

## **Luther's Legacy: Where Have All the Pastors Gone?**

Jane, 18, a widow with two small children, descended into a deep depression. One day, while walking along a river with thoughts of suicide, she heard a plowman on the other bank. As he began his fieldwork, he whistled Christian hymns, and something about his spirit touched Jane. If a simple plowman could display such enthusiasm for the mundane work of his life, why couldn't she? With a new perspective, Jane returned to Dublin, where she answered the call to follow Christ. She prayed earnestly for her children and the next *twelve generations* following her.

Among the results? Her son, Grattan, became a minister and helped trigger the 1859 revival in Ireland. From his descendants alone have come a host of Christian workers who have traveled the world with the Gospel, including the noted Christian author Dr. Os Guinness.

Through our faithful witness, we can bless future generations to come. Let's strengthen our homes and produce, by His grace, a legacy for the Lord.

### **Malachi 2:15 (NKJV)**

**But did He not make *them* one,  
Having a remnant of the Spirit?  
And why one?  
He seeks godly offspring.  
And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.**

American independence resulted from Patriot Pastors who searched the scriptures to determine God's view of government. They then took to their pulpits to rouse their congregations to stand against tyranny. Men took up arms to defend their families because preachers taught them about their unalienable rights from God.

The clergy that existed before the Revolution played a significant role in shaping the views of our Founders and Framers towards liberty. However, today, it is rare to find such Patriot Pastors. Most have given in to the pressures of fear and capitulation, as they are worried about losing their church's tax-exempt status or government-approved housing allowance.

Yes, we want to have the right spirit about us, and we certainly prefer going to heaven over hell, but what about equipping us for the day-to-day issues we face and our Christian responsibilities toward our families, country, and world? Remember, Jesus said to "occupy" or "do business" until He returns (**Luke 19:17**).

Today, I want to draw our attention to the brave men of God from the past who were willing to endure suffering by standing up for what was right. All five of these men happened to be Lutherans. However, I am unsure if the contemporary Lutheran Church has the same level of determination as its predecessors. Nevertheless, this is not unique to the Lutheran denomination, as most churches started out strong but have lost their fervor and become inactive and apprehensive in the face of adversity. We have grown complacent and are living off the faith of our ancestors, who made great sacrifices for the sake of their beliefs.

### **Martin Luther**

The Lutheran Church was born out of hardship when Martin Luther resisted papal tyranny and brought reform to the Roman Catholic Church. On October 31, 1517, he nailed his now-famous "95 Theses" to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, initially attempting to help the Church, not start a revolution. He soon found himself in controversial turmoil with the Catholic hierarchy.

Luther was a devout monk who searched the scriptures to understand the will of God and please Him. As he studied the Book of Romans, he saw the place of faith and not merely external sacraments. In particular, he objected to selling “indulgences,” sold as “get-out-of-purgatory” cards to unsuspecting the masses. The Church used the money it raised to build grand Cathedrals.

As his story progressed, Martin Luther, a radical Christian, translated the scriptures into the people's language. He joined the ranks of other courageous Christians who translated the Bible so their people could read it. The people were no longer required to learn Latin or attend superstitious services they could not understand. They no longer had to depend on a clergyman to explain the text, as they could read and understand it themselves.

Martin Luther never intended to establish a new church or denomination. However, his name is now synonymous with opposition to religious oppression. He remained steadfast in his principles despite the religious authorities' threat of execution for heresy. Through his faith in God, he passed down a legacy to those who came after him.

**John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg** grew up in the household of a Lutheran pastor. Before the American Revolution, he became the pastor of two churches in Woodstock, Virginia. One was an English-speaking Anglican Church. The other was a German-speaking Lutheran Church. In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, he served in the Virginia State Legislature. In January of 1776, he realized that the war with Great Britain was inevitable due to the British aggressions toward the Colonies. The English blocked Boston Harbor, burned Charlestown, attacked Lexington and Concord, seized gunpowder in Virginia, and fought the Battle of Bunker Hill.

On January 21, 1776, Peter Muhlenberg delivered his last sermon to his Woodstock congregation. He recounted the American crisis and reminded his parishioners of America's founding principles of religious and civil liberties. He described how they were in danger of losing both rights. Turning to **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**, he declared, “In the language of the Holy Writ there was a time for all things, a time to preach and a time to pray, but those times have passed away.” Then, in a booming voice, said, “There is a time to fight – and that time has come!”

At the end of his sermon, he led a benediction. Instead of moving to the vestry room after the service, he removed his black clerical robe before the congregation, revealing his Continental Army officer's uniform. Then, he invited his church members to fight with him to protect their liberties. 300 men from both churches joined him to establish the Eighth Virginia Regiment.

Peter Muhlenberg rose through the ranks and gained valuable experience, becoming one of General Washington's most productive generals. He played a crucial role in the defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown and was present at the British surrender. After the war, he served in the first national legislature.

Today, Muhlenberg is honored with a statue in Statuary Hall in the US Capitol rotunda for his Christian patriotism. Martin Luther inspired his integrity and was known for resisting civil and religious tyranny.

Let me tell you about the Lutheran Pastor, **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**. We remember this courageous man for his resistance to the embodiment of evil in the Twentieth Century, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Third Reich in Germany.

Bonhoeffer had the opportunity and encouragement to sit out World War II in the United States. Instead, despite the dangers, he chose to be a “good shepherd” to his flock in Germany. He believed that to combat evil, we must utilize all the weapons at our disposal, both spiritual and physical, and therefore, he returned to Germany to confront the enemy.

