

### ***My Pastoral Hero***

*I have but one passion...tis He, tis only He. To seek for souls, souls, in order that Jesus may receive those who love Him and that His Kingdom may be inhabited, that is my work.*

Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf

Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf was more than a traditional evangelical pastor. Yet, not less than one. I have chosen Zinzendorf as my pastoral hero because I really admire his life and faith, his leadership abilities, missionary zeal and his ecumenical vision. He was a pastor and teacher, a poet and hymn-writer, a missionary, theologian, liturgist and ecclesiastical spokesman. Some have called him to be “certainly the greatest German Evangelical since Luther.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **Summary of Zinzendorf’s life**

Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf was born in Dresden on 26 May 1700. He was the son of a Saxon minister of state of Austrian noble descent. His early upbringing was closely supervised by his aristocratic maternal grandmother, Henrietta von Gersdorf, a devout Pietist and friend of a major Pietist theologian, Philip Jacob Spener. Zinzendorf’s biographer, John R. Weinlick, points out that the union of piety and nobility were the main features of Zinzendorf’s character and the main key in his career. “His name carried prestige and gained him entry where his zeal drove him.”<sup>2</sup> As early as at age four, Zinzendorf had a remarkable grasp of Christian teaching. At age six, he made the firm decision to live for Christ alone. Zinzendorf was first trained at the University of Halle, which under Hermann Francke’s leadership was the center of Pietism; and then at Wittenberg where, being

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Lewis, “Zinzendorf the ecumenical pioneer,” (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 12.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Weinlick, “Count Zinzendorf,” (New York – Nashville: Abingdon Press), 21.

pressured by his family, he studied law in order to prepare himself for a diplomatic career. His government service was short-lived, though. Having inherited part of his grandmother's estate of Berthelsdorf, he became increasingly engrossed in the pastoral affairs of his tenants, who were refugees from Bohemia and Moravia. In 1722 they requested permission to live on his lands. He granted their request, and the new settlement was named Herrnhut ("Under the Lords Watch"). The name proved to be prophetic. A few years later, a twenty-four hour prayer watch was established and it continued without a stop more than one hundred years. Herrnhut became the model village for more than twenty settlements established by Zinzendorf and Moravians in Europe and America during the next fifty years. The settlements were closely knit religio-socio-economic units that became centers for vigorous missionary and educational activities.

Zinzendorf married Erdmuthe Dorothea von Reuss, who bore him twelve children, from whom only three outlived their parents. Count Zinzendorf died on May 9, 1760, with some of his last words being, "I only asked for first-fruits among the heathen, and thousands have been given me...I am ready."<sup>3</sup>

### **Pastoral lessons to be learned from Zinzendorf**

1. *A balanced outlook: passion grounded in theology.* Zinzendorf, raised as a Pietist was a practitioner of "heart religion," yet he was an earnest student of theology and Scripture. On the one hand, as Craig Atwood notes in his dissertation, "Zinzendorf insisted that the truest language for heart religion is song.... For Zinzendorf and the Brüdergemeine [brotherhood]... the truths of the Christian religion are best communicated in poetry and

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<sup>3</sup>J. E. Hutton, *A History of Moravian Church* (London: Moravian Publication, 1909), 392.

song, not in systematic theology and polemics.”<sup>4</sup> Yet on the other hand, when Zinzendorf was seeking the ordination in the Lutheran church, he not only passed the three day theological examination conducted in Latin and German by prominent Swedish theologians, but also so inspired them, that one, who had not preached five years because of his illness shortly after that “again entered upon the full duties of his office.”<sup>5</sup> I believe that this kind of balance is very important: a pastor should be both theologically sound and passionate about his faith.

2. *Empathy with those who suffer.* Zinzendorf wore a ring with the inscription in Greek, “No one lives unto himself.” This was an attribute of the Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed, which Zinzendorf and like-minded peers founded at Wittenberg. They pledged to remain true to the teachings of Jesus, to love their fellow men and to seek at all time the welfare of others. It was this kind of empathy that opened the doors for persecuted Christians from Bohemia and Moravia to the property of Zinzendorf. It was this mind-set that inspired missionaries from Herrnhut to sell themselves as slaves in order to preach to Africans. In my judgment, this characteristic especially reveals the pastoral heart of Zinzendorf because, as Derek Tidball points out in *Skilful Shepherds*, providing consolation to those who suffer has always been a major aspect of the pastoral ministry.

