



Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)

Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf was born in Dresden on May 26, 1700. He became a leader of the Protestant Reformation and the founder of the Renewed Moravian Church. Zinzendorf built the Moravian Church upon the foundation of Comenius's Revision of The Order of Discipline of the Church of the Brethren. Zinzendorf wrote the Brotherly Agreement of 1727 for the Protestant refugees who had taken refuge on his estate. He soon became the leading theologian of the Moravian Church. The young Count studied theology and submitted to ordination within the Lutheran Church in order to offer political protection and spiritual guidance to the Herrnhut community. Zinzendorf's theology grew out of Luther's Catechisms, Comenius's records of Brethren teachings and his own experiences in the Herrnhut community. Zinzendorf's teachings put Christ at the center of the Moravian theology. The Count wrote hymns and litanies which stressed the salvific benefits of Jesus' death upon the cross, and introduced the lovefeast to Moravian life (Sawyer, p. 41). Zinzendorf emphasized devotion to the blood of Jesus, organized church bands, designated the role of the Holy Spirit within the Moravian community as the role of a mother (Kinkel, p. 24), and moved the Moravians toward mission work because of his belief that the atonement of Jesus had opened the hearts of all individuals to the voice of the Holy Spirit proclaiming the Good News of salvation (Kinkel, pp. 61-67).

Formation Influences from Count Zinzendorf's Early Life

Zinzendorf was born to position, power, and piety. His family had been in Austria for many generations before Nicholas was born. When the Protestant Reformation began in the sixteenth century, the Zinzendorf family embraced it. When Nicholas's father died shortly after his birth and his mother remarried and moved to Berlin, Nicholas was left to be raised in the castle of his grandmother, the Baroness Gersdorf, who was a well-educated and accomplished woman. Zinzendorf's grandmother and aunt were both Pietists, and the Baroness knew and entertained the leaders of that movement. Philip Jacob Spener, Pietist theologian, was the young Count's godfather (Weinlick, pp. 13-15). Zinzendorf later stated that because of his grandmother's influence, when he grew up "he could relish nothing but the doctrine of Jesus Christ and his death and merits" (Weinlick, p. 21).

The Count's deep attachment to Christ, which began at the age of four (Weinlick, p. 20), led him to break with Pietist theology on the issue of confession. Zinzendorf chose to stress that the child must know Christ from infancy and view Jesus as an elder brother. It is difficult to believe that Zinzendorf's early tender nurture by these Christian women did not influence his later innovative thinking about the function of bands in the formation of young Christians and the role of the Holy Spirit as nurturing mother in Moravian communities.

Formation influences from Zinzendorf's Community

At ten Zinzendorf was sent to a paedagogium at Halle which was run by the Pietist, August Herman Franke. Here Zinzendorf and three other lads organized a club called "The Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed." This group held these purposes: total commitment to God, pure living, love for



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others, and doing mission work among the Jews and heathen. Members were also expected to refrain from gambling or dancing. This "mustard seed" community built around the love of God continued and extended through Zinzendorf's lifetime. Thus at home and at school the young Count was shaped toward the mission which would consume the energies of his adult years (Sawyer, p. 42; Weinlick dates the club's organization after Zinzendorf left Halle, pp. 28-29).

Formation Influences from the Suffering Which Zinzendorf Endured

The early loss of his father and his mother's move to Berlin left Zinzendorf a lonely child, but he filled his loneliness with his relationship with Jesus. Jesus became a friend and companion to the lonely boy. At school Zinzendorf was misunderstood in his beginning years by Franke, but this painful phase of his youth created some needed toughness which helped him in later life. His first choice of a marriage partner rejected his proposal, but her sister, who seems to have been an ideal wife for a man of the Count's convictions, accepted him and became his partner in ministry. When Zinzendorf continued to work with the Moravians after his ordination in the Lutheran Church, he was exiled from his estates for ten years. This suffering merely broadened the Moravian outreach to America and created Moravian converts in England. All of Zinzendorf's sufferings were turned into good for the cause of Christ.

(You may read about Zinzendorf in *Confessing Our Unity*, pp. 6-8.) When we think of the Christ-centered focus of Zinzendorf's teachings, we are reminded of the passage from *The Ground of the Unity* entitled "Personal Belief."

The belief of the Church is effected and preserved through the testimony of Jesus Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit. This testimony calls each individual personally, and leads each one to the recognition of sin and to the acceptance of the redemption achieved by Christ.- In fellowship with Him the love of Christ becomes more and more the power of the new life, power which penetrates and shapes the entire person. As God's Spirit so effects living belief in the hearts of individuals, He grants them the privilege to share in the fruits of Christ's salvation and membership in His body.

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