

### 3. EXISTENTIAL THEOLOGY

#### General Remarks

In the twentieth century collapse of idealism and naturalism, at least four types of philosophy arose: pragmatism, phenomenology, linguistic analysis, and existentialism.

In his famous essay, *Existentialism*, Jean-Paul Sartre asks the question, "What is meant by the term existentialism?"

Most people who use the word would be rather embarrassed if they have to explain it, since, now that the word is all the rage, even the work of a musician or painter is being called existentialist... Someone recently told me of a lady who, when she let slip a vulgar word in a moment of irritation, excused herself by saying, "I guess I'm becoming an existentialist."... A gossip columnist (in a certain periodical) signs himself The Existentialist, so that by this time the word has been so stretched and has taken on so broad a meaning, that is no longer means anything at all.

Walter Kaufman, Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University, wrote that

Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living "existentialists" have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other. To add to the confusion, many writers of the past have frequently been hailed as members of this movement, and it is extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they are consigned. In view of this, it might be argued that the label "existentialism" ought to be abandoned altogether.

Nevertheless, lists of "pre-existentialists" and existentialists include the following names: Soren Kierkegaard, Feodor Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, Miguel de Unamuno, F. H. Heineman, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Rainer Rilke, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, Nicolas Berdyaev, Leon Shestov, Martin Buber, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

The heart of existentialism in its negative implications is said to consist in the refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life.

Existentialists have not only reacted against all traditional and contemporary systems of philosophy, they have come to believe that present human existence is characterized by at least three motifs: alienation, meaninglessness, and absurdity. The following are mentioned as factors which have contributed to their reaction: