

Africo-American Presbyterian

"AND YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH. AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE" - John viii. 32

VOL. LV.

CHARLOTTE, N. C. THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1934.

NO. 48.

REDEEMED FROM ECCLESIASTICAL BONDAGE

By Rev. E. W. Carpenter

(The Rev. Edward W. Carpenter, of New York City, preached Sunday, Dec. 9th, at 11 A. M., in the Thirteenth Avenue Presbyterian church, Newark, N. J., the Rev. Lawrence B. Ellerson, D. D., pastor. The church observed the Four Hundredth Anniversary of Luther's translation of the Bible. The sermon is given here.)

MARTIN LUTHER

1. Few men have ever lived during whose lifetime such momentous changes occurred as those which took place during the days of Martin Luther. One great revolution is sufficient to make notable the century of its occurrence. Yet during the lifetime of Luther (1483-1546) three stupendous revolutions are recorded: the conclusion of the Renaissance, the beginning of the Reformation, and the rise of Capitalism. Rapid strides were also made in the direction of Individualism and Nationalism. Only four decades before Luther's birth came the notable invention of printing by Gutenberg, thus making possible the spread of popular education and the rise of modern democracy. During this period, new universities and institutions of higher learning were springing up throughout Europe. Many notable men of science and art were laying the foundations of the new learning. Copernicus and Servetus, Machiavelli and Renchin, Erasmus and Hultsch, Leonardo da Vinci and Titian, Holbein and Durer, Raphael and Michael Angelo, all were Luther's contemporaries. Luther was a boy of nine when Columbus discovered America, and before he died Vasco de Gama and Magellan had completed their voyages of circumnavigation, thus opening up a whole new world.

From the beginning of the sixteenth century the opposition within Germany to Roman rule began to assume formidable proportions. Without the continuous support of powerful German nobles, Luther could never have achieved his work.

The Church controlled the education, the amusements, and the worship of the people everywhere; spiritual and temporal blessings in this world and salvation in the world to come had their sole origin in the Church. Baptism at the hands of a representative of the Church was the only means of gaining salvation. Those persons, including infants, who had not been baptized, at the time of death, were consigned to the flames of hell throughout eternity. The Church alone could interpret the Scripture and all truth was in its infallible keeping. It spoke with absolute authority and insisted upon implicit obedience to every doctrine and command. Dissent was heresy and was punished with the utmost rigor.

The Inquisition

In the thirteenth century a special institution known as the Inquisition was inaugurated to hunt out and restrain heretics. Since heretics were regarded as lost souls who would burn endlessly in hell if they died unrepentant, extreme bodily and mental torture was inflicted by the Church in the endeavor to restore the guilty one to orthodox and salvation. The most violent punishment at the hands of the Church was regarded as an act of mercy to a vile sinner, far better than that the soul should be damned. Especially so since the

guilty one, if left unrestrained, would drag many of the faithful with him to the depths of perdition.

To grasp the real significance of the limitless power wielded by the Inquisition, it is necessary to remember that it was regarded as heresy to deny the truth of any doctrine of the Church or to refuse in any way to obey the ecclesiastical authorities, whether the doctrines dealt with astronomy, physics, geography or geology, medicine or chemistry, education or government. For extent, duration and intensity the reign of terror which everywhere accompanied the Inquisition is unparalleled in human history. Germany, however, escaped its worst horrors. It never did take root there as in Italy, Spain, France and elsewhere. While it still maintained a nominal existence in Germany at the time of Luther's revolt, it retained so little actual power that it was helpless to silence or destroy even such an arch heretic as Luther, and thus the course of history was changed.

The Degeneracy of the Church

It is extremely painful to call attention to the condition of Christendom at the time Luther began his work. The Church had fallen on evil days. Graft and corruption were widespread. High ecclesiastical offices were openly purchased. Simony, the buying and selling of the things of God, was almost universal. Every function of the priest became a source of revenue. Marriage and funeral ceremonies were refused unless the fees demanded were paid in advance, and the Eucharist was withheld from the communicant unless he offered an oblation.

