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HENRY MELCHIOR MUHLENBERG AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for elective
H-200

A

You have done a good job
of collecting and organizing
your data and presenting
it in a clear and interesting
manner. Your conclusions
are amply supported by your
data, and appear to be
relatively free of bias.
Congratulations for a fine
piece of work.
R.A.B.

by

Michael Frank Volk

March 1971

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Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, the patriarch of American Lutheranism, lived through one of the most trying times in our nation's history, namely, its birth in war against England. Certainly the war brought with it a great number of problems with which every person at that time had to struggle. There were the difficulties of simply staying alive in a time of civil disruption, where to obtain food, or where to stay if one's home or livelihood were destroyed. But perhaps the most trying problem was the question of loyalty. To whom does one owe his allegiance? This question was especially acute when pressed upon a man of religious consciousness, a man who desired peace and established order so that the church might grow. Such a man was Henry Melchior Muhlenberg.

The position of Muhlenberg in respect to the American Revolution has been treated in many ways by various writers. It is said by some, such as Tappert, that Muhlenberg maintained a strictly neutral position in the war. Others, such as Humphrey, Stoeber and Henry Augustus Muhlenberg, try to place Henry Melchior Muhlenberg squarely into the revolutionary camp and even say he was prominent in that group. No source known to this author attempts to say that Muhlenberg was a strict British sympathizer.

It will be the major purpose of this paper to examine the evidence available in such a way that the reader may recognize the various tensions with which Muhlenberg had to

struggle as he attempted to cope with the war in whose midst he found himself. Then recognizing these tensions, it is hoped that the reader will have a clearer understanding of the position or positions which Muhlenberg took.

It should further be noted that the data for this study was somewhat limited. The primary source material is found in The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, translated from the German by Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein published in Philadelphia by The Muhlenberg Press in 1958. This source presents some difficulties in that it is incomplete. There are pages missing from the Journals. Some were removed by Muhlenberg himself. In most cases he notes this. However, there are others missing which are not noted. One portion in particular from 1776 where Muhlenberg begins to express some ideas about the Revolution is missing. At this important point five pages have been removed. Who removed the pages is unknown. It should further be noted that the Journals were prepared primarily as reports to Muhlenberg's superiors in Halle. This may account for the limited political references and even family information.

The study is divided into four chapters. The first will examine influences on Muhlenberg's attitudes prior to the Revolutionary War. The second will express the views of some of his contemporaries about political involvement in general and the Revolutionary War in particular. Muhlenberg's own ideas about the cause of the war as well as his desire to remain personally neutral in the conflict will be presented

in the third chapter. Muhlenberg's war-time experiences, political and religious activities and family relationships will be the subject of the last chapter.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF HENRY MELCHIOR MUHLENBERG

September 6, 1711	Muhlenberg is born at Einbeck in Hanover
1735	Began his studies at Göttingen, continued at Halle
1739	Ordained into the ministry
September 6, 1741	Received call to three Lutheran Churches in Pennsylvania
November 25, 1742	Arrives at Philadelphia
April 22, 1742	Marries Anna Maria Weiser
by 1752	Muhlenberg had organized ten new congregations
July 11, 1776	Moved from Philadelphia to Trappe
October 7, 1787	Muhlenberg dies - buried at Trappe

CHAPTER I

INFLUENCES ON HENRY MELCHIOR MUHLENBERG PRIOR TO THE WAR

Henry Melchior Muhlenberg was a man who by birth and citizenship would be moved to the side of loyalty to his king in a struggle such as the American Revolution. He had a double loyalty to the English king since the royal house of England traced its lineage to the Electoral Principality of Hanover. It was in Hanover that Muhlenberg was born on September 6, 1711. Thus he owed allegiance by birth. However when Muhlenberg became a naturalized citizen of England in 1754, he compounded his allegiance to that same royal family against whom the Colonies would revolt.

His early German environment also provided him with a concern for order, decorum and harmony. These he saw as marks of God's presence in the world.¹

A classical education was begun by Muhlenberg at the age of seven. However, his studies were interrupted by the death of his father. Following a period of manual labor, his talents were recognized by Herr Alberty. Thus was begun a long list of patrons who helped Muhlenberg through his education and calling to America.

Muhlenberg's patrons were men of education, financial means and title. The list included such educators as His Worthiness Herr Rector Joachim Schüssler, superintendent of the classical school at Einbeck and Rev. Dr. Joachim

Oporin, Professor of Dogmatic and Moral Theology at the University of Göttingen. Noblemen such as His Grace the Twenty-fourth Count Reuss of Köstritz and His Excelency Privy Councilor von Gersdorf were also among Muhlenberg's patrons as were notable clergymen such as Gotthilf Augustus Franke His Reverence Friedrick Michael Ziegenhagen, German Lutheran Chaplain of the Royal Chapel of St. James in London.

His politics was taken from the orderly system which gave his patrons their titles and gave Muhlenberg their patronage. "Government, he believed, is the Great Patron, established by God and sanctioned by His Word."²

The influence of Halle upon Muhlenberg cannot be overlooked. It was at Halle that Muhlenberg began his study to be a missionary. He first hoped to go to India. It was to Halle that Ziegenhagen turned with the call from Pennsylvania and it was from Halle that Muhlenberg was sent. Muhlenberg's respect for the men at Halle is expressed in his constant reference to them as "Reverend Fathers."

