

THE
LORD
OF THE
RING

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RING

A journey in search of Count Zinzendorf

PHIL ANDERSON



Muddy
Pearl

Published in 2020 by
Muddy Pearl, Edinburgh, Scotland.
www.muddypEARL.com
books@muddypEARL.com

First published by Kingsway Publications 2006

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-910012-33-8

Cover design by Lindy Martin

Cover image © shutterstock 300737435 by grop, shutterstock 241275133 by kuroksta, shutterstock 366809210 by zorina_larisa, shutterstock 490396798 by Kues

Typeset in Minion by Revo Creative Ltd, Lancaster

Printed in Great Britain by Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow

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Acknowledgements

This book emerged from the remarkable international community of Prayer, Mission and Justice known as 24-7 Prayer. The individuals who have been an encouragement, challenge and inspiration to me in retelling Zinzendorf's story are too numerous to mention individually, but I am grateful to you all.

My specific thanks are due to Lisa, Holly and Bethany Anderson for sharing our home with a 300-year-old German for what is now over sixteen years (the 'Z' section of our bookshelf continues to grow at the expense of everyone else's literary interests). To Pete Greig for challenging me to write and for the hours spent helping to shape the results into something readable. To Justin Blake and Markus Laegel for being co-pilgrims on the journey. To Pete Ward and Tim Harrold for shaping the community that sent us on our way. To the editorial staff at Kingsway and Regal for enabling the first editions of this book to see the light of day. To the Moravian archivists in Herrnhut (Rudiger Kruger) and London (Lorraine Parsons) for their generosity in sharing their knowledge and resources back in 2004. And to the Moravian historians both past and present on whose work and scholarship I have leaned so heavily.

This second edition is mostly down to two people. Jill Weber, Global Convener of the renewed Order of the Mustard Seed, who encouraged me to get the book re-published, and Stephanie Heald at Muddy Pearl who kindly agreed to take the task on. But my continued enthusiasm that this story should be known and re-told has been kept alive by the men and women who today form the renewed Order of the Mustard Seed. Their commitment to be True to Christ, Kind to People and take the Gospel to the Nations challenges and inspires me daily, as does the ring I have worn on my finger every day since 2005.

About the Author

The Phil Anderson who wrote the first edition of this book published in 2006 described himself as:

a pilot and pilgrim, an engineer and encourager, a communicator and conspirator. He works as a consultant, serves as a leader of Thurrock Christian Fellowship (a church in the south-east of England), participates as a member of 24-7 Prayer (an international community of prayer, mission and justice) and facilitates www.mustardseedorder.com (a meeting place for those interested in exploring the relevance of Zinzendorf's mustard seed vow to discipleship in the twenty-first century). He is a husband to Lisa and a father to Holly (9) and Bethany (7).

Since then, Phil's conspiring has resulted in him becoming a founder member of the renewed Order of the Mustard Seed (www.orderofthemustardseed.com) and a founder of the Stanford-le-Hope 24-7 Prayer Boiler Room Community (now known as Proximity Church). His pilgrimage has led him through the world of politics as a senior elected politician in local government, a political author (*Nation in Transit*, 2016, also published by Muddy Pearl) and a co-ordinator of the UK National Prayer Breakfast.

Phil is still a keen pilot and husband to Lisa. His little girls are, however, quite clearly no longer aged 9 and 7 ...

Foreword: Lord of the Ring

There could hardly be a better time to shine a spotlight on the life and legacy of Count Nicklaus von Zinzendorf. At a time of social fragmentation, he speaks to us about community and sustainability, having founded a succession of radical settlements in Europe and North America. At a time when prayer movements are multiplying around the world, he has a great deal to teach us, as founder of the famous Moravian prayer watch which continued for more than a century.

