

# **How Martin Luther's Uncompromising Stand for Freedom Contributed to America's Founding**

Oct. 31, 2017 will mark the 500-year anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg church door and igniting the Protestant Reformation. Luther, a Catholic priest and University professor, was challenging his church's practice of selling indulgences that offered forgiveness of sins and freedom from purgatory for a price.

From there, Luther went on to challenge papal authority and the sacramental system of the Catholic Church with his teachings on justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers and the ultimate authority of Scripture. Ordered by the Roman Church hierarchy to stop teaching these doctrines, Luther decided that he could not sacrifice truth for a superficial unity.

## **Luther's Bold Stand for Freedom**

He was, therefore, ordered to appear before a tribunal of cardinals, bishops and the Roman emperor. Held in the city of Worms, it was known as the Diet of Worms. Standing alone before this imposing body of religious and civil authorities, Luther was ordered to recant his teachings or suffer excommunication, which could also mean death.

Luther told this court that he was willing to recant but only if he could be convinced by reason and the Scriptures that he was in error. The Roman hierarchy, however, was not in the habit of "reasoning" with those who challenged their authority, and they demanded that Luther admit his error on the spot.

In his famous reply, which struck a blow for individual freedom and religious liberty, Luther defended what he had taught. Knowing his life was on the line, he boldly concluded his defense with these words.

*I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture, which is my basis. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant anything, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. Here I stand! I can do no other! Amen!*

## **The Radical Reformers**

Luther, however, was a man of his times and in later life, physically ill and frustrated with the multitude of hindrances to the Reformation, he advocated the use of force in dealing with those he considered enemies of the gospel, which included Catholics, Muslims, Jews and Anabaptists.

It was the more radical, pacifist groups of the Reformation—the Anabaptists, Separatist Puritans and Quakers—who took Luther's early stance on freedom of conscience and religious liberty to its logical conclusion and applied it to all areas of life, even when it meant suffering and death.

Like Luther, these groups considered the ideal of individual freedom and religious liberty to be tied to their Christian faith. This is clearly borne out in the Constitution of "The New England Confederation," formed in 1643, which begins with the declaration,

*Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the Liberties of the Gospel in purity and peace.*

Yes, it was these so-called "radical" Reformation groups, the

Separatist Puritans, the Baptists and the Quakers, that brought Luther's original ideas of freedom of conscience and religious liberty to the New World and further developed them on American soil. This is what historian Benjamin Hart was referring to when he wrote,

*It was Protestants of the most radical stripe, most zealous in their religious convictions (those whom the America Civil Liberties Union would like to see outlawed from the public discourse) who were in fact the greatest proponents of religious liberty as codified in America's governing charter 200 years later.*

### **These American Liberties are Under Attack**

Today those radical ideas of individual freedom and religious liberty on which our nation was founded are under attack. Christian bakers, florists and other Christian artisans are being told they "must" provide their services to same-sex weddings, irrespective of the fact that it violates their conscience and sincerely held religious beliefs. This is un-American!

Christians are being told they have no right to make their views known in public. Senators Diane Feinstein and Bernie Sanders have recently challenged the fitness of judicial nominees to serve because of their open Christian testimony. A recent "chilling study" revealed that a majority of college students believe it is OK to disrupt and shout down a [Christian] speaker with whom they disagree. This is un-American.

Yes, it is time for Christians in America to take a cue from Luther and once again make a stand for individual freedom of conscience and religious liberty. Like Luther, we must be fully convinced by the Word of God that ours is the true and righteous position. And then, we must not waver.

## A Time for Truth and Boldness

“Remember George, this is no time to go wobbly,” Margaret Thatcher is reported to have said to George H.W. Bush as he mulled over what to do in response to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990. This is an appropriate word for American Christians in 2017 when the ideals that made America and the Western world are under attack.

Yes, this is no time for Christians in America to go wobbly. We must, like Luther, take a stand for individual freedom and religious liberty. If we don’t take this stand, this unique liberty, that has been enjoyed by generations of Americans, will be lost to the next generation. It is that serious.

But if we take this stand in the spirit of Christ, we can count on the Holy Spirit to empower us afresh with another Great Awakening and these freedoms will be preserved for coming generations. Just look at how far-reaching was Luther’s uncompromising stand that day. It changed the Western World and provided an ideal for the founding of the United States of America. {eoa}

*This article was derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s book, Pilgrims and Patriots, available from Amazon and his website at . Dr. Hyatt presents “Revive America” events in which he documents how America was birthed out of a Great Spiritual Awakening and shows why he believes another Great Awakening is imminent. He can be contacted at dreddiehyatt@*