In most realms of thought and activity the human spirit was shackled and bound. Human progress was conditioned upon bursting asunder the chains of ecclesiastical tyranny. It was into such a world and at such an hour that Martin Luther was born.

2. What Did Luther Do?

Few great men of history began life under such obscure and humble circumstances as did Martin Luther. He was born on November 10, 1483, in the village of Eisleben in Central Germany. His father was a peasant miner, with only meager natural gifts, with no advantages. His mother was a quiet, austere woman, a most rigid disciplinarian. Martin was the oldest child. Shortly after his birth the family moved to the mining town of Mansfeld where they lived in abject poverty. In the village school Latin was the chief subject and the pupils were required not only to read it but to speak it as well. Ignorance and brutality was a marked characteristic of the teachers of those days. In referring to his painful experience in school Luther later said: The examination was like a trial for murder. The teacher once beat him sixteen times on a single morning. At the age of thirteen Martin was sent away to a religious school at Marburg where he earned his way by begging on the streets. The following year he was transferred to Eisenback. Here he was taken into the home of a very devout and wealthy family named Catts. In 1501 his father, by great effort and privation, sent him to the famous old University of Erfurt. The studies which he pursued while here would seem unbearably dry and barren to a modern student. The next year he received

the bachelor of arts degree, and three years later he was awarded the master's degree. In accordance with the wishes of his father he then began to study law, one of the easiest roads to fame and fortune. Within two months he abruptly abandoned the study of law and entered a monastery. Various explanations have been advanced for this precipitous action. It seems that he had become disgusted with the study of law and went home to secure his father's permission to change his course. On his way back to the university he was overtaken by a terrible thunder storm and in his fright vowed to St. Anna to be a monk if his life was spared. The people of that day were exceedingly superstitious and regarded storms as a direct interposition of the devil.

On July 17, 1505, at the age of twenty-two, he entered the Augustinian Convent at Erfurt as a novice. Here the brilliant university scholar began to scrub floors and to beg upon the street. Shortly afterward through the efforts of Vicar John Van Stanpity, he was relieved of his servile labors and sent back to his studies. He now began to specialize in the study of the Bible and to read speculative theology.

On May 2, 1507, Luther was admitted to the priesthood, and continued as an inmate of the Convent at Erfurt until the end of 1508. During these years he devoted himself with great zeal to the monastic method of reaching perfection; praying industriously night and day, practicing long fastings and sleepless vigil. But he found little spiritual satisfaction. Later he wrote: "When I was the most devout, I went a doubter to the altar; a doubter I came away from it; if I had confessed my penitence, I still doubted; had I not, I was in despair." Stanpity seemed to understand him and finally helped him to overcome his doubts and to regain his faith. From 1512 to 1517 Luther was a professor at the University of Wittenberg, of which his old friend Stanpity had become dean. He now began to lecture on the Bible, a practice which he never abandoned throughout his lifetime. At this period Luther's growing revolt against Scholasticism came to a climax. In September, 1517, a month before he issued his renounced ninety-five theses, he published ninety-seven theses, denying the value of Aristotle's works as a text book. In his lectures he poured contempt on the methods of Aristotle. He was so successful in his protests that a complete reform of the university curriculum was carried through. Luther devoted himself to the study of the Bible, and to the Fathers, especially to Augustine. He was not yet prepared to make the Bible his ultimate authority, but he was moving rapidly in that direction. From the very beginning of his work Luther was an extraordinarily prolific writer. A steady stream of books and pamphlets poured from his pen. His greatest monument, says one of his biographers, is the German Bible. The New Testament was completed during the year he was in seclusion in the Wartburg in 1521. The Old Testament appeared in sections, the last part being published in (1532) 1534. It seems almost incredible that this man, in addition to his regular work of preaching, teaching and visitation of the churches should have produced 420 separate works, many of them of great length.