Phil Anderson's exceptional biography reveals that this lesser-known German aristocrat deserves far greater recognition as a godfather to both the modern missions movement and the modern prayer movement. He is certainly also one of the great inspirations for 24-7 Prayer International. What's more, Zinzendorf's radical lifelong commitment to Christian unity (the Moravians were nicknamed *unitas fratrum*) shaped the ecumenical agenda of the post-war years. On top of all this, Zinzendorf is a key figure in the history of at least three major Christian denominations: Moravian, Methodist and Salvation Army. Here, then, is a man whose life casts a very long shadow indeed for many millions of people today, even upon those who know little about him.

Zinzendorf was a man who thought global and acted local. Best known for instigating the Moravian 'hundred-year prayer meeting' in the German village of Herrnhut, he also developed radical economic models of social enterprise. All while mobilizing the first great missionary push of the Reformation, successfully propelling the life-changing gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus from that quiet little village to the ends of the earth – and this at a time when few gave any thought to the plight of those beyond the bounds of Christendom. Moravian missionaries were the first to preach the gospel in a number of nations.

Zinzendorf's remarkable story found its defining moment in his Rule of Life, which was rooted in a solemn vow made with his friends as a university student and marked by a ring. Jesus himself, of course, was the Lord of that ring. Once again this dimension of Zinzendorf's life is interesting to a generation like ours, looking (as many of us are) for 'the ancient paths', exploring spiritual formation and rules of life.

At a time when Zinzendorf's life has so much to teach us, this book (apparently and amazingly the first serious biography in the English language in at least fifty years, drawing as it does from the original archives in Herrnhut) is thrillingly pertinent. I particularly appreciate the rigorous research and the integrity of the storytelling, which – while vivid – spurns the urban myths and Chinese whispers that have grown up in certain circles over recent years. I have learned a great deal I never knew about one of my heroes from this timely book. In particular, I appreciate the way that Phil has told the story 'warts-and-all', not placing Zinzendorf on a heroic pedestal but admitting to his various failings and foibles. Thereby, Zinzendorf becomes more remarkable, not less, as his many achievements are thrown into relief against the evidence of his humanity. And the book reveals not just how much we owe to Zinzendorf as a historical figure (which would be worthwhile in itself), but also how much we can learn from him about our present reality, and even, perhaps, about our future too. As such, *Lord of the Ring* is more than just a historical biography; it is also, I believe, a work of prophetic importance and insight for anyone today with a passion for prayer, a call to the nations, a burden for Christian unity or a desire to explore radical community.

Phil Anderson is someone who lives for all these values day to day. I've flown with him in his plane, travelled with him to many countries and prayed with him, late into the night, as fellow members of Zinzendorf's Order. When this book was first published, our kids would sometimes play together and now they

are all young adults. Phil continues to be one of the cleverest and most focussed people I know, but he never shows off about it. He is sacrificial, gentle, humble and fun – eminently qualified to write this book.

The writer of Hebrews lists many great heroes of the faith and calls us to run the race with perseverance, our eyes fixed on Jesus, drawing inspiration from the ‘cloud of witnesses’ cheering us on. One such witness, urging us on as we give ourselves to prayer, mission, unity and community, is surely Count Zinzendorf, whose star continues to arise in our time. May his example galvanize us afresh to focus our ambitions entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

PETE GREIG

24-7 Prayer International

Emmaus Rd Church, Guildford, UK

September 2020

Introduction

There is properly no history, only biography.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Fifteen years after the first edition of *Lord Of The Ring* was published, people are still talking about Count Zinzendorf.

Intercessors look to the Moravian ‘hundred-year prayer watch’ as the benchmark for serious prayer warriors. Evangelists identify the Moravians as initiators of revival and the ‘architects of modern missions.’ Charismatics see the Pentecostal visitation of 1727 as a defining example of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Advocates of church unity acknowledge that Zinzendorf coined the word ‘ecumenism’ which defines their hopes. Postmodern millennials and New Monastics find in Zinzendorf’s Order of the Mustard Seed the sense of identity and deeper spirituality their culture longs to embrace. Contemporary Moravians and Lutherans seek to rediscover their heritage afresh, and Methodists are recognizing that there may be more to their Moravian roots than the hit-and-run ‘conversion’ of their founder John Wesley.

