

# MILESTONES

## Zinzendorf and Recovery

**I**n the history of the church, there are many milestones that demonstrate the principle of recovery. From the opening up of God's Word through translation and printing to the proclamation of central items of the truth, such as justification by faith and the assurance of salvation based on the righteousness of God, there has been an undeniable move of God in human history to gain His eternal expression. One principal sign of recovery, which involves the heading up of all things in Christ, is the practical oneness of the believers. The history of the church is replete with examples of division. Examples of receiving believers in simplicity, oneness, and practicality based on our common bond as brothers, who have received the divine life and nature, are rare. But even with the church's shameful testimony of division, there has been a genuine move of the Lord to gain a testimony of oneness in answer to His prayer in John 17. The experience of the Moravian Brethren, under the shepherding care of Count Zinzendorf, is one such milestone.

### Background and Education

Although wellborn, the life of Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf demonstrates the mercy and calling of God, which can extend, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 1:26, even to some of noble or high birth. Zinzendorf was born on May 26, 1700 in Dresden, Germany to a family listed among Austrian nobility. Throughout his life, Zinzendorf was a faithful witness of the Lord and a shepherd of His sheep. As one who knew the Lord subjectively, he was zealous for the oneness of the Body of Christ and a true slave of the Lord.

Zinzendorf was educated at the Paedagogium in Halle from 1710 through 1716. The University of Halle was a center of Pietism due to the influence of August H. Francke, the head of the Paedagogium and professor of theology. Zinzendorf daily ate meals at Francke's table, and Francke greatly influenced the young Count concerning the Lord and the beliefs of Pietism. Zinzendorf himself described this atmosphere and its effect on him:

The daily meetings in professor Francke's house, the edifying accounts concerning the kingdom of Christ, the conversation with witnesses of the truth in distant regions, the acquaintances with several missionaries, the

[flight] of divers exiles and prisoners,...the cheerfulness of that man of God in the work of the Lord, together with various heavy trials attending it, increased my zeal for the cause of the Lord in a powerful manner. (Weinlick 29)

From 1716 to 1719 he studied at the University of Wittenberg, the center of orthodox Lutheranism. He arrived in Wittenberg, the birthplace of the Reformation, at the time when preparations were being made for the bicentennial celebration of the posting of Luther's Ninety-five Theses. Although he enrolled at the university to study law, his real desire was to study theology. While at the university, he read the writings of Luther and the Pietists and would sometimes spend hours studying hymns. Following the completion of his formal studies, he set out in 1719 on a tour of the continent, a journey that was customary for sons of nobility. Wherever he went, he witnessed not only the religious differences between Christians but also the bond that believers have in Christ.

### Emphasis on the Subjective Experience of Christ

Pietism had a strong influence on Zinzendorf from an early age. The beginnings of Pietism were expressed in the teachings of Johann Arndt in his book *True Christianity*, written in 1606. Pietism attempted to cut through dead traditional Christianity to a life of faith activated by love for God and for one another. The Pietists maintained the need for a personal and subjective experience of Christ rather than just an intellectual and doctrinal formulation. They sought to live a pure and holy life avoiding theater, dance, and card playing. They practiced moderation in food, drink, and dress. They believed in the priesthood of all believers, which they practiced in small home meetings. In these meetings they prayed, sang, read the Bible, and fellowshiped with one another. Their beliefs and practices deeply impressed Zinzendorf, and he defended and developed them throughout his life.

### Establishment of Herrnhut

In 1722 Zinzendorf used an inheritance he had received to purchase a large estate including the old village of Berthelsdorf. His hope with this land was to plant a garden of the Lord. It would soon become a refuge for persecuted Christians of many diverse backgrounds and doctrinal

persuasions. Due to the repressive measures of the counter-Reformation, many believers were forced to flee from their homelands in Moravia and Bohemia. When Zinzendorf heard of their plight, he allowed some of the oppressed to settle on his estate. In June of 1722 work was begun on the building of a new settlement. Zinzendorf was away when the initial exiles arrived. Upon returning in December, he was struck with what he saw:

