Henry Melchior Muhlenberg is the principal organizer of American Lutheranism. He was born in Einbeck, Germany, in 1711, and studied at Gottingen and at Halle. Lutherans in America at that time were found in a few scattered communities, of various national backgrounds, with no central organization, and with a grave danger of factionalism. Several congregations wrote to Halle University, asking for a pastor to take charge. Hermann Francke, a Lutheran leader of the Pietist movement at Halle, chose Muhlenberg and sent him to America. He arrived in Charleston on 23 September 1742. He was soon accorded widespread recognition by Lutheran churches, German, Swedish, and others, as the senior Lutheran pastor in America. He set the tone for the Lutheran community in what was to be the United States, and almost all Lutheran Churches in America today use liturgies which are developed from the one that he proposed for American use. His plans for local church government, presented to congregations that had been accustomed to a great deal of government control, eased the transition to the "free church" model, and form the basis for plans of local church government in American Lutheran churches today.

One of his sons, John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg, served as a general under George Washington in the War of Independence. Another, Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg, became a member of the Continental Congress, and first speaker of the House of Representatives. A great-grandson, William Augustus Muhlenberg, became an eminent Anglican priest (see 8 April). Henry Melchior Muhlenberg died 7 October 1787, and is buried at Trappe, Pennsylvania. His epitaph (in Latin) reads: "Who and what he was, future ages will know without a stone." -James E. Kiefer