Zinzendorf and the Order of the Dannebrog

In 1731 Zinzendorf was awarded with the Order of the Dannebrog by the King of Denmark. Zinzendorf was very pleased with this order and considered it a great honor. All the greater was his disappointment when the Danish King demanded the order back on January 30, 1736—275 years ago.

As a young man Zinzendorf had high hopes of his connections to the royal family of Denmark. He was related to Sophia Magdalena of Brandenburg-Kulmbach who married Prince Christian, heir to the Danish crown, in 1721. Prince Christian was a pious man and ever since he and his wife visited Zinzendorf that same year, Zinzendorf set his hopes on a position at the Danish court. When Prince Christian became King of Denmark in 1730, Zinzendorf expected Denmark to become a center of piety and missionary enterprise. He himself wished to oversee the future missions in Greenland and Lapland. With these high expectations, Zinzendorf traveled to Copenhagen to at-

tend the coronation ceremonies on June 6, 1731 at which time he received the Order of the Dannebrog.

While in Copenhagen Zinzendorf was asked if he wanted to serve as a minister in one of the governmental departments. Zinzendorf declined the offer. His suggestion, on the other hand, for the foundation of a Christian university "to fill the entire world with the Gospel of Christ" in Flensburg, was ignored. The hoped-for close cooperation with the Danish court did not seem to materialize; it has even been argued that the awarding of the Order of the Dannebrog (and not of the higher Order of the Elephant) was an early sign that relations with the Danish royal family were not as close as Zinzendorf had expected.

Zinzendorf does not seem to have been offended by the fact that he did not receive the Order of the Elephant. On the contrary, he seemed to have been very pleased with the Order of the Dannebrog. In a letter to his wife he wrote the order "was very dear" to him. And he remained fond of the order, even after the Danish King asked Zinzendorf to return the order.

Christian VI was a great supporter of the Pietists in Halle and the rift between Halle and Herrnhut also affected the relationship between the Danish King and Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf visited Copenhagen again in May of 1735 but he did not gain an audience with the king or the queen.

As if the failed visit to Copenhagen was not humiliating enough for Zinzendorf, another blow came in February of 1736 when a letter arrived in Herrnhut in which the Danish King asked for the insignia of the Order of the Dannebrog to be returned. Zinzendorf obediently sent the insignia back, but not before he had replicas made. The

Herrnhut Archives still possesses the replica of the white ribbon and the breast star with the grand cross. The Bethlehem Archives also has a replica of one of the insignia: a cross-shaped pendant with clear rhinestones on one side and Christian VI's initials on the other side. The pendant was handed down among Zinzendorf's descendants in America.

These insignia are also depicted on a portrait of Zinzendorf with Herrnhut in the background. The portrait is a further indication of Zinzendorf's attachment to the order. According to former Unity Archivist, Richard Träger, Herrnhut is shown as it looked in the 1740s. That suggests the portrait was done years after Zinzendorf returned the order to Copenhagen. Apparently the count wanted to hold on to the memory of this Danish order. While he cherished the positive memories, he wanted to forget about the negative ones. Zinzendorf gave the letter by which King Christian demanded the order back to his secretary, David Nitschmann, and told him to do with it as he pleased. Zinzendorf did not want to keep the unpleasant letter among his papers any longer.

Source

Images: oil painting in Unity Archives, Herrnhut (GS 051); pendant in Moravian Archives, Bethlehem. Jørgen Bøytler, "Zinzendorf und Dänemark," in *Graf ohne Grenzen* (2000), 73-81, 171.

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