[There was] in the wood, near the road, a house which he was told was the one built on his estate for the Moravians. He joyfully entered it, welcomed them cordially, fell upon his knees with them, returned thanks to God, and blessed the place with a warm heart. He entreated the Lord to extend His hand over the house, encouraged its inhabitants, and assured them of the favour and faithfulness of God. (Spangenberg 41)

The site where the new community was built was called Herrnhut, the "Lord's watch." After the first immigrants arrived, there was a rapid influx of believers, including Lutherans, Calvinists, Reformed, dissenters from established churches, Bohemian Brethren, and Schwenkfelders (followers of Casper Schwenkfeld, a contemporary of Luther whom Luther had opposed). The Count and his wife occupied a simple house that he called Bethel. John Wesley visited the Count's house and gave this description: "The Count's house—a small, plain building like the rest; having a large garden behind it, well laid out, not for show, but for the use of the community" (Lewis 76).

**H**errnhut suffered severe testing as wind after wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14, NASV) blew through the young community. The immigrants brought with them a wide variety of doctrines and diversity of opinions. As lord of the estate, Zinzendorf said, "I could easily have found means to rid myself of many of these people who gave me so much trouble" (Lewis 48). However, he went from house to house praying with the immigrants and admonishing them to settle their differences with one another. Lewis describes the turmoil:

It seemed that every wind of doctrine and division blew through Herrnhut....But any unity in the Settlement was a thing of rags and tatters....[Zinzendorf] wrote a hymn of complete trust: "Faith breaks through the steel and stone / And can seize upon the Almighty: / If one has only faith, / He can do all!" (50)

He was patient and forbearing with those in error and with differing views. He listened in an understanding manner, agreeing when he could without sacrificing the truth and humbly expressing doubt when he did not agree. On May 12, 1727, Zinzendorf spoke for three hours about the oneness of the Body of Christ and the evils of division. All who heard were affected. Spangenberg describes the reaction:

On that day, the Count made a covenant with the people, in the presence of God. The brethren individually engaged to belong entirely to the Saviour. They were ashamed of their religious quarrels, and were unanimously disposed to bury them in oblivion. They also sincerely renounced self-love, self-will, disobedience, and free-thinking. They were desirous of becoming poor in spirit; none of them sought a preference above the rest; and each one wished to be taught by the Holy Spirit in all things; they were not only convinced, but carried away and overpowered by the operating grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. (83)

**T**he covenant that was agreed upon by all included both individual responsibilities and relations to one another as Christians. Each was to labor with his hands so that he would not be a burden to others. He would take care of his own needs and those of the needy. Toward one another, they would remain in a "constant bond of love with all children of God—they must judge none, enter into no disputes with any,...but rather seek to maintain among themselves the pure evangelical doctrine, simplicity, and grace" (Weinlick 75). Zinzendorf described the changes that took place in the community as "a visible tabernacle of God among men, and...there was nothing to be seen and heard but joy and gladness" (Lewis 53).

Three months after the covenant was agreed upon, Zinzendorf called everyone together to take part in the Lord's table on August 13, 1727. During that meeting, everyone knelt down to pray. The Count prayed and openly confessed his sins to the Lord. This experience was like the anointing oil that flows down from the Head to the Body when the oneness is expressed (Psa. 133). It was good and pleasant! That was the day "Herrnhut became a living Congregation of Christ" (Lewis 59).

### A Daily Church Life

Under Zinzendorf's direction, the brothers and sisters were brought into a daily church life. There were various meetings in Herrnhut. Everyone was encouraged to have a daily, personal time with the Lord by praying, reading, and singing. Zinzendorf was also concerned for corporate times of gathering and for the exercise of gifts for the building up of each other. Everyone met together three times a day: at 4 a.m. (5 a.m. in the winter), at 8 a.m., and at 8 p.m. They met to read the Scriptures and to praise the Lord with singing. On the Lord's Day, praises could be heard throughout the community from five in the morning until nine at night.