3. *Missionary vision.* Zinzendorf became the architect of missions of Herrnhut’s brotherhood. In 1732, the first missionary team of two brethren was sent from Herrnhut out to preach Christ to the black people of St. Thomas Island in the West Indies. By 1740, sixty-eight Moravian missionaries had been sent out; and by the time of Zinzendorf’s death in 1760, no less than 226 missionaries had gone to destinations ranging from the Arctic to the

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Atwood, *Blood, Sex, and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf’s Bethlehem*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> Weinlick, 118.

tropics, from the Far East to the American mid-west. Zinzendorf himself came to the New England colonies and traveled into the wilderness to meet with the chieftains of several tribes and clans. It is thought that he is the only European noble to have gone out to meet the Native American leaders in this manner. Moravians published *Periodical Accounts*, which is the oldest existing missionary magazine. William Carrey, who often is referred to as a pioneer of modern missions, after reading *Periodical Accounts* of Moravians exclaimed, “See what these Moravians have done! Can’t we Baptists at least attempt something in fealty to the same Lord?”<sup>6</sup> As a result, the Baptist Missionary Society was born. I strongly believe that a pastor, while primary serving the needs of his parishioners, should have a missionary vision that reaches father than his own parish. As individual who is only preoccupied with himself, is not available for God, so is the local church.

4. *Ecumenicity*. Fellowship among brothers and sisters was looked upon as having spiritual meaning and importance. Brotherly fellowship was a means of receiving forgiveness and drawing closer to Christ. In one of his interviews, Zinzendorf uttered the words that later became almost as adage of Moravian Church: “I acknowledge no Christianity without fellowship.”<sup>7</sup> In Zinzendorf’s mind this fellowship was crossing the denominational barriers. As already noted Zinzendorf’s empathy has made Herrnhut a haven for persecuted Christians from different denominations. Yet, the phenomenon of Herrnhut was that different theological positions did not fragment them. On contrary, they became a community known for forbearing and love. One Moravian observes, “It is truly a miracle of God that out of so many kinds and sects as Catholic Lutheran, Reformed, Separatist, Gichtelian, and the like,

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<sup>6</sup> A. J. Lewis, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 67.

we could have been melted into one.”<sup>8</sup> John Wesley visited Herrnhut and from there wrote, “I am with a Church whose conversation is in heaven.... As they have all one Lord and one faith, so they are all partakers of one Spirit, the spirit of meekness and love, which uniformly and continually animates all their conversation.”<sup>9</sup> In my mind, A. J. Lewis rightly calls Zinzendorf “the apostle of unity” and “the ecumenical pioneer.” I think that although not every pastor is called to be the catalyst of ecumenism, yet without a disposition towards unity among different Christian denominations, it is so easy to be trapped in the complex of superiority, which defies those from a different camp.

5. *Christcenteredness.* Finally, Zinzendorf believed that the message of the cross was able to meet every man at his own level of understanding. The Christ-centered message entailed the power needed to deliver the sinners, to provide refuge to the outcasts and to set the flame of revival among Christians. The adoration of the Lamb was the constant theme in Herrnhut. It sounded not only in their hymns and worship services that were held three times a day, but also in their lives and purposes. “I have but one passion...tis He, tis only He,” – this confession of Zinzendorf perhaps explains best where the Count did draw his strength from for his manifold pastoral and missionary endeavors.

It is not easy to see faults in one’s heroes. That is how they so easily become idols and mystical legends. Therefore not without some inner pain that I should mention some of Zinzendorf’s weaknesses and mistakes. The Moravian historian Hutton writes, “As the Count advanced toward middle age, he grew more domineering in tone, more noble in his dreams, and more foolish in his conduct. He was soon to shine in each of these tree lights.”<sup>10</sup>

Zinzendorf failed to unite German speaking churches in America, his allusions to the Holy

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<sup>8</sup> Weinlick, 79.

<sup>9</sup> A. J. Lewis, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Weinlick, 198.

Spirit as Mother of the Church were not appropriate, and his expenses for abroad missions were higher than his income. Yet, the legacy of his ideas and the enormous fruit of his endeavors remains the source of inspiration for us, who strive to be skilful shepherds of the Lord's flock today.

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