It was not the policy of Halle to simply send men into a mission field. They kept in constant touch with their missionaries and the missionaries responded. The Hallesche Nachrichten, published in 1787, is the record of these communications between Halle and her missionaries.³ In this way no important occurrence could be overlooked by the Fathers in Halle. This also allowed them to participate in the mapping out of policy in the missionary churches. It was not

uncommon for the missionaries to seek the advice as well as the financial aid of Halle in their missionary activities.⁴ Muhlenberg was not an exception to this general policy as can be seen in the preparation of his Journals. Certainly the opinion of the Fathers in Halle would be important for Muhlenberg's view of the Revolution.

The authority of Halle, in addition to his proper ordination and legal call sent through Ziegenhagen were important to Muhlenberg in the early days in America. Muhlenberg found the situation of the Lutheran churches around Philadelphia to be in a bad state. A number of self-styled Lutheran preachers had taken up pulpits in the area. Foremost among them was Count von Zinzendorf. In Muhlenberg's efforts to rid the Lutheran Church of men such as Zinzendorf, he appealed to the authority of his legal call and the authority of Ziegenhagen. On December 27, 1742 Muhlenberg presented his credentials to Mr. Tranberg of the Swedish Lutheran group. Muhlenberg thus received their backing. He also received the support of the Governor of Pennsylvania on December 28.⁵ On December 30, 1742 Muhlenberg was cross-examined by Zinzendorf about Muhlenberg's authority. His appeal to his legal call, his European authority and orthodox Lutheran background helped him win acceptance by the Philadelphia Lutherans.⁶ It is clear from this one incident that established authority was extremely important for Muhlenberg even in the establishment of his pastorate.

While Muhlenberg had a great deal of respect for his superiors at Halle, certain events involving his sons worked to break down some of Muhlenberg's reverence for the opinions of his superiors. Muhlenberg felt that his sons needed a good education. Therefore he decided to send them to Halle for their training. He made all of the arrangements for their travel and on April 27, 1763, they left for Europe.⁷ Peter was sixteen years old, Fredrick was thirteen and Henry Ernest was nine when they were sent overseas. Muhlenberg expressed his concern for Peter's restlessness in letters to Ziegenhagen⁸ and Dr. Franke, who was to be the guardian for the boys in Halle. Muhlenberg made very few references in his Journals to the events which then occurred.

There are two basic versions of what happened to Peter in Halle. Peter, it is said, was constantly in trouble at Halle. He refused to submit to the strict discipline required at the school. He was also insulted by the fact that he and his brothers were treated as demi-savages because they were from America. Finally, at a public procession of the students before the head of the school, Peter was insulted by one of the tutors. Peter then struck him. Knowing that expulsion was inevitable, Peter left school and joined a company of German dragoons. Among these soldiers he gained a reputation as a fighter.⁹

This story, however, is not true. Peter, it turns out, was never a student at Halle. Dr. Franke said, and Peter admitted, that he did not want to attend school, but rather

wanted to learn the drug business. Therefore, on the advice of a friend, Dr. Franke apprenticed Peter for six years to Leonard Heinrich Niemeyer of Lübeck.¹⁰ However, Niemeyer's business was not the large drug business Franke thought, but only a small grocery store. Peter received no money, only food and lodging. Dr. Franke was to supply his clothes. Peter could not afford to have his clothes washed or even mended since Niemeyer's wife would not do it. There are records of Muhlenberg ^esinding money to Niemeyer for Peter.¹¹ But Peter received none of it. Peter finally made some mild protests about his condition and was rebuked by Dr. Franke.

Muhlenberg by this time was becoming suspicious about Peter's condition. An investigation into the situation was begun by some of the other instructors at Halle. The other instructors were also taken in by Niemeyer just as Franke had been. They also rebuked Peter. By this time Muhlenberg was attempting to free Peter from his apprenticeship.¹² However, in August of 1766 Peter fled from Niemeyer and joined a British regiment which was being recruited in the free city of Lübeck, to go to America. Peter became their secretary.¹³

On December 9, 1766 Muhlenberg received a stinging letter from Dr. Franke about Peter's leaving Niemeyer. He also received a copy of Peter's apprenticeship contract and Peter's note to Niemeyer.¹⁴ In the letter Dr. Franke called Peter an "erring son" but said that he would continue to bear with Fredrick and Henry Ernest. Muhlenberg's wife became

very ill and upset after receiving the letter. Muhlenberg's first reaction was complete humiliation and he wrote for forgiveness.¹⁵ However, after Peter's return to America, Muhlenberg entered him in the English school in Philadelphia. He then wrote letters to his friends in London expressing his pride in Peter.¹⁶

Fredrick and Henry Ernest returned home from Halle on September 22, 1770.¹⁷ Director Knapp of Halle wrote to Muhlenberg that neither boy "was fitted for the Pastoral office."¹⁸ Muhlenberg must not have taken this letter very seriously since both of his sons preached on October seventh and were ordained at the Synodical Meeting at Reading on October twenty-fifth.¹⁹ Muhlenberg obviously did not accept or act according to Director Knapp's letter. Muhlenberg's encounter with Halle in regard to his sons seems to have lessened his respect for the opinions of the Halle Fathers.

Prior to the Revolution, Muhlenberg did not see the situation of colonies as one which was deprived of freedom. He expressed this opinion on December 17, 1763 when a controversy arose among some of his elders concerning a burial. Muhlenberg acknowledged that "petty things can sometimes give rise to great troubles...in a free country."²⁰ He seems to have been pleased also with the religious liberties assured in the Pennsylvania colony in the name of the King and the Proprietors of the Colony.

Muhlenberg was influenced toward a position of outward

loyalty to the established government by his experiences prior to the Revolution. There are signs, such as in the Halle incident, that some of his respect for overseas authority had been damaged. However, his basic concern for order, particularly as it facilitated free religious activities, was very dominant prior to the Revolution. This concern certainly was shaken by the war and presented problems with which Muhlenberg had to deal.