Most German churches caved to Hitler's intimidation. Only a few chose to go underground and resist his tyranny. Bonhoeffer joined the resistance and spoke out against the regime, while most German pastors "went along to get along," fearing they would lose their salaries or worse. Hitler controlled the government and almost all of the German congregations. The Nazis silenced the Christian voice and launched the holocaust, killing millions of Jews and non-Jews with indirect Christian approval.

Pastor Bonhoeffer pulled out all the stops and fought with every resource. He taught biblical principles of resistance to evil, prayed, and acted. Implicated in an assassination attempt on Hitler, he was hanged in a German prison just days before the Allied liberation. He resisted to the end instead of taking a way of ease.

**Martin Niemoller** was a German Lutheran Pastor and a contemporary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Initially, Pastor Niemoller supported Adolf Hitler and the Nazis' rise to power. However, he eventually became an opponent of the "Nazification" of Protestant German churches. The Nazi elite had planned to force all Protestant denominations to unite in a single pro-Nazi Evangelical Christian Church. Niemoller opposed this idea.

Niemoller's opposition to the Nazi regime led to his imprisonment in two concentration camps between 1938 and 1945, where he barely escaped execution. After his imprisonment, he expressed deep regret about not having done enough to help the victims of the Nazis' abuse. He is famous for this little poem.

"First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me."

**Lutheran Pastor Richard Wurmbrand** of Romania was born into Judaism, sidetracked briefly by atheism, and then converted to Christianity. He was called the "Iron Curtain St. Paul" and endured fourteen years of harsh imprisonment and brutal torture for his faith under communist rule. But unlike Paul, he regained his freedom and devoted the next thirty-five years to helping other persecuted Christians.

During World War II, Richard and his wife Sabina evangelized the occupying German forces, preached in bomb shelters, and rescued scores of Jewish children from the ghettos. The Nazis arrested them repeatedly for their resistance.

Wurmbrand's connection with Russia began during this same time period. His own miraculous conversion had given him intense sorrow for a people raised from childhood in atheism, and during the war, he had an opportunity to minister to Russian soldiers held in Romanian prisons. Seeing men who had lost the ability to think for themselves, Wurmbrand vowed to dedicate his life to such men "to give them back their personalities and to give them faith in God and Christ."

Nine months before the end of the war in Europe, one million Russian troops marched into Romania. The communists seized control of the government, beginning a nightmare of oppression and capitulation. The Russian occupiers convened a congress of religious bodies attended by over 4,000 ministers, priests, and rabbis. Joseph Stalin was named honorary president of the gathering, and one by one, the spiritual leaders swore their allegiance to the new government. Sabina urged her husband, "Richard, stand up and wash away this shame from the face of Christ!" Wurmbrand rose and told the delegates that their duty was to glorify God and Christ alone.

Over the next two years, Wurmbrand distributed one million Bibles to Russian troops and smuggled Bibles into Russia. By now, he was head of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission in Bucharest. On February

29, 1948, the secret police kidnapped him and threw him into prison with the designation “Prisoner Number 1.” He was held there for over eight years and subjected to horrific torture. In a general amnesty brought about by the Khrushchev-Eisenhower “thaw,” The Communists released Pastor Wurmbrand in 1956. Although warned never to preach again, he soon resumed his underground work.

In 1959, the government rearrested him and sentenced him to twenty-five more excruciating years in prison. However, in 1964, Wurmbrand was released and then ransomed for \$10,000 to leave Romania with his family. The following year, he appeared before a US Senate subcommittee, at one point stripping to the waist to show eighteen deep torture wounds. In 1967, the Wurmbrands began a ministry to the persecuted church in communist countries. He died on February 17, 2001, and was active in his ministry to the end.

The Lutherans were not the only ones to take up the cause of liberty; other denominations have also done so. As I recounted these stories, I feel more than a little embarrassed at the ease of my life as a Christian. I am from a denomination that resists cultural involvement and promotes unlimited submission to government, so I have yet to be on the front lines of the fight consistently. I got my “red pill” when Barack Obama was elected (maybe selected) as President. I saw the handwriting on the wall when he asked his constituents to help him “fundamentally change America.” We don’t need a fundamental change; we need the foundational renewal of being the “Christian Nation” our patriot ancestors envisioned.

We may yet be called on to suffer horrendous things for Christ. Martin Luther was stalked because he wanted to translate the Bible into the people’s language. Peter Muhlenberg put his life on the line as a line officer in the Continental Army and never returned to a pulpit. Bonhoeffer, Niemuller, and Wurmbrand risked their lives and liberty for Christ. Niemoller and Wurmbrand suffered torture and imprisonment, while Bonhoeffer paid the ultimate price.

When I stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and he asks what I gave up for Him, what can I say? What will you say? Too often, when given the choice, we have preferred the ease of going along to get along to the rigors of resisting tyranny.

You may disagree with the theology of the Lutheran Church. Do you dispute the actions and faith of these men? They stood against tyranny in its many forms and refused to surrender for beds of ease. I wonder if verses like these pricked their consciences.

**Woe to you *who are at ease in Zion*, (Amos 6:1, NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> **“But woe to you who are rich,**

**For you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24, NKJV)**

Keep The Light of *Engaging the Enemy* Burning!

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