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THE SPRINGFIELDER

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Editorials

Twenty-five Years of Service . . .

RECENTLY the members of Synod's Board of Directors took cognizance—and properly so—of Dr. John Behnken's twenty-fifth anniversary as President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

An objective analysis of Dr. Behnken's administration must be left to some future chronicler who can view his years of service in the perspective of history. Recognizing the limitations imposed upon us by our admiration for the man, our lack of perspective, and the canons of good taste, we would nevertheless attempt to assess briefly his administration.

As a pastor in Houston, Dr. Behnken was noted for his emphasis on missions. Several of the thriving congregations in that city today exist as the result of the tent services he held in his successful effort to begin new missions. In all of his appearances at District conventions, he constantly impressed upon the hearts and minds of pastors and laymen the imperative necessity of sharing the Gospel with the unchurched American public. To no small degree, therefore, the amazing growth of our Church in the past twenty-five years—without the benefit of an immigrant wave—is a reflection of his personal missionary zeal.

During his presidency he saw a communicant membership grow from 800,000 to 1,500,000; adult confirmations rose from 8600 to 35,000 per year; Sunday School enrollments developed from 276,000 to 860,000; Bible class enrollments—and how this phenomenon must thrill his heart—surged from a meager 55,000 to 227,000 in his tenure.

Dr. Behnken has never been reluctant to discuss the problem of the stewardship of money. Unquestionably his personal example in this area as well as his moving public pronouncements played a significant role in the improvement of giving in the Missouri Synod. In the year in which he took office our fellow Lutherans gave \$9,000,000 (\$11.00 per communicant) for home purposes. By 1959 these gifts had "ballooned" to \$114,000,000 (\$74.84 per communicant). In 1935 Missouri Synod Lutherans contributed a

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paltry \$2.76 per communicant for the work of the church-at-large or a total of \$2,300,000. In 1959 \$28,000,000, or \$18.43 per communicant member were given for this purpose.

His administration also witnessed commensurate and phenomenal growth in foreign missions, ministerial education, lay activity, and communication of the Gospel by means of radio and television.

The future historian may well consider Dr. Behnken's prudent leadership in effecting the assimilation of the Synod into the American way of life as his most significant contribution. In spite of World War I, the Missouri Synod in 1935 continued to exist primarily as a socio-cultural group, living on a social island, largely separated by language and custom from the mainstream of American life. It is a tribute to Dr. Behnken's leadership that the difficult transition from that island into the mainstream was made with so few casualties.

In the area of liturgical practices he probably reckons his leadership as a dead loss. In spite of his precept and example which were weighted in the direction of sane liturgical practices, generally the pastors in Synod decked themselves in the surplice and stole combination, "a combination," as one Lutheran scholar puts it "which has no warrant in historic Lutheran practice as normal service garb in the church." Aping the Roman Catholics and the Episcopalians, we introduced liturgical practices and at the same time ignored the dubious doctrinal basis of some of the bizarre innovations. The theatrical rather than the meaningful and the functional became normative in liturgies.

It is difficult to assess Dr. Behnken's quarter century theologically. No epoch-making theological works came from Missouri's press during that period. Fundamentalism rather than Lutheran confessional theology established the climate of the era. Greater latitude, occasioned by the exigencies of World War II and its aftermath, developed in that singular compartmentalization, "co-operation in externals." Expediency rather than fixed principle apparently became the criterion for determining action in this area.

Aside from the deterioration of relationships within the Synodical Conference, little of significance occurred in relations with other Lutherans. *The Common Confession*, which deserved :

better fate than it received (especially Part II of that document), was "shelved." The "grass roots" dialogues with the A. L. C. were terminated when the time for effective action approached. It remains to be seen whether or not the current and heartening conversations with the National Lutheran Council will result in a greater confessionalism in American Lutheranism and a closer *rapprochement* among all Lutherans.

Comments could be made regarding the apparently unrestrained and unplanned growth of the Synodical and District administrative structures, the development of the Pension Fund, the Bad Boll junkets, the growth of the LLL and the LWML, the ill-timed appearance of A STATEMENT, the ludicrous aspects of the Chinese Term Question, the increase in social services—all of which developed in the past twenty-five years.

Dr. Behnken undoubtedly would be most ready to confess the administrative sins of omission and commission which have been his during the past twenty-five years. Nevertheless, we believe that he can and should look upon his leadership during this turbulent period in the history of our Synod and of the world with a certain amount of pardonable pride. We are confident that tomorrow's church historian will evaluate his administration by concluding that he was "come to the kingdom for such a time as this."

G. J. B.

* * *

Ich War Bei Billy Graham

SOMETIME ago one of the publications of our Free Church brethren carried an article entitled *Ich war bei Billy Graham*. The writer ably analyzed Graham's strengths and weaknesses as evidenced in his Berlin rallies.

The author closed his presentation with a paragraph which, in our opinion, is one of the most significant admissions to come from the Free Churches of Germany:

Was wir von Billy Graham lernen können, ist: von Herzen Busse zu tun darüber, dasz wir in den Reichtümern des Evangeliums sitzen und doch so wenig davon auszuteilen verstehen, und das wenige noch so ungeschickt. Gott helfe uns, eine "lebendige

Gemeinde" zu sein und immer mehr zu werden, damit wir nicht vor Gott und Billy Graham zuschanden werden!

We would concur in the prayer of the writer "Gott Hilfe un eine 'lebendige Gemeinde' zu sein."