CHAPTER II

THE REVOLUTION AND OTHER LUTHERANS

Not only Muhlenberg, but also all other people living in the colonies had to make basic decisions about their loyalties and their relationships to the war. For some it may have been an easy decision, but for others it was very difficult. Lutheran reactions to the war ran all the way from strict Tory to strict Revolutionary, with more moderate positions in between.

As could be expected, the school at Halle was concerned about the events in the mission fields of America. Therefore His Reverence Director Freylinghausen sent a letter of instruction in 1776 concerning the clergyman's role in the Revolution. The letter urged clergymen not to meddle in secular affairs. They were to follow Christ's example and not interfere in worldly matters. An important point of the letter concerned the clergyman's duty to have nothing to do with disorders against the lawful government. The missionaries were urged to "give neither party occasion for increased bitterness."¹

On December 4, 1776 Muhlenberg's son, Fredrick, reported to his father that the letter from Freylinghausen had arrived in New York.² Muhlenberg, however, never received a copy of it. Almost a year later, on November 11, 1777, Muhlenberg comments on the letter and seems rather sarcastic about not

receiving it personally and about the fact that Freylinghausen had sent it with a Hessian officer.³ At this time there were many rumors about British and Hessian plans to capture and execute Muhlenberg.⁴

Many Lutherans remained loyal to the British cause during the war. Pastor Hausihil was the pastor of a church in New York. When the British troops neared the city, Fredrick and his family fled to Trappe with his father. Pastor Hausihil remained in New York. When the British left the city at the end of the war, Pastor Hausihil and many members of his congregation left for Halifax. In Georgia, Rev. Triebner also left America for England with the British troops at the end of the war.⁵

On July 21, 1776, Muhlenberg recorded some of the reactions among the elders of his New Hanover congregation to the war. Some felt that the colonies should not revolt. A son should respect his father and this must be impressed on people by the law was their idea. Others saw England as Rehoboam trying to force the people to accept his will. Others were content to say that whatever the outcome of the struggle would be, it would be the will of God.⁶ The difficulties of taking a position on the war obviously were not confined to the clergy alone.

Some clergymen who were close to Muhlenberg also expressed opinions about the war. Dr. Wrangel, twelve years prior to the war, gave a speech to a crowd angry about the

government's slowness in providing troops to defend them against the Indians, urging them that true Christians must be loyal to the king and warning them of dire consequences "if seduced by improper, they transgress the bounds of Christian and civil law."⁷ Rev. Kunze, Muhlenberg's son-in-law and assistant in Philadelphia, disclaimed any political judgments about the war. His judgment would be theological. This opinion was expressed in a letter to Halle dated July 18, 1775.⁸ Rev. J.H.C. Helmuth of Lancaster believed that both England and America deserved God's punishment. The role of the preacher was to preach repentance and faith.⁹ Helmuth was a trusted colleague of Muhlenberg's. It is worth noting also that the Pennsylvania Ministerium took no official position on the war. The only reference to the war in the minutes of the Ministerium is one sentence, "It was decided how prayers should be offered for the government and several cases of conscience were also discussed."¹⁰ Muhlenberg was no doubt interested in and influenced by the opinions of his colleagues.

Other Lutheran clergymen, including Muhlenberg's own sons, assumed an active role favoring the revolutionary causes. Some Lutheran and Reformed vestries in Pennsylvania published a pamphlet in 1775 urging support of the Revolution. They also raised a militia and a select group of sharpshooters.¹¹ All three of Muhlenberg's sons took a decidedly pro-revolutionary attitude. Two even left the ministry to pursue their beliefs in the Revolution in new careers. John Peter

Gabriel Muhlenberg, usually known as Peter, was active in the political life of Virginia where he was pastor of the Lutheran Church at Woodstock. He was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses and was a supporter of Patrick Henry. After the Battle of Bunker Hill, Virginia raised a Revolutionary army. Peter was appointed to the rank of colonel, recruited his own battalion and joined the forces of General Washington. He fought at many of the largest battles of the war and by the end of the war he had attained the rank of major-general. Fredrick assisted his father in his clerical duties at Trappe until 1779 when he left the ministry and entered politics. He was elected as a representative from Pennsylvania to the Continental Congress and in the course of his career became the first speaker of the House of Representatives under the Constitution in 1789. Henry Ernest remained in the ministry, but also favored the Revolution. He served in Philadelphia during the war and narrowly escaped capture by the British on one occasion. He said little, but nursed his anger against the Loyalists.¹²

Some of Muhlenberg's closest friends urged a neutral position, as did the Halle superiors. Some pastors actively chose a position of loyalty to the king while others, including his sons, openly supported the Revolution. In this situation it was necessary for Muhlenberg to examine his own thinking about the war.

CHAPTER III

THE CAUSES OF THE WAR

AND MUHLENBERG'S DESIRE FOR NEUTRALITY

As Muhlenberg looked at America he sought reasons for the war. The reasons, as he saw them, were primarily theological, not political or economic. As early as November 22, 1763 Muhlenberg noted the sparks of revolution. Many people were angry with the British for not providing sufficient protection from the Indians. Muhlenberg noted that the country people were embittered, and that the cities were full of unruly mobs and hostile groups. His judgment upon this situation was that "the cup of sin is full."¹ He also comments that such abominations will be punished.

