

Intro:

Our lesson today is a ‘biographical sketch’.

I mentioned that our theme for Christmas this year is inspired by passages associated with a Moravian Christmas ornament known as a “Moravian star”.

I also gave you a brief sketch of Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians last Sunday afternoon as an illustration in our introductory message.

I suppose I should make a few comments about the value and place of Church History in our studies and even in our devotional lives.

The Christian Church is now fast closing in on 2000 years ... in about 2030 or 2033 or somewhere in-between those years, on the Day of Pentecost the Church will be 2000 years old if the Lord tarries. Just 22 years from now.

- How many Christians do you think there have been in 2000 years?
- How many sermons have been preached?
- How many spiritually minded books have been written?
- How much thinking has been done concerning God’s revealed truth?

Do you suppose that it is possible that the thoughts and life of some Christian or Christians of the past could be profitable to your thought and life?

I think so!

One of the most fascinating stories of Church History (among many) is the story of Count Zinzendorf.

The apostle Paul said:

^{KJV} **1 Corinthians 1:26** ¶ For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*:

Count Zinzendorf and a few others are very thankful that the apostle didn’t say: “not any” — he just said “not many.”

So today for our study time I’d like to give you a bit more detail concerning the life of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf

I. The young Pietist

A. Born May 26, 1700, a count in the Holy Roman Empire (Austria)

Mother recorded his birth in family Bible: “gift of my first-born son, Nicolaus Ludwig” and asked “the Father of mercy” to “govern the heart of this child that he may walk blamelessly in the path of virtue ... may his path be fortified in his Word.”¹

1. Lutheran family

2. Influenced by Pietism

a. Pietists emphasized personal walk with Christ

“For them, walking with the Savior meant being separate from the world, shunning the dance and theater and idle talk. It meant living in obedience to Christ in his Word and loving him with the heart in song and prayer.”²

b. Founder of Pietism, Philip Jacob Spener, served as ‘god-father’

B. Father’s death by TB: six weeks after Ludwig’s birth

1. Mother remarried three years later

2. Ludwig raised by his strongly Pietist aunt and grandmother, Baroness Henriette Katherina von Gersdorf

3. Home environment “bathed in prayer, Bible reading and hymn-singing”³

4. Nevertheless, as a count, tutored and trained for a future life at court

C. Sent to Halle, a Pietist centre at age 10

1. Auguste Francke, staunch Pietist, the principal teacher at Halle

2. By age of 15, had a thorough classical education

a. Could read the classics and the NT in Greek

b. Fluent in Latin and French as well as native German

c. Did not excel in Hebrew, but did in poetry

3. Influenced during this time by a returned missionary-evangelist from Halle to India

¹ “The Rich Young Ruler Who said Yes” *Christian History Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

II. The maturing nobleman

- A. At 15, sent from Halle to Wittenburg for further training in duties of court
1. Wittenburg the headquarters of Luther himself – “a stronghold of Lutheran orthodoxy”⁴
 2. Grandmother concerned about his inclination towards Christian ministry rather than court duties
- B. Characteristics of his studies (from his diary)

“This week I began the plan of spending a whole hour, from six to seven in the morning, as well as in the evening from eight to nine, and for fifteen minutes at a quarter of ten, in prayer. Also I resolved to pursue the study of civil law with all my energy, since I expect all sorts of interruptions this coming summer.

“Examinations with Mencken. At ten o’clock I fenced. At eleven I studied the pandects. At twelve I dined. At one I played badminton. At two I drew. At three I attended a lecture in the history of the Reich. At four I danced. At five Bardin (French tutor) was here. At six I studied civil law. At seven I dined. At eight I prayed. At nine I studied Hoppe’s examination.”⁵

- C. Studies completed with a tour of foreign centers of learning
1. Attended lectures in Holland, where he studied English and visited various Dutch cities
 2. Spent six months in Paris: Toured Versailles
- D. Life-changing experience: museum at Dusseldorf
1. Saw the painting of Domenico Feti, *Ecce Homo* (‘Behold the Man’) – a portrait of thorn crowned Christ
 2. Inscription: “I have done this for you, what have you done for me?”