Zinzendorf’s impact on history has been profound. His legacy has shaped the lives of people groups from the British to the Native Americans, the Afro-Caribbean and the Greenland Inuit. His influence has touched personalities as diverse as William Carey, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Nelson Mandela. If you want to understand why the West Indies are known for their gospel music, or why the UK is ruled by a queen or king rather than a president, tracing the answers will eventually lead you to Zinzendorf.

Like most Christians, my knowledge of the Moravians was initially limited to vague recollections from a Methodist upbringing, of a mysterious group who emerged from nowhere, dramatically influenced the life of John Wesley, then vanished as quickly as

they had appeared. Then, in 2001, I encountered the remarkable, accidental, international prayer movement called 24-7 Prayer. Their inspiration had been a seemingly chance visit by founder Pete Greig to Herrnhut in Germany, the place where Zinzendorf had initiated the Moravian prayer watch which ran without ceasing for one hundred years.* So this was Zinzendorf (or so I thought). The Great Prayer Leader. Patron Saint of 24-7. One of Us.

At the end of 2003, Pete was starting work on a book inspired by Zinzendorf's remarkable 'rule of life,**' and he gathered a group of half a dozen willing volunteers to help with some of the background research. My task for the odd spare evening was to clarify the facts surrounding Zinzendorf's childhood semi-secret spiritual society, the Order of the Mustard Seed.

A few months into this process we had tracked down enough material for Pete's book, and ten times more besides. We were starting to recognize that there was a lot more to the eighteenth-century Moravians than prayer, or spiritual orders, or overseas mission, or any of the many other filters that have been used to view them. In Zinzendorf and his followers we were forced to acknowledge that we could see the DNA of the entire 24-7 Prayer movement, and some crucial signposts for anyone grappling with the church's identity and calling as an authentic, relational, missional community in a new millennium.

With several historical accounts to draw on but nothing truly accessible in print, it was Pete (again) who suggested that we needed to write a book specifically devoted to Zinzendorf. I was up for the challenge, but my personal style leans more towards Indiana Jones than Library of Congress. I needed to see the places for myself, to touch, feel and smell as well as simply to read. I needed

* The story of 24-7 Prayer is told in Pete Greig and Dave Roberts, *Red Moon Rising* (Kingsway, 2004) and Greig, *Dirty Glory: Go Where Your Best Prayers Take You* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018). See also www.24-7prayer.com.

** Greig, *The Vision and the Vow* (Kingsway, 2005).

to understand Zinzendorf through the experience of pilgrimage alongside the discipline of research.

When the original edition was published in 2006, it included an endnote encouraging Christians to consider adopting the principles of Zinzendorf's Order of the Mustard Seed as a framework for life and discipleship. What it did not say was that a group had already met at Holy Trinity Church in Clapham in February 2005 to take Zinzendorf's Mustard Seed Vow for themselves. For the first ten years this group remained relatively small, feeling that we were still very much beginners at the whole 'rule of life'. By 2015 the renewed OMS was becoming something that we were ready to open up for others to join and belong to. Since then the OMS has grown steadily, and it is now an established and recognized international Christian Order.

With candidates for membership of the new order wanting to understand Zinzendorf's story for themselves, the fact that the first edition was by now out of print started to become a problem. This new edition addresses that problem, and makes the story available to the next generation who remain eager to explore and apply it for themselves. The text is virtually unchanged from the original, although the language and references have been slightly updated and a few important historical details revised to reflect the latest academic research on the eighteenth-century Moravians.

This book is a product of that continuing journey. A journey that spans half a continent, 300 years of history, and fifteen years of deep personal response. A quest whose ultimate goal and destination is Jesus Christ, to whom Zinzendorf gave his life in service.

Please fasten your seatbelts ...



CHAPTER I

LITTLE LUTZ

Christianity began as a youth mission.