The American scene was one of false security and evil. Deism was prominent. These national vices corrupted the whole body as Muhlenberg viewed it on June 12, 1775. This kind of situation is difficult to do anything about, as Muhlenberg saw it, because to try to show people these sins always ended in being called a traitor. At this point he saw the worsening situation as "divine discipline."²

Even as late as November 21, 1780, when commenting upon Fredrick's election to the State Assembly, Muhlenberg expressed his apprehension about the new government. He felt that the vox populi was not a trustworthy means of govern-

ment. It was too changeable and too easily shifted to extremes.³

Muhlenberg saw a possible grave danger for the cause of Christianity in the new form of government. He, along with other clergymen, submitted a petition to the new state government of Pennsylvania about the draft of the new State Constitution. In the petition of September 15, 1776 it was noted that the constitution did not favor Christianity. It spoke of a supreme being in very general terms and would permit freedom of religion to non-Christian groups. It was also requested that all religious bodies continue to enjoy all the privileges and immunities they enjoyed under the old constitution.⁴ On October 6, 1776, after seeing the final draft of the constitution, Muhlenberg reacted against the new oath of office which it contained. The new oath made no mention of Christ. Muhlenberg reacted, "very well, you smart chief-fabricators...have acted very cleverly in allowing nothing concerning a Savior of the world to slip in,"⁵ He also charged that their edifice was built on quicksand. On October twenty-third he charged that the new government showed how the beast of Revelation works behind the scenes to throw out the Christian religion.⁶

The war, however, was not only due to America's sins. Both England and America were guilty of national sins. Muhlenberg seems to agree with the opinion of certain fellow Christians who on June 12, 1775 expressed the idea that

Americans were filled with hypocrisy while England's leaders had forsaken the Christian faith. Therefore God intended to use England as a rod to punish America and then He would throw the rod away.⁷ When it looked like the American cause was collapsing in 1777, Muhlenberg noted that England was perhaps more guilty than America in its Deism and Pelagianism.⁸

Muhlenberg felt that the war was caused by the sins of both sides and the greatest sin was that of not being faithful to the Christian religion. On October 23, 1776 he noted that if England and America had practiced the Christian religion this "unnatural and inhuman war" would not have happened.⁹ This perspective of seeing blame on both sides forms a satisfactory base for Muhlenberg's desire to be neutral in the war.

Muhlenberg's strong ideas about the ministry also lent support to a position of neutrality, not only in the revolution, but in all political affairs. In a dispute over church property in Germantown, two factions fought for control of the church. On April 12, 1763 Muhlenberg was advised by some of the elders to whom the court had awarded the property that the other faction, led by Pastor Rap, had occupied the building and would not leave. It was suggested that Muhlenberg and the elders throw Rap and his group out by force. Muhlenberg advised that preachers and elders ought to have nothing to do with such violent activities.¹⁰ On a

decidedly more political issue in 1764, Muhlenberg again maintained a position of non-involvement in political activities. This case involved a petition to have the clergy support a plan to put Pennsylvania under direct royal control. Muhlenberg replied that the preacher's function was to pray for God's protection and admonish citizens to fear God, honor the king and love their neighbors.¹¹

The strong position on the ministry is seen also in Muhlenberg's reaction to his sons. He makes no mention in his Journals of Peter's leaving the ministry except at a much later date. However, when it is suggested that Fredrick might run for Congress, Muhlenberg recalled a certain Pastor Bolzius who entered the army as a colonel, then became counsellor to the governor, but who was killed. Muhlenberg seems to feel that this was a result of leaving the ministry and entering the political world.¹² After Fredrick's election his father was shocked. When asked for his opinion on the election he replied, "He is of age, ask him: he shall speak for himself."¹³ In a letter dated as late as March 27, 1782, Muhlenberg continued to lament his son's decision, "If Gabriel and Fredrick had only remained faithful to their calling!... One who suffers in the service of Christ...is rewarded with grace and comfort."¹⁴ In 1784 he maintained that Henry Ernest, the son who stayed in the ministry, was the most successful of his sons.¹⁵ The fact that he was a minister dictated for Muhlenberg that he stay out of politics as much as

possible.

In order to pursue his neutrality under safer circumstances, Muhlenberg moved from Philadelphia to Providence, often called Trappe. Richards maintains that this move was made because Muhlenberg's devotion to the revolutionary cause was so well known that he was a marked man and he had to flee to save his life.¹⁶ Muhlenberg's own reasoning on the subject seems to indicate that it was expedient to make the move in order to escape the fighting and to facilitate his neutrality. He also hoped to provide a shelter for pastors who would have to flee.¹⁷ The move to Providence occurred on July 11, 1776.

On the momentous day that the Declaration of Independence was issued, July 4, 1776, Muhlenberg was still in Philadelphia. His reaction to the document is entirely non-committal:

This has caused some thoughtful and far-seeing melancholici to be down in the mouth; on the other hand, it has caused some more sanguine miopes to exult and shout with joy. In fine videbitur cuius toni.¹⁸

He then finds comfort in the knowledge that God is still ruling.