3. What Did Luther Say?

Three of Luther's writings, known in Germany as the Three Great Reformation Treatises, contain the heart of

his message. They are: "The Liberty of a Christian Man," "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," and "On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church." They were all published in 1520, when Luther was thirty-seven years old. Of the first Luther later said: "A very small book so far as paper is concerned, but one containing the whole sum of the Christian life." Its main thesis is the priesthood of all believers as a consequence of justification by faith. If a man has faith, he has all; if he has not faith, he has nothing. Religious ceremonies may be helpful, but they are not essential. At best they are merely means to an end; if they prove to be a hindrance they ought to be swept away. Upon this ideal the Reformation was founded. Its implications were far-reaching. It undermined the whole doctrine of exclusive salvation, at the hands of the Church, and broke the bonds of ecclesiastical authority. Few ideas in history have produced greater changes in human society than this one, which now appears so obvious to millions of Christians. In his ninety-five theses on Indulgences he attacked the ceremonial system and declared that the Christian who has truly repented has already been forgiven by God and has no need of an indulgence. Christ demands only true repentance and no intermediary is required in asking pardon from God. From the beginning Luther wished reformation, not revolution. Luther believed that some parts of the Bible were more inspired than others, for example, the Gospels and the First Epistle of John, the letters to the Romans, to the Galatians and to the Ephesians, and the First Epistle of St. Peter, and the Psalms. On the other hand, he rejected the Epistle of James as an Epistle of straw. He denied the Mosaic authority of part of the Pentateuch; he declared Job to be an allegory, Jonah was so childish that he was almost inclined to laugh at it; the Book of Kings was a thousand paces ahead of Chronicles and more to be believed. "Ecclesiastes has neither boots nor spurs, but rides in socks, as I did when I was in cloister."

4. What Happened to Luther?

It is exceedingly difficult for Modern Protestants to understand the intensity with which Luther was hated by the ecclesiastical leaders of his day. From their point of view he was not only a vile heretic, doomed to eternal damnation, but was also an open rebel and was doing his utmost to destroy the holy Church. Thousands of men and women had been burned at the stake for heresies which were inconsequential as compared with those of Luther. That he was not immediately reduced to ashes following his excommunication by the Pope was due entirely to the protection he received from the German princes. His life would have been snuffed out before his work was well started if it had not been for the rise of Nationalism in Germany and the growing resentment against the domination of Rome. During the last twenty-six years of his life he was an outlaw and fugitive from justice. It was only the refusal of the German princes to carry out the edict that enabled him to avoid execution. Few men have ever been subjected to such severe abuse as was heaped upon Luther.

5. What Kind of a Man Was Luther?

Concerning almost no other man in history are there such violently divergent estimates

NEW OFFICERS OF THE FEDERAL COUNCIL

At the Biennial Meeting of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, held in Dayton, Ohio, December 4-7, Dr. Ivan Lee Holt, minister of St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church, South, St. Louis, Mo., was elected President, and Dr. George W. Richards, President of the General Conference of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, was elected Vice-President.

Dr. Holt is one of the outstanding pastors of the South, being the minister of what is often called "The Cathedral Church of Southern Methodism." It is widely known because of its remarkable contacts with the whole life of the city, social, civic, educational and philanthropic. It maintains a hospital, a social settlement, an extensive program of religious education, and an important ministry on the foreign missionary field. Dr. Holt is still in his forties, having been born in DeWitt, Ark., in 1886. After graduating from Vanderbilt University, he took his Ph. D. in ancient languages in the University of Chicago. Offered a scholarship in Egyptology at a leading university in the East, he found the personal interests of men's souls more challenging than the intricacies of hieroglyphics, and entered the pastorate. Later he was chaplain and professor of Old Testament Literature at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

As a preacher, Dr. Holt's influence reaches far beyond the United States. He has been a visiting minister in England on several occasions. On January fifteenth he leaves for the Orient where he will fill a three months' visiting pastorate in the Community Church in Shanghai, confer with representatives of the National Christian Council in Japan and serve as a special messenger at the Centennial of the founding of Methodism in Australia.