ARCHBISHOP GEORGE CAREY

The count was not an old man, but as he lay in an upper room of his Dresden home he knew that he was going to die. Under the rich silk bedclothes his body was emaciated, ribs protruding starkly from a collapsed chest, neck unnaturally elongated behind knotted sinews. The racking coughs of consumption (tuberculosis) were growing weaker as his body gradually lost the capacity to fight the illness.

Gathering his remaining strength, Count George Ludwig von Zinzendorf reached for a small bell and rang for the servant who waited attentively outside the door of his chamber. Motioning the young man to draw closer, the count raised himself up and drew breath as if to speak, but instead lapsed into another coughing fit, showering the servant's face with small droplets of spittle. Finally, in a faltering voice which still carried an unmistakable air of command, he asked that his six-week-old son be brought to his bedside.

The footman's steps retreated down the staircase, to be replaced in a few moments by the lighter, nervous tread of the nursemaid. She entered cautiously, the baby well wrapped in spite of the early summer warmth. Young Nikolaus Ludwig remained fast asleep, his

face peaceful, a few wisps of golden hair offering a hint of the future head of blonde curls which his father would now never see. Taking the infant in his arms, George Ludwig slowly pronounced a final blessing over his child: ‘My dear son, they ask me to bless you, but you are more blessed than I am; even though now I feel as if I were already standing before the throne of Jesus.’*

George Ludwig von Zinzendorf died 9 July 1700, at the age of 38. He left his 25-year-old widow Charlotte Justine, her firstborn son Nikolaus Ludwig, and two children by his previous marriage. Early mortality was a grim fact of life at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

To be widowed at such a young age left the countess in a delicate situation. There was money in the family, but none of it was immediately due to her and this left her dependent on the generosity of relatives for support. Hers had been no marriage of convenience; the couple had been close both emotionally and spiritually, and the grief and loneliness were painful. For three years Charlotte lived with her infant son on her mother’s estate at Gross Hennersdorf. In 1704 she remarried, becoming the wife of Field Marshal Dubislaw von Natzmer, a widower twenty years her senior who lived in Berlin.

It was agreed that 4-year-old Nikolaus Ludwig should remain in the care of his grandmother Henrietta. The formidable Lady von Gersdorf would now become the central figure in his upbringing. She affectionately nicknamed him Lutz, a name which would stay with him throughout his early childhood.

Right from the start, matters of faith took a prominent place in young Lutz’s life. Both his parents had shared deep Christian convictions, and his grandmother’s estate at Gross Hennersdorf

* A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf, the Ecumenical Pioneer* (SCM Press, 1962), p. 21.

was an important meeting point for the movement of which they had been a part. To live in a household where spirituality was central to daily life, rather than being confined to a Sunday ritual, already meant that Lutz grew up in a different environment from the majority of his contemporaries.

A CHILD OF HIS TIMES

Politically, the Zinzendorf family were among the highest-ranking nobles of Saxony, in the far east of modern-day Germany. In an age when birth counted for everything, young Lutz was destined for high position and royal service as a matter of inevitability. The eighteenth century was also a time of great social change. In England the industrial revolution was beginning, and with it a profound transition from rural lifestyles, which had not changed for centuries, to increasing urbanization. In America, the Caribbean, Africa, India and the Far East, the European colonial powers were steadily extending their dominance. The age of global empires had begun. Across the world, the new social and political philosophies of the Enlightenment were being expounded, which by the end of the century would sweep away the last remains of medieval feudalism in the American and French revolutions.

While society around it was undergoing dynamic changes, the church on the whole had become divided and politicized, and bore little resemblance to the kind of discipleship demanded by Jesus and lived out by his early followers. Churches were strongly associated with the state, and unofficial sects were branded as theologically heretical and politically treasonous. In the previous century, Europe had been torn apart by a series of wars fought under religious banners between the mainly Protestant states of the north and the traditionally Catholic powers of the south. The military and political aftershocks were still continuing, and the psychological scars ran very deep. For individuals to identify themselves as ‘Protestant’,

‘Catholic’, ‘Lutheran’ or ‘Anglican’ was more often a statement of social and political allegiance than personal conviction.