As word of the meetings and the communal life at Herrnhut spread far and wide, many visitors were attracted to come and observe for themselves. Zinzendorf set aside the Lord's Day afternoon for interested ones to come. The church shared its hymns, testimonies, prayers, and ministry

with its visitors. John Wesley, while traveling in Germany in 1738, met with them and recorded this impression in his journal:

I now understand those words of poor Julian, "See how these Christians love one another." Yea, how they love all who have the faintest desire to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Oh may He sanctify to us their holy conversation, that we may be partakers of the spirit which is in them; of their faith unfeigned, and meekness, wisdom, and love which never faileth. (8)

Inspired by what he saw, Wesley used the words of Psalm 133 to declare, "Oh how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (11). To his brother Charles he wrote, "The spirit of the Brethren is above our highest expectation. Young and old, they breathe nothing but faith and love, at all times and in all places. I..endeavour to grow up in these after the glorious example set before me." (12). Upon taking his leave of Herrnhut in August of that year, Wesley called it "this happy place" (28). If he had not been called by his Master to work elsewhere in the vineyard, he said, "I would gladly have spent my life here"; he further exclaimed, "Oh when shall THIS Christianity cover the earth, as the 'waters cover the sea'?" (28).

### Pioneers in World-wide Evangelism

Zinzendorf and the Moravians were pioneers in carrying the gospel to foreign countries and spreading the church life beyond Herrnhut. T. Austin-Sparks cites the Moravians as a move of the Lord that was profitable and effectual on a world-wide scale. He said,

In the first twenty years they actually sent out more missionaries than the whole Protestant Church had done in two hundred years. Of the closed lands entered, the sufferings gladly endured, the range covered, the lives lived and laid down, the grace of God manifested, it stirs wonder and shame to read. (51)

The burden for the gospel came out of corporate prayer and a vision that Zinzendorf instilled into the brothers and sisters. Two days after their first prayer day in 1728, which included fellowship and prayer concerning Turkey, Ethiopia, Greenland, and Lapland, twenty-six brothers banded together to seek the Lord for His burden. Out of this group, two brothers became the first of many to leave Herrnhut to go abroad. In quick succession, some went to Greenland, others to Surinam, and still others to South Africa. Later, the Moravians went to Georgia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania in the United States and many other places.

**Z**inzendorf also went out on "witness journeys." In 1731 he traveled to Copenhagen where he testified of

Christ to the king of Denmark. In 1736 he took a walking tour through southern Germany and Switzerland. Wherever he went, he witnessed of God who became a man and died for us. He traveled to the West Indies (1738-39) and to North America (1741-43) and made several trips to England (1749-55).

### A Spreading Church Life

There were also two other kinds of moves of Zinzendorf and the Moravians: the Pilgrim Congregation and the Diaspora. The Pilgrim Congregation was based upon the realization that the Christian life is one of a pilgrim or sojourner (1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:13). Zinzendorf considered it a privilege to be just a pilgrim on earth and learned "by experience that there is happiness in being at home everywhere, as He was who passed most of His life as a pilgrim and in exile" (Lewis 116). Zinzendorf and the pilgrims went throughout Europe and the British Isles seeking fellowship with Christians based upon the common life all the children of God share.

**T**he Diaspora was another move that originated from Herrnhut as early as 1727 and continued on after the Pilgrim Congregation ceased. It is still a feature of Moravian life around the world where the scattered or dispersed Christians gather together as one (John 11:52). Zinzendorf never considered that all who called themselves "Christian" or who belonged to a denomination were true believers. He stated that "a heathen can be more readily saved than a nominal Christian. The latter is in still greater danger of the judgment, because he provokes the wrath of God by neglecting his Christian privileges" (Lewis 119). The Diaspora meetings were open to all believers. Matters of doctrinal divisions were to be avoided as an *odium theologicum*.

One place where the pilgrims settled on their journeys was at the Marienborn Castle in Ronneburg west from Herrnhut close to the western border of Saxony. They called the place Herrnhag which was patterned after Herrnhut. It was here that Zinzendorf declared of this community, "It is very important that the Brethren should labour everywhere in the true spirit of the community, not seeking their own advantage, but that of the whole Church" (Lewis 76). In one meeting in Herrnhag, the Methodist John Cennick counted twenty-two different languages all together praising the Lamb.