Even when Muhlenberg preached to a group of American soldiers on August 22, 1776, he maintained that he had not endangered his neutral position, since it was an act of charity. He felt he was following the example of the Heavenly Father who lets the sun shine on the good and evil. He could do no less since it was impossible to determine which side was right in the war.¹⁹ As late as November 11, 1777 Muhlenberg

noted that to his knowledge, no preacher sent out by Halle had ever meddled in political affairs.²⁰

Neutrality was extremely difficult to maintain during the times of war. For the average man it was nearly impossible. If they did as the Parliament requested, they were called "traitors to liberty." If they went along with the revolutionaries, they were called "rebels." They were trapped between fire and sword.²¹ Muhlenberg expressed the same concern again on November 2, 1777.²² This difficulty was brought very close for Muhlenberg when his good friend in Georgia, Gaspar Wertsch, was arrested and accused of helping the British. Muhlenberg observed that no man can serve two masters. "Anyone who tries to remain neutral...will be oppressed and harassed by both sides."²³

Muhlenberg found himself on the receiving end of such oppression and harassment. Numerous rumors were spread about him by elements on both extremes of the war. After his return from Georgia, where he had to settle a dispute in 1775, he faced charges that he had betrayed America to the English. It was said that through his correspondence with Ziegenhagen he had arranged to levy a church tax on all the citizens of Pennsylvania. The rumors grew until in one version, the king had become a papist and Muhlenberg had travelled to England to celebrate Mass for the king. God had worked revenge upon Muhlenberg for this. It was said that he had been shipwrecked and killed. Another version said that Muhlenberg had

been tarred and feathered and driven out of Philadelphia as had a doctor when he spoke against the revolution. Muhlenberg felt that these rumors were made up by enemies of the Pennsylvania Ministerium in order to hurt it.²⁴ Again in May of 1777 a rumor was circulated that Muhlenberg was a Tory. It was charged that he had conducted treasonable correspondence with General Howe. Because of this, it was said, he had been arrested by the revolutionaries.²⁵

However, more serious rumors, with some element of truth to them, warned Muhlenberg that the British planned to arrest him. A German named Verner, who was a British sympathizer and keeper of the jail in Philadelphia, boasted that he would arrest and kill Muhlenberg.²⁶ It was also maintained that the English and Hessian officers had singled him out for revenge.²⁷

A pamphlet called, "Lament of the Congress," published in Philadelphia in 1778, exhorted the Loyalists. It also charged that Muhlenberg and another clergyman had instigated the revolution.²⁸

Muhlenberg chose not to reply to most of these rumors. Instead he would commit them to prayer. However, he did reply to the serious charges of disloyalty in his letter to David Grimm, which will be referred to in more detail below.²⁹

It should not be assumed that Muhlenberg chose a neutral stand because he was a pacifist. He mocked the Quakers who claimed to be pacifists, yet often supported the British. He

further does not seem to object to a new law of 1777 which stated that all men from eighteen to fifty-three years of age should be available to the army and all who refused for reasons of conscience should be fined.³⁰

The course Muhlenberg tried to pursue was one of neutrality in the war. This choice was due to his view of the causes of the war and the fact that he saw the war as a judgment of God. He also felt that as a minister he could not, with a good conscience, participate in political affairs. Choosing neutrality, he moved to Providence to try to pursue it. There were rumors and charges about him, yet he continued to try to pursue a neutral policy.

CHAPTER IV

EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE WAR

Muhlenberg's neutrality was severely tested during the war. The fighting followed him to the area of Providence. This caused some situations which he may have hope to avoid; the sounds of cannon fire and his frequent contacts with the troops.

The contacts which Muhlenberg had with the soldiers were not always pleasant. On June 11, 1775, Muhlenberg preached in Philadelphia. He noted at that time that the church was filled with troops of the newly organized militia. Guards were also posted outside the church. As he was returning to his home on June 12, 1775, it grew late and he was tired. Therefore he stopped for the night at an inn. Also staying at the inn were various groups of drunken American soldiers. This disturbed Muhlenberg so much that he reflected rather skeptically on the situation. "I thought, if we have no better patriots or heroes to defend our priceless civil liberty ...all is lost."¹

Perhaps the most shocking bad experience with American troops took place on September 27, 1777. Muhlenberg was preparing to have a funeral for the son of one of his elders at Trappe. When he entered the church he was shocked to see that it had been occupied during the night by a group of the Pennsylvania Militia. There was straw, which had been used

for bedding, all over the building. Manure was also all over; it was even found on the altar. When the soldiers recognized Muhlenberg's presence, one of them shouted to another in the choir loft to play a Hessian march on the organ. They jeered Muhlenberg and called him a Tory. He said nothing, but simply left the church and thought, "the sight of the church etc. made me wretched."² Then, to make things even worse, the soldiers had put their horses out to pasture in Muhlenberg's newly ripened buckwheat field.

One more bad incident with American troops occurred on December 12, 1777. A group of soldiers arrived at his house and demanded housing for the night. Muhlenberg had no more room in the house since many relatives, such as all of his son Fredrick's family, were living with him. He refused the soldier's request. They then accused him of being a Tory and threatened him with violence. However, they did not actually perpetrate any violence against him.³

While Muhlenberg never had any actual bad experiences with British troops, he does record in his Journals stories of evil carried out by British and Hessian troops. On December 17, 1776 he heard and apparently believed reports of atrocities carried out by the British and Hessians in Jersey. There were terrible reports of rape, robbery, plundering and abuse of all people.⁴ Naturally Muhlenberg could see no good in such deeds. More atrocities in Northern New York were reported on August 27, 1777. In this case a new

element is added. The Indians, allied with the British and Hessians, were involved. They acted like wolves and lions and even scalped people.⁵ Muhlenberg seems to be especially disturbed by the British use of Indians in the war. This was perhaps due to the atrocities attributed to the Indians during the French and Indian Wars,⁶ as well as the war-time experiences of Muhlenberg's father-in-law, Conrad Weiser, who was a colonel in the Indian wars.