The tradition in which the young Count Zinzendorf was brought up was a grass-roots renewal movement known as Pietism. To our modern ears, the term ‘piety’ invokes images of a dreary, legalistic mindset, and to refer to someone as ‘pious’ is more likely to be taken as a criticism than a compliment. The Pietism of Zinzendorf’s day was a generally healthy reaction against the nominalism of the established churches. First advanced by Philipp Spener (himself a regular visitor to Gross Hennersdorf), it emphasized the necessity of a living relationship with Christ as Saviour rather than external religious affiliation. In its later forms it could indeed become narrow and dogmatic, but little Lutz was growing up during its vibrant and creative beginnings.

Inspired by the teaching and example of Spener and others, Pietists formed religious societies where they met together for prayer, Bible study and discussion. In many ways they were the first modern expression of the ‘house church’ or ‘cell’ concept. They tried to avoid being branded as a dangerous sect by becoming a ‘church within the church’. Most Pietists remained loyal to the state-sponsored Lutheran Church, while also pursuing their ‘unofficial’ spiritual activities. Luther himself had stated in his ‘Smalcald Articles’ that meeting together for fellowship was a legitimate expression of Christian faith and a means of God’s grace. This meant that the tensions between traditional Lutherans and Pietists remained as a theological fence fight rather than escalating into open conflict.

As every parent knows, there is no guarantee that the values and beliefs of a family will be reproduced in their children, no matter how sincerely they are held. In Lutz’s case, however, he immediately began to display a deep childlike faith which amazed even his devout relatives. ‘In my fourth year’, he later wrote, ‘I began to seek God earnestly, and determined to become a true servant

of Jesus Christ.* At the age of 6 he would sometimes be found apparently talking to himself, and would cheerfully confirm that he was speaking to Jesus, whom he regarded as a kind of elder brother. As he learned to write under his private tutor Edeling, he would pen letters to his Saviour and throw them out of the window in full confidence that Christ would find and read them.

Growing up without a father and with only occasional contact with his mother, Zinzendorf's was a rather solitary childhood. Gross Hennersdorf was very much an adult world, and although playmates were arranged they did not seem to feature large in young Lutz's life. It was his aunt, a young woman in her early twenties also named Henrietta, who became his friend and confidante, part mother and part older sister. She prayed with Lutz daily, and his own prayer life soon progressed far beyond repeating the formal prayers he heard at church. 'A thousand times,' he said, 'I heard Him speak in my heart, and saw Him with the eye of faith.**' Only once, at the age of 8, does he record being troubled by atheistic doubts, and even these seem soon to have passed following a sleepless night of wrestling.

YOUNG NICK'S SCHOOLDAYS

The plan for Zinzendorf's education may sound familiar: go to school, continue on to university, take a year out to travel and see the world, then get a job in the family business. But what is the norm for thousands of young men and women in Western societies today was the privilege of a tiny minority in the early 1700s. At the age of 10, the young count was sent to attend the renowned Pietist boarding school at Halle near Leipzig.

On arrival, he accidentally overheard his mother in private conversation with the headmaster, August Hermann Francke. She

* James E. Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church* (Moravian Publication Office, 1909), 2.1.

** Ibid.

described her son as a boy of great ability, but needing to be kept in check or he would become proud and presume upon his talents.* The Pietism of Halle was already starting its drift towards a rigid dogma which regarded the human spirit as completely corrupt before the moment of 'conversion' and fully redeemed thereafter. This model could not accommodate the spontaneous and joyful faith of the young Zinzendorf, so Francke initially wrote him off as unrepentant and deluded. The scene was set for the most miserable few years of Zinzendorf's life.

