decadent twentieth century. It would therefore be gross neglect on the part of Christian education if it

does not determine and define the implications of this philosophy.

A religious minded people cannot accept the separation of its religion from its education and hence this study was undertaken in an effort to evaluate the existentialism in the light of the scriptures in which God discloses Himself and His relation to all things.

It was deemed necessary to refer to religion and calling (vocation) as these are integral aspects of man's life. It was also necessary to refer to the implications of the belief in God as the foundation for a science of education with its corresponding aim and content. Therefore reference is made to an ontological, a cosmological, an anthropological, a cognizable and a methodological basis for this philosophy of education determined by Word revelation.

The phenomenological approach (method) employed by the existentialists as well as the denunciation of the God of the Scriptures, causes the total absence of any relation to God, hence the neutrality. In its full reality, however, the God of the Scriptures and the Word of God cannot for one moment be excluded from its reality and no neutrality as such is ever possible. Any educator is a human being and thus

a religious being who stands in relation to God, whether he is aware of it or not. Whether he accepts it or not, does not matter. All human activity is an activity issuing from the heart and qualified by the heart, be it in obedience to the law of God or not. Hence all activities of man are religiously centred and that includes education and educating. Man was created by God, as a child of God with the task of governing and ruling over His whole creation, as he would over himself; over his fellow human being, a task which includes the rearing and educating of the child and thereby complying with the responsibility entrusted to him by his Creator.

Existentialistic anthropology which considers man as an incomplete and temporary being with no ultimate goal, severs the bond of the human being at its very source, viz., God. Anthropology has contributed largely to contemporary non-recognition of values and principles in education. The Christian educator sees man as the creation of God. Only anthropology based on the Bible can reflect a truly realistic image and total concept of the child.

Existentialism absolutizes human liberty and self responsibility which does not subordinate itself to any authority or principle. This approach is a

cosmologic absolutization of man's existence. Man is created by God with a given task and responsibility to do his share in the fulfilment of God's will. The Lord God has put a radical yet correlated variety in the cosmos. This irreducible variety and interdependent relation must be accepted and investigated without relativization and absolutization and yet with the acknowledgement of God as sovereign Ruler over and Creator of man and the cosmos subject to God's cosmic law and order.

The subjectivism into which the existentialists have deteriorated has caused the relegation to total insignificance of the subject-object relationship in the actual creation. To our mind the concept that knowledge can be obtained only through subjectivity, is impossible to accept. Subject and object are cognizable because God has created them as such. The educationist as a scientist, should continually realize that his knowledge can only be partial, but in the light of Scripture he should acknowledge the sovereignty of God over the whole cosmos and over each and every activity of man, and this includes education. In order to combat the godlessness of existentialism the Christian educator should practise his education, that is every subject, in the light of Scripture.

The determining approach, the Word of God, has illuminated that which has to be researched. An attempt has been made not only to give a mere description of the field or research, but also to delve into the results with full and due consideration of what God has revealed in connection with it in His Word. The Word has therefore a function to fulfil in connection with the field of research as well as the researcher. These principles have therefore of necessity determined the method used. Use has also been made of the analytical and comparative methods.

The conclusion arrived at in this study is that the answers to questions arising from educational problems such as those with regard to the eventual aims education should strive for, the very essence of education, the reason for educating, content and method, freedom and authority, discipline and punishment, the task of the teacher, and all questions relating to the full spectrum of education, cannot be supplied by existentialism. A philosophy of education should be based on a Christian philosophy and should include the totality of education that in its entirety depends on the revelation of the Word.