It was also reported that American prisoners were being mistreated by the British. It was said that the prisoners were crowded onto a ship. Many died due to this over-crowding. Muhlenberg further reported that certain Christians cared for the dying prisoners.⁷

One other policy of the British was scorned by Muhlenberg. This policy was the misuse of the Hessian soldiers. Certainly Muhlenberg felt a certain relationship to the Hessians due to their common German origin. Muhlenberg had the opportunity to speak to a group of Hessian prisoners on November 8, 1776. The Hessians explained that they fought extremely hard against the Americans because the British had lied to them. The Hessians had been told that the Americans were cannibals and that if captured, they would be eaten. Muhlenberg's harsh judgment on the British for this situation was that the British would rather fill graves with hirelings than with their own "native and lordly flesh."⁸

Muhlenberg's bad experiences with American troops found

counterparts in the atrocities attributed to the British. Both sides were guilty of many evil deeds during the war and Muhlenberg seems to clearly condemn them all. His feelings favoring neutrality could well have been reinforced by his observations of the troops on both sides of the war.

In spite of Muhlenberg's personal desire to remain neutral, times arose when he had to defend himself and profess his loyalty to the crown. At these times he could point to his response to the initiation of the Stamp Act of 1765. On the day that the ship arrived in Philadelphia carrying the stamps, the patriots arranged a protest. All the church bells in the city were to be tolled as a symbol of mourning. All churches participated in this except Muhlenberg's church. When asked his opinion on the Stamp Act he replied, "Be subject to the authorities that have power over you."⁹ On the following Sunday, he urged the congregation to have nothing to do with the uprisings which were occurring in the city.¹⁰ He could also point to the fact that until July 4, 1776 he had continued to pray publicly for the king.¹¹

In July of 1775 Muhlenberg was urged by a member of the Continental Congress to exhort people to support the patriots. Muhlenberg replied, "as far as I know, all the intelligent members of our Lutheran Congregations are faithful subjects of His Royal Majesty, our sovereign."¹²

Muhlenberg decided to defend his loyalty to the king in the face of threats on his life. He sent his defense in a

letter to the British through David Grimm in New York. The letter is dated January 22, 1778. In the letter Muhlenberg listed a number of factors to show his loyalty. He noted his Hanoverian birth, and maintained that he never broke his oath of loyalty. He noted that his call to America was issued through the court preacher, Ziegenhagen, and that he was granted royal permission to establish congregations in a royal colony. His correspondence with London, especially with the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, is called upon in his defense. The reply to the congressman in 1775 referred to above, is also mentioned. Finally, he noted that in 1776 he was reluctant to change his oath of allegiance unless forced to do so. Furthermore he disclaims any responsibility for his son Peter's involvement in the war.¹³ While organizing all these facts in his defense, it should be noted that his last argument is from the year 1776. He made no mention of activities after that date and this letter was written two years later.

While certain arguments could be made emphasizing Muhlenberg's loyalty to the crown, it might easily be seen that in his war-time activities there would have been a great deal of evidence to back up charges that he was a supporter of the revolution. Muhlenberg's home at Trappe provided a haven for many of his acquaintances during the war years. He also housed many fugitives and never sent the hungry away empty.¹⁴ For example, on August 11, 1777 a group of soldiers

stopped for some food. Muhlenberg gave them milk, water, apples and cabbage. He stated that he would not begrudge anyone as long as they came peacefully. He even would give to "his countrymen," the Hessians.¹⁵ It is clear, however, that most frequently Muhlenberg's courtesy was extended to American troops because they were active in the area.

On June 17, 1778 he refused the American Army permission to use the church at Trappe for a hospital. He refused, not for political reasons, but because the church building was to be used by the citizens for worship. There were other better locations for the hospital. He also drew on the day of prayer ordered by Congress. There would be no place to observe this day if the church would be used as a hospital.¹⁶ However, he had permitted American army supplies to be stored in his cellar earlier in December of 1777.¹⁷

In addition to his son Peter, Muhlenberg entertained other high-ranking American officers. One day he hosted Lord Stirling and General Wayne at breakfast.¹⁸

On at least two occasions Muhlenberg used his acquaintance with American officers to make intercession for others. On September 23, 1777 he saw General Maxwell to give a character reference for one of his Anglican neighbors who had been arrested for being a Tory.¹⁹

On another occasion Muhlenberg interceded for mercy to Colonel Michael Probst on behalf of Jacob Gandy, whose mother was a member of Muhlenberg's congregation. Gandy had been

found guilty in a court-martial. Muhlenberg felt he could do nothing. However, after further urging by his son, Henry Ernest and his son-in-law, Rev. Kunze, Muhlenberg wrote an appeal to General Washington.²⁰ Muhlenberg does not say whether or not his appeal had any effect.

In the area of religious activities Muhlenberg participated in some activities which might be seen as favoring the revolution. As early as May of 1766, when the Stamp Act was repealed, he rejoiced even though he had gone along with it when it was enacted. On this occasion he preached the only sermon he had published entitled:

A Testimony of the Goodness and Zeal of God Toward His Covenant People in the Old and New Times, and of the Ingratitude of His People Toward Him, Given at the Occasion of the Thanksgiving in Consequence of the Repeal of the Stamp Act, August 1st, 1766. By the Reverend H. Muhlenberg.²¹

He also observed the days of prayer ordered by Congress.²² Often American soldiers were among those in the church at Trappe when Muhlenberg preached. He also participated in many military funerals. For example, he took part in a memorial service for General Montgomery, who had been killed in battle on December 31, 1775.²³ At such a military funeral on July 26, 1778, Muhlenberg's hearing was permanently impaired by the report of the salute fired by the soldiers present at the funeral.²⁴