### Living a Crucified Life

From early boyhood throughout his entire life, Zinzendorf realized that the life of the slave is not above his master (Matt. 10:24). The world had hated Him (John 15:18, 20), and the way of His followers would be no different. Troubles arose for Zinzendorf from the

political and religious world. Various clergy, in pastoral letters, warned their people about Zinzendorf, accusing him as being unsound and unscriptural in his teaching and of being a sentimental mystic. Even Pietists, with whom he had been closely related, began to oppose him after Francke's death. These Pietists, insisting upon a particular kind of salvation experience (painful struggle followed by spiritual breakthrough) as proof of genuine salvation, began to question Zinzendorf, whose teaching and own salvation experience did not match this. Weinlick describes Zinzendorf's relationship with the Lord:

The count, having practiced the presence of Christ from his tenderest years, could not fit this pattern to his own experience. Even if he could have done so, he objected to ascribing uniformity to God's ways of dealing with individuals. His conception of the believer's relationship to the Saviour had a much more joyful and personal note in it than was the case with his early teachers. (113)

In addition to open criticism from religious quarters, certain religious persons also stirred up political opposition. A governmental commission even was formed to determine whether or not the emigrants had been seduced to leave Moravia and to determine what, in the teachings of Zinzendorf, had stirred up so much religious opposition. The commission came to Herrnhut in 1732 to take a close look. Spangenberg describes what took place:

During the examination, the members of the church spoke from the sincerity of their hearts....The Commissioners therefore found no difficulty in ascertaining the real state of the case. Hence they bore this public testimony to the church, on their departure: "You have acted like honest people, and have honourably stood the test." (212-213)

The commission left satisfied with what they found and took no formal action against Zinzendorf and the Moravians at that time. Political opposition, however, flared up again and became so severe that in 1736 an order of banishment was issued against Zinzendorf. He was accused of enlarging his own estate by "stealing" tenants from neighboring estates. Zinzendorf, who saw the Lord's hand in all of this, reacted by saying,

It matters little. I could not have returned to Herrnhut anyway for ten years, for the time has come to gather the pilgrim congregation and preach the Saviour to the whole world. Our home will be that particular place where at the moment our Saviour has the most for us to do. (Weinlick 127)

From that time on, he lived the life of a pilgrim and a stranger. It was out of the Count's banishment that the pilgrim unions and the Diaspora developed.

## Emphasis on the Oneness of the Believers

Throughout his life Zinzendorf had a strong burden for the oneness of the believers. Upon completing his studies at the University of Halle, the topic he chose for his valedictory address was, "The Quarrelsomeness of Learned Men." In it he stressed the need for oneness rather than disputes over opinions (Rom. 14:1). While a student at the University of Wittenberg, he sought unsuccessfully to reconcile the Lutheran faculty of Wittenberg with the Pietist faculty of Halle, and he sought for oneness among those at Herrnhut in the face of discord, disharmony, and division. Christian David described the change, in particular, that occurred on August 13, 1727. He said, "It is truly a miracle of God that out of so many kinds and sects as Catholics, Lutheran, Reformed, Separatist, Gichtelian and the like, we could have been melted together into one" (Lewis 59).

Zinzendorf's desire for oneness even led him to try to bring together a number of diverse religious sects and denominations in the American colonies into a visible expression of a "Congregation of God in the Spirit." From 1742 to 1743, Zinzendorf worked with Lutherans, Reformed, Mennonites, Schwenkfelders, Baptists, Dunkers, Separatists, and Moravians in Pennsylvania to realize the church as the communion of saints. While Zinzendorf was abroad in the colonies working for the oneness of the Body of Christ, the Moravian Church organized into a separate, independent church (Freeman 265). Zinzendorf opposed such a step, but when he returned, the changes had already been made. Despite this setback, however, Zinzendorf needs to be credited with clearly seeing and standing for the oneness that all believers share in the divine life. Without such an understanding, fellowship in the Body is diminished.

by James Reetzke

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