The tutors took his mother's warning and their own assumptions to heart, and set out to break him of his pride. He was given menial tasks and beaten for the most trivial offences. The punishments were made into a form of public entertainment: 'Next week,' ran one announcement on the school noticeboard, 'the Count is to have the stick.'** To avoid any sense of academic excellence he was placed into classes below his ability and when he became demotivated was accused of laziness. On one occasion, imitation donkey ears were placed on his head and he was forced to stand at the front of the class with a sign saying 'lazy donkey' on his back.

If the tutors were harsh with the young count, his fellow pupils were cruel in the way that only children can be. He had been brought up in a sheltered environment, surrounded by women, and had inherited his father's relatively weak constitution. None of this equipped him for the tough and ruthless environment of boarding school life. His noble origins only added to the problem. He easily outranked his peers in wealth and status, and they took every opportunity to bring him down a peg or two. 'With a few exceptions,' he says sadly, 'my schoolfellows hated me throughout.' Among the many taunts and practical jokes, they would frequently knock his books into the gutter, then zealously report him late for school while he picked up the mess.

* John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf* (Moravian Church in America, 1956), p. 23.

** Hutton, *A History*, 2.1.

The final straw was his personal tutor, Daniel Crisenius. Appointed in 1712, Crisenius was a bully who made Zinzendorf's life a misery. The appointment was opposed by his grandmother, who had doubts about Crisenius' character and felt that his piety was at best skin deep, but supported by his uncle Otto, who considered Crisenius to be a shrewd man of the world, qualities he wanted his nephew to acquire. Between them, the two seem to have had Crisenius pretty well worked out. He made Zinzendorf beg his relatives for money, then took most of it himself. He advised him to write home complaining about his harsh treatment, then confiscated the letters and showed them to the school inspector. He did his best to interrupt the boy's prayers and devotions, and introduced crude topics of conversation to embarrass his pupil.

In spite of the tough conditions, Zinzendorf gradually began to shine academically. He was competent in Greek, fluent in French and Latin, and while he struggled with Hebrew he excelled at poetry and public speaking. He was confirmed as a member of the Lutheran Church, and following his first communion wrote a moving hymn expressing his deep feelings at the event. Francke began to re-evaluate the young man more favourably, and although he would never have admitted it, even Crisenius must have been cautiously impressed, at least on a professional level. By his final year, Zinzendorf had effectively completed the Halle curriculum and was placed in a small group of advanced students to prepare for his move up to university.

THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Although his academic progress must have given him some comfort, the most important aspect of Zinzendorf's final years at Halle was his spiritual involvement. His isolation was never going to last for ever, and the friends to whom he was eventually drawn were those who shared his deep faith and convictions. They included George

von Söhlenthal, who was the initial ringleader of the group; Anton von Wallbaum; von Tanz; and Frederick de Watteville, who would remain one of his closest lifelong friends.

The five friends and numbers of others began to meet up in their rooms and secluded spots around the school for prayer, Bible study, discussion and fellowship. Some of their schoolmates were openly rebelling against their Pietist upbringing and education, but others wanted to emulate the example of a ‘church within the church’ that they had been shown. Zinzendorf proved himself to be a natural leader and organizer of these gatherings. He had an easy manner and would talk to almost anyone on spiritual topics. The transformation was remarkable. He had progressed from being a lonely, bullied outsider to become one of the key movers in what amounted to a miniature spiritual revival. By the time he left Halle, he was able to hand over to Professor Francke details of no less than seven prayer groups and societies with which he had been involved. The staff subsequently went on to use these groups as the basis for a renewal of spiritual life among the students.*

One of the ‘privileges’ of Zinzendorf’s rank was that he got to have dinner every day at Francke’s personal table. Initially, this had been a painful experience, rubbing salt in the wounds of their strained relationship. However, in his final two years a genuine friendship developed, and in addition to enjoying the older man’s conversation, Zinzendorf had a chance to meet with some intriguing guests. In the early eighteenth century Halle was one of the very few places in the Protestant world to have any developed concept of Christian mission. The idea that anyone should go and take the gospel message to people who had not yet heard it was simply alien to most branches of the church, but Halle had already sent out a handful of foreign missionaries under the patronage of the Danish royal family.