Muhlenberg did not close his eyes to certain influences on the American political scene in the early days of the con-

flict. Muhlenberg obtained a copy of Tom Paine's Common Sense in a German translation. The reading of this book must have momentarily at least, overwhelmed Muhlenberg. He wrote a letter to his son-in-law, Emanuel Schultze, dated March 7, 1776.²⁵ Along with the letter he sent a copy of the book. The letter enthusiastically endorses the book and notes that "the young people are right in fighting for their God-given liberty."²⁶

As Muhlenberg faced the problem of the necessity of taking an oath of allegiance to the new government of Pennsylvania in 1777, he reflected an interesting theological interpretation. On May 5, 1777 he told how in years past the colonial citizens did not receive the help they needed from the government to fight the Indians. The government, at that time, was too interested in "useless disputation." He noted that people remember such things, but of course it was not Christian to do so.²⁷ Then on July 1, 1777 he had to make the decision about his oath of allegiance. After pondering Romans 13:1-4, he came to the conclusion that the Christian should be subject to the government "which has the power to protect and...to defend...the rights and liberties granted by God and man."²⁸ Based on his previous reflections, it seemed only natural to take the oath.

Among the leaders of the revolution, Muhlenberg seems to have had the greatest respect and even reverence for General Washington. Washington, on October 5, 1777 spoke to his troops from the steps of the church at Trappe.²⁹ Muhlenberg

felt that Washington set a fine example for his men with his practice of Christian virtues. On May 7, 1778 Muhlenberg expressed the belief that Washington had been preserved from harm in the war because he respected the Word of God.³⁰ On November 24, 1779 Muhlenberg baptized his grandson. The child born to his daughter, Maria, and her husband, Mr. Swaine, who had been General Peter Muhlenberg's aide, was named George Washington Swaine.³¹ It may have been this view of Washington as a truly Christian leader which helped ease some of Muhlenberg's fears about the non-Christian influences he noted in the new government.

Muhlenberg was brought into close contact with the revolutionary side of the war not only by location, but by his family. During most of the war Fredrick Muhlenberg and his family lived with his father at Trappe. General Peter Muhlenberg's camp for some time in 1777 was located within seven miles of Trappe and he often visited his father's home. He visited, however, less frequently than he might have wanted to because he knew that his visits drew Tory suspicions upon his father. While Peter and his father had a violent split over Peter's action of leaving the ministry, they were reconciled by the end of the Valley Forge winter of 1777-1778. An important factor in this reconciliation was that Henry Melchior Muhlenberg became convinced that the cause supported by Peter and George Washington was not contrary to Christianity.³² By November of 1778 Muhlenberg was requested

by Peter to give him some fatherly advice about duty. The question involved whether Peter should leave his post to be with his wife when she gave birth to their baby. Muhlenberg replied that a man in public office has duties he must perform and it happens very often that children are born without their father being present.³³ By Christmas of 1779 Peter was well established as a military officer, Fredrick was a member of the Continental Congress and Henry Ernest was assisting his father. They all gathered for a very festive Christmas, having reconciled most of their differences.³⁴

The peace negotiations to end the war began in Paris in 1782. Commenting on the negotiations, Muhlenberg observed that the war would not end until God willed it.³⁵ As the negotiations neared an end it appeared to him that it was God's will that America be independent. As Muhlenberg saw it however, that fact did not solve all national problems. The "true Christian religion still has few roots and assured fruits in America."³⁶ So with the proclamation of peace on April 17, 1783, there was still a great deal of work ahead for the Christian church.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that during the revolution Muhlenberg desired to maintain a position of neutrality. This was based on his conviction that the war was caused by the sins of both England and America. The war could very well have been interpreted as divine punishment upon both sides. He also felt that his role as a clergyman necessitated a neutral position. Muhlenberg did not seem to feel that the British crown was suppressing American freedom. Therefore, he felt no compelling reason to revolt in order to attain freedom.

However, his geographic location, as well as family and social situation, made neutrality an impossible stand to maintain. He left Philadelphia, not primarily because he feared the British, but rather because he actually felt it would be easier to be neutral at Providence. The war followed him there. The majority of his contacts after the move to Providence were with people who favored the revolutionary cause. Some of his associates, such as Kunze, urged neutrality, but Fredrick, Peter and Henry Ernest Muhlenberg had a clearly pro-revolutionary position. Muhlenberg had many contacts with American troops. Some of these were very bad, but the majority seems to have been good. He also had good relations with high-ranking American officers, including a great reverence for General Washington. All of these contacts, no doubt, added fuel to the rumors of British plans to capture Muhlenberg. Most of Muhlenberg's associates took these rumors

very seriously. They were, as rumors go, of a much more serious kind than the idle rumors or angry comments that he was a Tory. The threats had actual substance behind them. Muhlenberg, while he nowhere openly stated a decidedly pro-American stance, was influenced to a personally pro-American attitude. This also may be seen in the theological reinterpretation he carried out in order to justify a change in loyalty.

As Muhlenberg viewed the change of governments from a religious viewpoint, he originally favored loyalty to the established government. However, as the war progressed, Muhlenberg reinterpreted his understanding of Romans chapter thirteen. Instead of urging loyalty to the established government, he saw it as urging loyalty to the government which protects. At that time the government which protected him was the new American government. Thus he was able to justify his change of loyalty theologically.

While Muhlenberg, by the end of the war, looked favorably on the American cause and found theological justification for a change in loyalty, he never became an unrestrained supporter of the now political system. He had a distrust for the vox populi as too unreliable and changeable. His criticism of non-Christian attitudes as he saw them expressed in the new Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 had not changed by the end of the war. At that time he noted the work which was ahead for Christianity in the new nation.