Our own admittedly superficial observations in Germany, the reports of chaplains stationed in West Germany, and conversation with our students who come from the land of the Reformation give us reason to believe that the proclamation of the Gospel on the part of the Free Churches has been somewhat less than effective. If Billy Graham served no other purpose in Berlin, he at least moved one brother to recognize that possession of the Gospel is not identical with the sharing of it.

G. J. B.

* * *

Search for Meaning

SOME months ago Dr. Paul Tillich addressed the Faculty Forum at the University of Illinois on "The Search for Meaning."

Dr. Tillich stated:

Now where are sources of meaning in our time? The critical power of meaninglessness against every answer is very great. Again I saw this in Japan where the Christian missions, as direct missions, have only a very small chance of effect, because all the Christian symbols have already lost their power, even before they are known to the Japanese people. And if these symbols are given to them, they say, "Oh, another religion! We already have twenty and more." This is actually true. If Christianity cannot come to them in another way than as another religion, then it cannot come at all. Therefore, I believe that our resurgence of religion, which is visible on all campuses, is not sufficient, if it simply strengthens religion as religion, rather than religion as the state of being grasped by something ultimate—by ultimate concern. At the moment I can only say that this movement is not the answer and evangelistic events are not the answer. Skeptical defense mechanisms are extremely strong to

overcome, and they are so strong because there is some truth in them. Nothing negative can exist without the positive of which it is the distortion. And, therefore, their strength is the truth in them, namely the loss of the impact of these symbols on people who live in our present situation as I have described it in terms of the horizontal as against the vertical line.

No one need contest Dr. Tillich's analysis of the great problem of our day—the utter meaninglessness of life to many, many people in all parts of the world.

The world is in a schizophrenic condition, Dr. Tillich has stated. On the horizontal plane there is a constant forward thrust in new products, new tools, new skills, new comforts. But none of these help man to get at the meaning of his life. They leave unanswered for him questions like, Why do I exist? What is the end of existence? What comes after this life?

There is need for vertical dimension to life, as Dr. Tillich observed. For the serious questions of life man needs ultimate answers, answers which really give meaning to his otherwise meaningless existence.

So far so good. Dr. Tillich has focused on the crucial problem of man as he exists his existence. Has he anything to offer? Tillich's answer to man in his quest for meaning can be summed up briefly by these points of emphasis which formed the conclusion of his address:

- 1) Surrender to something ultimately sublime.
- 2) Have love (*eros*) for the smallest—for the inexhaustible depths of even the smallest—which shows that here something ultimately sublime shows itself in a preliminary way.
- 3) There is something great in your suffering as long as it is serious and not a matter of cynical arrogance.

These are philosophic answers which probably any of the princely intellects in history, from Plato's day on, could have made too. But do such answers improve the situation? If man is really desperate in his search for meaning in life, what possible help can he obtain by being told to find and surrender to something ultimate-

ly sublime, to love even the smallest, to find redemption through suffering?

Compare these answers with three others, three clear-cut Christian answers on the same themes (Phillips' translation):

- 1) On faith: "It is the secret of faith, which is the burden of our preaching, and it says, in effect, 'If you openly admit by your own mouth that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and if you believe in your own heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.'" (Rom. 10,8.9.)
- 2) On love: "Now that you have, by obeying the truth, made your souls clean enough for a genuine love of your fellows, see that you do love each other fervently and from the heart. For you are sons of God now." (I Peter 1,22f.)
- 3) On hope, even in suffering: "The Spirit Himself endorses our inward conviction that we really are the children of God. Think what that means. If we are His children we share His treasures, and all that Christ claims as His will belong to all of us as well! Yes, if we share in His sufferings we shall certainly share in His glory." (Rom. 8,16.17.)

Is Christianity, is its message just one among a host of other competing religions? If so, our missionaries should have yielded the spiritual "Quemoys" and "Matus" long ago to the devil, the arch-fiend who delights in keeping man reasonably satisfied in his meaningless existence.

But the fact is that Christianity alone is able to deal with the meaninglessness of human existence and provide man with the proper vertical connection with the sublime. It does so, not vaguely not with ambiguous philosophic talk, but plainly, by pointing to the Savior of the world, whose message cannot be misunderstood, who proved His truth by His resurrection, and who now earnestly seek for the hearts of all people to know and believe:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14,6.)

Shall we still talk about search for meaning, in the light of this? For the believer the quest is now over and the adventure of life's wonderful existence in Christ has begun.

E. F. Klug

* * *

Response

given by Dr. Walter F. Albrecht, speaking for members of the faculty who were recently honored for their many years of service in our Church, of which fifty-five years comprise the career of Dr. Albrecht.

THE seven men you are honoring tonight have collectively served 225 years in the Kingdom. This service has been rendered in the true visible Church.

None of these men is a genius, a spiritual giant. They are just average theologians. The credit for their work does not belong to them.

Our Father in heaven has hallowed His name through them, has induced them to treat His nature and properties, His Word and work, as sacred—above all criticism.

Our heavenly Father has had His Kingdom of Grace come through them. He has seen to it that His will was done on earth as it is in heaven, on them and through them.

He has given us our daily bread. He has forgiven us all our trespasses, even as we strive daily to forgive those who wrong us.

He has preserved us from many a temptation and sustained us in others. He has already delivered us from many an evil and will finally deliver us from all evil, when we enter into His glorious presence.

The Kingdom to be built is His; the power to build it is His alone; therefore, the glory and honor belong entirely to Him.
SOLI DEO GLORIA!