* Gerhard Reichel, *Der ‘Senfkornorden’ Zinzendorfs*, trans. Markus Laegel.

One of these very first missionaries was Ziegenbalg, who had gone to the Indian colony of Tranquebar. Zinzendorf met him while he was back on furlough in 1715, and was deeply impressed by his stories of serving Christ overseas. De Watteville shared his friend's enthusiasm, and the two of them entered into a solemn agreement to promote the missionary cause in their future lives. Being destined for careers in public service, neither of them expected to be able to go in person, but they resolved to send whoever God might show them to people about whose spiritual welfare no one else seemed to care.

For the five friends at the centre of the new movement of faith among the pupils of Halle, occasional meetings for prayer and fellowship were never going to be enough. They fully intended to commit their lives to the service of Christ, and started to look for ways to express that commitment in practice. In purely natural terms, their wealth and rank would give them ample opportunities for self-indulgence. Their expression of 'teenage rebellion' would be to live in a way that was holy in every respect, and worthy of true disciples of Jesus. In 1715 they formed a new society, committing together to live lives of righteousness before God and genuine accountability before each other. They called their group the 'Slaves of Virtue', and met together in a spirit of frank honesty and mutual encouragement.

In early 1716, Zinzendorf went home to spend a few months on his grandmother's estate prior to starting at university. He had gone to Halle as a precocious but slightly spoilt child; he returned older, wiser, and having learned some of life's lessons the hard way. He had also made some enduring friendships which would last for the rest of his life. Although none of them yet knew it, their little society of five was destined to become a covenant community which would eventually include among its members people of influence throughout the whole of the known world.



CHAPTER 1A

Southend Airport, East of London, UK

WEDNESDAY 2 JUNE 2004, 9.20AM GMT

'Clear Prop!'

I shout the statutory warning out of the small Perspex window next to the pilot's seat and hit the starter. The propeller cranks over with a reluctant whine, then the first cylinder fires and the engine growls into life. Quickly I run through the post-start checks. Oil pressure, fuel pressure, temperature, amps, suction. I glance over at Justin Blake, sat next to me in the right-hand seat. He looks relaxed but quietly excited. I don't blame him. In an age of sanitized mass transportation, there is still something about flying in a small aeroplane that stirs a sense of genuine adventure.

We give the engine a few minutes to warm up and turn on the radio and satellite navigation systems. Our course, carefully marked out on five separate charts, threads its way through the congested airspace of Western Europe and on to Dresden in the east of Germany. We have already filed a flight plan for Antwerp in Belgium, the first of two planned stops en route.

Together we plan to traverse 600 miles and three centuries, to another land and another time. The ultimate destination of our journey is the village of Herrnhut, tucked away in the furthest

corner of Germany near the Polish and Czech borders. Nearly 300 years ago, this obscure setting was the scene of a remarkable spiritual revival. Under the leadership of a charismatic nobleman named Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, an unlikely community became for a time the world's most dynamic powerhouse of Christian mission and renewal.

The reason why we are setting out on this crazy journey – part adventure, part research trip, part pilgrimage – is much more recent. One of the lasting achievements of the Herrnhutters was the establishment of a continuous prayer watch, which ran day and night for one hundred years. In 1999, inspired and challenged by the example of these 'Moravians',* a group of young people in Chichester on the south coast of England decided to see if they could manage to do the same thing for a month. The result was the unexpected birth of the movement known as 24-7 Prayer. In five years, with no grand strategy, no big-name leadership, and almost no budget, the wave of continuous prayer had spread to over fifty countries and seen thousands of mainly young people praying and encountering God like never before.** Justin was part of 24-7 from the beginning. I came to it slightly later, drawn in initially by a friend called Tim Harrold, who had found the fulfilment of his own dreams of seeing youth turn to God in prayer. Now we are going back to the place where it all began, to try and better understand the 'spiritual heritage' of the movement in which we are both caught up.