On the basis of the present research, it may be concluded that Muhlenberg was not a prominent leader of the revolutionary cause as Humphrey, Stoeber, and Henry Augustus Muhlenberg maintain. Neither was Muhlenberg strictly neutral about the war as Tappert concluded. Neutrality was Muhlenberg's position of choice, but due to the various pressures upon him he could not maintain his neutrality and often engaged in activities which were supportive of the revolutionary cause.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹Paul Anthony Wilson Wallace, The Muhlenbergs of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), p. 4.

²Ibid.

³T. E. Schmauk, A History of the Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania, 1638-1820 (Philadelphia, 1903), p. 204.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, translated by Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1958), I, 74.

⁶Ibid., pp. 76-80.

⁷Ibid., p. 623.

⁸William J. Mann, The Life and Times of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 160.

⁹Henry Augustus Muhlenberg, The Life of Major General Peter Muhlenberg of the Revolutionary Army (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1849), pp. 28-31.

¹⁰Wallace, p. 59.

¹¹Muhlenberg, Journals, II, 241.

¹²E. W. Hocker, The Fighting Parson of the American Revolution: A Biography of General Peter Muhlenberg (Philadelphia: published by author, 1936), p. 25.

¹³Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴Muhlenberg, Journals, II, 317.

¹⁵Wallace, pp. 68-69.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁷Muhlenberg, Journals, II, 459.

¹⁸Wallace, p. 76.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 78.

²⁰Muhlenberg, Journals, I, 723.

Chapter II

¹Cited from Hallesche Nachrichten, II, 708, by Theodore G. Tappert, "Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in the American Revolution," Church History, XI (December 1942), 288.

²Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, translated by Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Dorberstein (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1958), II, 761.

³Ibid., III, 101.

⁴Infra, p. 18.

⁵Edward Frank Humphrey, Nationalism and Religion in America, 1774-1789 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 116.

⁶Muhlenberg, II, 724.

⁷Ibid., p. 22.

⁸Cited from Hallesche Nachrichten, II, 706-707, by Tappert, p. 287.

⁹Cited from Hallesche Nachrichten, II, 703-704, by Tappert, p. 287.

¹⁰Tappert, p. 301.

¹¹William J. Mann, The Life and Times of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 484.

¹²Paul Anthony Wilson Wallace, The Muhlenbers of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), p.115.

Chapter III

¹Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, translated by Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1958), I, 709.

²Ibid., II, 700.

³Ibid., III, 375.

⁴Ibid., II, 740-742.

⁵Ibid., p. 748.

⁶Ibid., p. 751.

⁷Ibid., p. 701.

⁸Ibid., III, 68-69.

⁹Ibid., II, 751.

¹⁰Ibid., I, 618.

¹¹Ibid., II, 54.

¹²Ibid., III, 216.

¹³Ibid., 220.

¹⁴Theodore G. Tappert, "Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in the American Revolution," Church History, XI (December 1942), 294.

¹⁵Paul Anthony Wilson Wallace, The Muhlenbergs of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), p. 269.

¹⁶H. M. M. Richards, The Pennsylvania German in the Revolutionary War (Lancaster: Pennsylvania German Society, 1908), 428.

¹⁷Muhlenberg, II, 712.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 721. The Latin verse might loosely be translated: It will appear in the end who is right.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 736.

²⁰Ibid., III, 102.

- ²¹Ibid., II, 727.
²²Ibid., III, 96.
²³Ibid., 107.
²⁴Ibid., II, 693.
²⁵Ibid., III, 44.
²⁶Wallace, p. 160.
²⁷Muhlenberg, III, 112.
²⁸Ibid., p. 139.
²⁹Ibid., pp. 123-127.
³⁰Ibid., pp. 61 and 94.

Chapter IV

¹Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, translated by Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press), II, 698-699.

- ²Ibid., III, 80-81.
³Ibid., p. 113.
⁴Ibid., II, 765.
⁵Ibid., III, 71.
⁶Ibid., I, 648, 650 and 680.
⁷Ibid., III, 33-35.
⁸Ibid., II, 757.
⁹Ibid., p. 273.
¹⁰Ibid., p. 274.

¹¹Theodore G. Tappert, "Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in the American Revolution," Church History, XI (December 1942), 299.

- ¹²Ibid., p. 290.

- ¹³Muhlenberg, III, 123-127.
- ¹⁴Martin L. Stoeber, The Life and Times of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, D. D. (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1856), p. 86.
- ¹⁵Muhlenberg, III, 66.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 165.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 109.
- ¹⁸H. M. M. Richards, The Pennsylvania German in the Revolutionary War (Lancaster: Pennsylvania German Society, 1908), p. 264.
- ¹⁹Muhlenberg, III, 79.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 179.
- ²¹William Keller Frick, Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, "Patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America" (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), p. 116.
- ²²Muhlenberg, II, 720 and III, 28 and 208.
- ²³Ibid., II, 716.
- ²⁴Ibid., III, 178.
- ²⁵This letter is in the Fredrick Nicollis Collection in Reading, Pennsylvania.
- ²⁶Paul Anthony Wilson Wallace, The Muhlenbergs of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1950), p. 123.
- ²⁷Muhlenberg, III, 37.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 55.
- ²⁹Muhlenberg Bicentennial Celebration, Inc., For God and Country (Allentown: Muhlenberg College, 1942), p. 6.
- ³⁰Muhlenberg, III, 149.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 54.
- ³²Wallace, p. 144.
- ³³Muhlenberg, III, 195-196.

³⁴Wallace, p. 187.

³⁵Muhlenberg, III, 532.

³⁶Ibid., p. 534.

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