Zinzendorf: “I have loved Him for a long time, but I have never actually done anything for Him. From now on I will do whatever He leads me to do.”⁶

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

III. The ministering man

- A. At age of 21, began service in court and purchased grandmother's estate
1. In Dresden, held Sunday services in his apartment, attracting a "growing circle"
 2. Married a young countess, the sister of a friend, a woman "who shared his ideals"⁷
- B. The beginning of Herrnhut
1. A Moravian named Christian David, under persecution in Czechoslovakia, requested a home on his estate (1722)
 2. First Moravians arrived (while Zinzendorf away) in December 1722
 - a. Christian David quoted Psalm 84:3: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself"
 - b. Felled first tree and began building a home for 6 adults and 4 children
 - c. Other Moravians arrived in ensuing months
 - d. Five arrived when Zinzendorf was present to lay a foundation stone for an Academy building
 - 1) Z. accompanied by Pietist friend
 - 2) Of the 5 Moravians, three named "David Nitschman"
 - 3) Impressed by prayers of Zinzendorf and friend, so stayed
 3. By May 1725, 90 Moravians at Herrnhut ("under the Lord's watch" or "on the watch for the Lord"⁸)
 - a. Some Lutherans joined community [differed with Moravians on some points of liturgy]
 - b. Heretical teacher arrived, telling everyone that Z. was the 'beast' of Revelation
 - c. Economic pressures
 4. In 1727, Zinzendorf moved his own family into the Moravian settlement and took on the role of pastor
 - a. Settled differences

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

- b. Established “Brotherly Agreement” – code of conduct based on Christian principles

IV. The missionary sponsor

- A. Established the Unity of the Brethren as a distinct church in Herrnhut
 - 1. Settling differences in community meant distinct churches
 - a. A Lutheran parish
 - b. A U of B church
 - c. Traveled all over Saxony to offset criticism among Pietists for establishing a ‘separate’ church
 - 2. Small groups in Moravian U of B church trained lay people, and sent them out to other Moravian settlements to encourage spiritual life
 - a. These various groups became known as Diaspora
 - b. Workers went “to and fro on the continent, to Moravia, the Baltic States, Holland, Denmark and even to Britain”⁹
- B. Three factors led to wider missionary ministry¹⁰
 - 1. Contagious Christianity of Herrnhut
 - 2. Zinzendorf’s connections as a count opened doors all over Europe
 - 3. Moravians were already uprooted from homeland, so more ready to enter itinerant ministries
- C. Met converted former West Indies slave, Anthony Ulrich, at coronation of Christian VI in Copenhagen (1731)
 - 1. Urged Zinzendorf to send missionaries to slaves
 - 2. Two young men responded to call, Leonard Dober and Tobias Leupold (more on this next week)
 - 3. Missionaries sent out one year later (Leonard Dober and one of the David Nitschmans)
 - 4. In 1734 reinforcements came, including Tobias Leupold
 - 5. Out of first 29 missionaries, 22 died in 1735

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

D. Missions ongoing, over 226 by time of Zinzendorf's death in 1760

1. Zinzendorf visited several mission fields during his lifetime, including the initial field in St Thomas
2. Spent 14 months in what would become USA (1741)
3. Wife died in 1756, remarried a year later 1757
4. Zinzendorf died himself 1760

V. A sinner saved by grace

A. Not a perfect man – some doctrinal issues

1. Referred to the relationships in Trinity as the Holy Spirit as “Mother” – way he expressed this is not quite heretical, but an aberration
2. Emphasized ‘community life’ of the church so much that he and Moravians developed a ‘communal’ approach to civil and religious affairs [later changed when need for individual initiative became apparent]
3. Perhaps unduly opened door to female leadership positions in the church — his views may not have been too extreme, but long-term consequences
4. Ecumenical emphasis: tried to unite widely divergent churches without sufficient regard to orthodox doctrine

B. Unfortunate consequences

1. Moravian church today very liberal
2. Moravian church today has women pastors
3. Moravian church a founding member of World Council of Churches

C. Nevertheless

1. Role as missionary statesman is indisputable
2. Essentially orthodox himself (but see noted aberrations)
3. Responsible for sending hundreds of missionaries (when none were being sent) and for thousands of true converts to Jesus Christ