Dr. Richards, who has been elected Vice-President of the Council, is one of the foremost church historians of the country, now President of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church at Lancaster, Pa. After graduating from Franklin and Marshall College in 1887, he studied at the Universities of Berlin, Erlangen and Heidelberg in Germany. He received the degree of Dr. of Theology from Heidelberg and also holds the honorary degree of D. D., from Edinburgh University.

Dr. Richards has had wide contacts with the churches of other lands, especially as President of the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System Throughout the World. He is a member of the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order. He is widely known as an advocate of church union, having been a leading factor in bringing about the recent union of the Reformed Church in the U. S. and the Evangelical Synod of North America in what is now known as the Evangelical and Reformed Church. At the merger of the two bodies last June he was elected the first President.

Dr. Richards is one of the closest American friends of Karl Barth, the distinguished German-Swiss theologian, who was recently removed from his chair at Bonn by the Nazi Government as a result of his unwillingness to take an unconditional oath of loyalty to Hitler. Dr. Richards is the translator of one of Barth's volumes entitled, "Come, Holy Spirit." Dr. Richards' most recent volume, "Beyond Fundamentalism

and Modernism," was published only a few months ago.

Dr. Rivington D. Lord, minister of the First Baptist church, of Brooklyn, N. Y., was re-elected Recording Secretary. He has held this office since the Council was first organized in 1908. Mr. Frank H. Mann, a business man of New York, was re-elected Treasurer.

The preliminary report on the relation of the churches to the liquor problem, presented by the Department of Social Service, analyzed frankly the new situation which the churches face in the light of the twelve months experience with repeal. The report pointed out that a reorganization is taking place in the temperance agencies, responsibility now being chiefly located in the educational boards of the churches. Candidly recognizing that on many points there is little agreement and that there is no unanimous judgment supporting prohibition as the immediate major policy of the nation, the report insists that on one point at least there is agreement, namely, that the first need is for a more educational approach to the problem. The statement, which was presented as a report for information, was received and its recommendations adopted. The recommendations express satisfaction with the new educational approach which is now being made to the liquor problem and authorize further study of major problems of liquor control.

The emphasis upon evangelism was perhaps the outstanding note of the meeting as a whole. An address by Dr. Butcherick on "The Minister as Evangelist," was heart-searching and kindling. His simple and direct narrative of ways in which as pastor and preacher he has been led to a new sense of the possibilities of really changing the lives of men and women inspired many to a new commitment on their own part. The proposal made by Dr. William Hiram Foulkes, the Chairman of the Federal Council's Department of Evangelism, for a National Preaching Mission to be held about a year hence after the most careful preparation has been made, was received with much enthusiasm. It is expected that some of the foremost preachers in the world, including those of other countries, will be called into service for a great united effort in interpreting the significance of the Christian Gospel in the leading cities of the country.

The noon-day periods of worship, led by Dr. Richard Roberts, of Toronto, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, provided an atmosphere of spiritual warmth for the whole sessions. His heart-to-heart talks upon the Church, the Evangel, and the Cross, were luminous interpretations of the Christian witness to the world.

The "Message" adopted by the Council was a bugle call to a spiritual advance. Beginning with a recognition of the great historic evangelical convictions in which the churches are united in the Council, the Message gives frank recognition to the "difficulty of this age, its perplexity, futility and wrongness in many areas of life," passes on to a frank confession of shortcomings even in the Church itself, calls for a renewed faith in God, a reaffirmed loyalty to Christ, a new commitment both to Christian social ideals and to personal devotion of life. It ends with an emphasis upon the present as "a day of rebirth for the Christian Church," emphasizing the necessity for a greater unity, a more convincing presentation of the Gospel and a more courageous dealing with the great social and in-

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued on page 4)