

PRAYER: The Power Behind a Peaceful Revolution



The Church of St. Nicholas and the Peaceful Revolution Memorial.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Many see that dramatic event as the most symbolic victory for liberty in the 20th century. The peaceful dismantling of the wall was followed by the complete disintegration of the Soviet Union, resulting in the liberation of tens of millions of people and the birth of freedom in many Eastern European nations. Through those miraculous events the world was saved from the terrifying threat of thermonuclear holocaust.

Many historians credit the demise of the Berlin Wall to a devastated Soviet economy, coupled with President Ronald Reagan's call for Mr. Gorbachev to "tear down that wall!" But there is a virtually unknown story behind East Germany's liberation in 1989. I first learned of it several years ago when I was in Germany preparing for a Reformation Tour I was about to lead. In Leipzig, Germany, I visited a beautiful 16th century Lutheran cathedral and heard a lecture by the pastor, Rev. Christian Fuhrer. After the lecture, Pastor Fuhrer and I met privately and he told me about a remarkable

prayer movement that began with a handful of people in his church in 1982, seven years before the wall came down.

For almost 40 years the tyrannical, Soviet-dominated German Democratic Republic (GDR) had ruled East Germany with an iron fist. Under dictator Erick Honecker, death or imprisonment awaited anyone who dared to defy the GDR or attempt to cross the wall between East and West Germany. Rev. Fuehr decided to begin a simple prayer meeting called Prayers for Peace. Every Monday at 5 p.m. the faithful would gather, light 40 candles representing the Jews' 40 years in the wilderness, and pray for peace.

For some time, the meetings were largely ignored by East German authorities; but eventually attendance at the weekly prayer meeting grew to thousands and the GDR could not turn a blind eye. Government spies infiltrated the meetings and recorded names of those present. Agents of the GDR tried to intimidate Pastor Fuhrer, once leaving him out in the snow to die. Numerous adults who attended the meetings were fired from their jobs, even though there was no political agenda, only prayers for freedom. Soon, German youth took the place of their



Pastor Fuhrer inside The Church of St. Nicholas in Leipzig, Germany

parents because they had no jobs to lose. Despite persecution and seemingly no answer from God, the intercession continued for seven years and the meetings turned into a prayer movement.

On October 9, 1989, Pastor Fuhrer convened the weekly prayer meeting. This time, however, he handed out candles to each attendee. He instructed each person to light their candle as they left the gathering and to join other East Germans in the streets of Leipzig. Together they would peacefully march to the city center.

As the 2,000 prayer warriors emerged from Pastor Fuhrer's church, they were met by approximately 100,000 fellow candle-carrying Germans. Facing possible death, the peaceful army approached the GDR troops. Never had Honecker allowed this kind of defiance. Previously, troops would have shot demonstrators against the regime. Russian tanks were lined up behind the soldiers who pointed their machine guns at the ever-growing crowd. The demonstrators bravely approached the soldiers (their fellow Germans) and offered them lighted candles. Amazingly, one by one, soldiers began to put down their weapons and receive the lighted candles. Soon all the soldiers had lowered their weapons and joined with the protestors. The Russian tanks backed up and returned to their barracks. Fuhrer said that East German officials would later say that they were ready for anything, "except candles and prayer."

The next week Honecker resigned, knowing that he had lost the loyalty of the German army. He knew that he could no longer intimidate anyone,

least of all people armed with the power of prayer! A month later, Soviet Premier Gorbachev began tearing down the Berlin Wall, and the German people knew that the miraculous, courageous events of October 9, 1989, had been the true power leading to Germany's reunification.

Without the church it would have been like all other revolutions before – bloody and unsuccessful. "We did it," Fuhrer said, "because the church has to do it." Now, 25 years after the miracle at Leipzig, Fuhrer warns the church of lethargy:

"Today that feeling of belonging together has largely given way to a shallow materialistic prosperity. Faith in the future and in the power and possibilities that God can bestow on us has disappeared. But the church is only the church if it is there for other people... The church must be open to all and must champion the disadvantaged. When an individual has no other aims, visions or hopes than those relating to his next holiday, shopping spree or share prices he will begin to cease to exist. That is why we need the vision of Jesus: a vision not only of sharing but of taking on

responsibility for each other so that faith and hope...can sweep through the masses again like a fresh wind."

Enslaved for 70 years under the Nazis and Communists, the East German people were ultimately blessed by a faithful praying remnant and guided by God's gracious hand. Their country was restored and our world was transformed, and it began with the power of prayer. In light of this history, cannot believing Americans peacefully pray and courageously act to restore our liberty under God? May God help us to do just that for His glory and for our children's children.

-Marshall Foster



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