

amazed at the idea that economic or political change could build a good social order, without first finding a way to change men's hearts. After all, the worst conceivable type of social organization, if run by truly Christian men, produces better results than the finest conceivable type of social organization, if run by wicked and ungodly men. Trying to change the social order without first changing men's hearts is like washing a pig. For a short time it may appear cleaner, but the effects do not remain very long.

It is quite misleading to suggest that Luther was a precursor of the World Council of Churches in its efforts to produce a new world through social change. He realized very clearly a vital fact that the World Council tends to forget--the reality of sin. This realization, in fact, was what launched Luther upon his life work. Because of this realization Luther gave up his early ambitions and turned against his father's desires. The whole course of his life was changed when he realized the importance of this tremendous central fact.

It is interesting to read the story of Luther's early life. His father had been a peasant. When Luther was a boy it was impossible for his parents to give him many advantages. They saw that he was a bright youngster and sent him away to the home of a cousin where there were better educational opportunities than in his own area. Here the young Luther had to sing on the street in order to raise money to attend an elementary school. By hard work and much self-sacrifice he made his way through college. By this time his hard-working father was getting ahead and becoming prosperous. He urged his son to become a lawyer. Knowing his son's ability, he declared that Martin might become a great man in Germany if he would study law. Soon after Luther had made a good start in his law course he came more and more to realize his sin. Compared with most young men Luther might well be considered as living an exemplary life, but realization of his own sinfulness, as compared with the righteous demands of God's holy law, resulted in his deciding to abandon all his plans of seeking worldly greatness.

One evening a very interesting meeting occurred in the university town of Erfurt. A group of friends came together at the home of one of their favorites, Martin Luther, whose excellence in music and fine companionship made them look forward to a very pleasant evening. Toward the end of a most enjoyable occasion, their host began to distribute among them his musical instruments, his law books, and various other possessions. They were amazed, and asked what it meant. They said, "Martin, you are acting as if you expected to die." Luther answered, "Yes, I am dying to the world. You will see me no more after today. Tomorrow I shall enter the Augustinian convent and become a monk." The friends said, "Martin, why should you bury yourself and end your chances of becoming a great man?"

Luther's father felt exactly as his friends did. When Luther insisted on his determination to become a monk his father said, "Does not the commandment say, 'Obey your parents'? You should obey me. I want you to be

he was thrust into a dungeon and not allowed to say anything in his defense. He was required merely to answer 'yes' or 'no' to specific questions as to what he had taught, and after this farce of a trial he was taken out and burned at the stake as a heretic, despite the fact that he had been given a safe conduct by the emperor. This new emperor will treat you in the same way that Sigismund treated John Huss." Luther replied that he would use the opportunity to witness to God's truth before the emperor even if, as a result, he also should be burned at the stake.

As Luther proceeded on the way to Worms, traveling across Germany with a herald, they would often see a large sign as they entered a town, proclaiming that the emperor had given orders that all Luther's books must be gathered together and burned. People said, "Luther, when the emperor has you in his hands he will treat you the same way that he is now treating your books." They begged Luther not to go to Worms. Luther said, "If there are as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, I am determined to go there and witness before the emperor."

In many towns people were anxious to see Luther. Sometimes, when they would enter a town, Luther would express a desire to preach, and the herald would permit it. So all along the way Luther preached the Gospel. In one town he went into the big church to preach. It was quite an old building. So many people crowded in that the weight was too great and a whole wall collapsed. No one was injured, as the wall fell outward. In terror, people began to run out of the church, saying, "This must surely be a very wicked man that even the church goes to pieces when he enters it to speak." However, Luther called out in a loud voice: "Come back, come back, the devil is trying to keep you from hearing the gospel."

This impresses me as a wonderful example of the proper attitude toward divine guidance. We should learn God's will from the study of the Bible, not from circumstances. If the circumstances fit with what we know to be God's will, we can thank God for giving us help in doing what He desires. If the circumstances point against the direction that we know to be God's will, we should blame the devil for the circumstances.

I have known cases where a young man, expecting to enter a seminary where the Word of God is believed and taught, would change his mind because someone wrote him a letter enclosing a check that should be used only if he studied at a different place. He said that the receiving of such an unsolicited letter must be God's leading. As a result, more than one earnest Christian has received training that unfitted him for the Lord's service. We should not let circumstances lead us. Our guidance should come from the Bible.

In the middle of the afternoon Luther entered Worms and was ushered into the great hall where the emperor sat in state. As the son of a peasant, brought up to feel that he belonged to a lower class, Luther was quite overwhelmed by the great assemblage of dukes, counts,