The oil temperature needle is moving at last, and it's time to go. I select the radio frequency and press the transmit button: 'Southend Tower, Golf Foxtrot Mike Alpha Mike.'

* Most of the inhabitants of Herrnhut originated from Moravia, in the eastern part of the modern-day Czech Republic.

** For the full story see Pete Greig and Dave Roberts, *Red Moon Rising* (Kingsway, 2004), and Greig, *Dirty Glory: Go Where Your Best Prayers Take You* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2018). See also www.24-7prayer.com.

The call sign (normally abbreviated to 'Alpha Mike') is our means of identification and the nearest our aeroplane has to a 'name'. Technically, the aircraft is a Piper Warrior II (PA-28), owned by a six-person syndicate based at Southend. Emotionally, it is the culmination of a dream of flight which I have harboured since childhood. Every step along my aeronautical journey has brought a new challenge, and this ambitious flight across Europe is pushing the bar up another notch.

'Alpha Mike, taxi holding point Alpha runway Two-Four.'

Alpha Mike trembles in the slipstream of 160 horsepower, and I reach down and release the brakes. A slight pressure on the rudder pedals to keep the nose straight; a glance down at the airspeed indicator; as we reach 64 knots, pull smoothly back on the control column; and we are airborne. Levelling out at 2,000 feet, we cross the Thames Estuary and set course for Dover, the first leg of our journey.

Crossing open water in a single-engine aircraft always tends to focus the pilot's mind. As we approach the coast I open the throttle and raise the nose, gaining as much extra height as conditions will allow. It won't save us from a swim if the engine were to give up half way, but it might at least earn us the time and gliding distance to find a friendly boat to ditch next to.

Our short hop over the narrowest stretch of the English Channel in fact passes without incident. We skirt the exclusion zone around the French nuclear power station at Gravelines, then request clearance to pass over the Belgian coastal airport of Ostend. So far so good, but according to the forecasts the trickiest bit of the flight is yet to come.

Unlike commercial airliners cruising at over 30,000 feet, small aeroplanes are quite vulnerable to the changing weather. Low cloud, fog, thunderstorms or strong winds can all make conditions unsafe for us. For the last few days, the internet weather services have been predicting that a band of low cloud and rain will be

lying across our path somewhere over the Low Countries. Since the beginning of the week, we and numbers of our friends have been praying that the system would weaken, or the whole trip would have to be cancelled. Even as late as breakfast this morning, our decision to go was not made until a final check revealed that the twelve-hour forecasts for southern Holland looked flyable. As we track inland across Belgium, the moment of truth has arrived.

The broken cloud over the Channel has now been replaced by a leaden overcast. The cloud base lowers steadily, forcing us down below 1,000 feet. With only fifteen miles to run to Antwerp, I call them up on the radio. By the time I have selected the new frequency and made contact, we have been pushed lower still and it is starting to rain. Tension in the cockpit is rising; low flying is much more exacting, and navigation is becoming harder, too, in the worsening visibility. I pass on our flight details, but the answer from Antwerp confirms what I already know. 'Alpha Mike, we cannot accept a visual flight. Please leave our zone and remain clear of controlled airspace.'

Taking a quick look at the map, we see that there is a small airfield about twenty miles to the north-west on the Dutch coast which should have clearer weather. We announce our new destination as Midden-Zeeland. Antwerp transfer us to Dutch Military Radar, whose worried-sounding controller advises us to steer a course of 305 degrees magnetic. Planning and executing a diversion at low level in poor weather in the cramped cockpit of a light aircraft is not always an easy task. In this case, however, I am on top of the situation, and ten minutes later the airstrip at Midden-Zeeland comes into view.

As expected, the conditions here are better and we are able to fly a conventional circuit to land. Touching down on the neat grass runway, it is good to be back on the ground, but our faces betray our concern. Unless we can find a way through this weather system, our journey could be over almost before it has begun.