

10 Well-Known Christians Who Met the Lord in 2013

Media outlets have published lists this week of celebrities who died in 2013—lists that include Nelson Mandela, Margaret Thatcher, Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chavez, novelist Tom Clancy and actors Peter O'Toole, Jean Stapleton and Paul Walker of *Fast and Furious* fame.

But religious leaders often don't make these lists, mostly because the work of the Spirit is rarely celebrated on this side of eternity. As this year comes to a close, I decided to look back at 2013 and honor the memory of church leaders who died this year. They include:

1. Samuel Lamb. This brave Chinese pastor died in August at age 88. He spent 20 years in prison for his faith because he refused to bow to his communist oppressors. He taught his flock: "The laws of God are more important than the laws of men." Today the illegal church he planted in the city of Guangzhou has grown to 4,000 members.

2. George Beverly Shea. Perhaps the best-known gospel singer of all time, Shea performed at Billy Graham's crusades for decades and recorded more than 70 albums. A Canadian known for his booming bass-baritone voice, he teamed up with Graham in 1947. Ever willing to stand in the shadow of the more famous evangelist, Shea prepared audiences for Graham's message by singing trademark songs such as "I'd Rather Have Jesus" and "How Great Thou Art." He died in April at age 104.

3. Edith Schaffer. She and her husband, Francis, both Presbyterian missionaries, established L'Abri Fellowship, a retreat center in Switzerland that became a think tank for Christian theologians and activists. Some believe Edith and her husband—through their many books and lectures—galvanized

the Christian Right in the 1980s by encouraging believers to challenge culture rather than hide from it. She was 98.

4. C. Everett Koop. Hated by some members of Congress because of his personal opposition to abortion, this distinguished pediatric surgeon was tapped by President Reagan to serve as U.S. Surgeon General. When Dr. Koop took office in 1981, 33 percent of Americans smoked; when he left in 1989, the percentage had dropped to 26 percent because of his strident campaign against tobacco use. A devoted Presbyterian who wrote a book about his faith journey, *Sometimes Mountains Move*, he also defended the rights of the elderly and children with birth defects. He was 96.

5. Richard Twiss. Once a monthly columnist for *Charisma*, Twiss was a rare breed: An outspoken charismatic Christian from a Native American background. His ministry, Wiconi International, focused on promoting reconciliation between whites and Native people. Born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, Twiss wrote the popular book *One Church, Many Tribes*, and used his pulpit to reach Native people for Christ. He was only 58.

6. Pat Summerall. Perhaps the best known sportscaster in the U.S., he was fondly referred to as “the voice of the NFL” because his career spanned more than 40 years—and 16 Super Bowls. But what many TV viewers did not know was that the man with the famous voice experienced a dramatic conversion to Christ in 1992 after battling alcoholism. He wrote in his autobiography: “My thirst for alcohol was being replaced by a thirst for knowledge about faith and God. ... I felt ecstatic, invigorated, happier, and freer. It felt as though my soul had been washed clean.” Summerall became a Southern Baptist before he died at age 82.

7. Paul Crouch. Raised in the Assemblies of God and driven by a desire to spread the gospel through television, Crouch built his Trinity Broadcasting Network from scratch, starting in

1973 with a station in Tustin, California, using \$20,000 of his own money. When Crouch died in November at age 79, TBN had more than 18,000 network affiliates. His fund-raising tactics and spending habits made him plenty of enemies, but millions of donors looked beyond his flaws to help him build the largest Christian TV ministry in the world.

8. Dallas Willard. Considered a leading authority on spiritual formation, Willard was a philosophy professor at the University of Southern California whose books included *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, *The Divine Conspiracy*, *Renovation of the Heart* and *Hearing God*. He was a passionate proponent for rigorous discipleship, and he chided the American church for thinking we can be Christians without being disciples. He wrote: “The spiritual life is a life of interaction with a personal God, and it is pure delusion to suppose that it can be carried on sloppily.” He was 77.

9. T.L. Osborn. This unassuming Oklahoma-based evangelist always kept his focus on evangelism, and he preached in 90 nations before he died in February at age 89. Never a showman, he did huge outreaches in developing countries that drew crowds as large as 500,000—but he didn’t brag about his accomplishments. (In one of his crusades he shipped and delivered 56 tons of literature!) Throughout his life he reminded Christians of their responsibility to obey the Great Commission. He summarized this in an interview I did with him in 2011. “I once had a vision of the Lord,” Osborn explained. “But in the vision, God didn’t have any hands. Then He looked at me and said, ‘You are my hands.’”

10. Faye Pama Mya. Few Americans have ever heard of this 47-year-old Pentecostal pastor who served as secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria. But he died a martyr’s death in May when Islamic militants burst into his home in Borno state and shot him. He is only one of hundreds of Christians who have died in Nigeria in recent years, victims of the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Organizations that monitor the persecution of Christians say the numbers of martyrs increased in 2013, especially in Nigeria, Egypt and Pakistan. In September in Pashawar, Pakistan, 78 worshipers were killed in a bomb attack at a church. In May, officials at the Vatican announced they believe 100,000 Christians are killed annually because of their faith.

I can't list all their names here. But I pray our hearts will be filled with the courage of a martyr as we head into 2014.

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