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MY BROTHER'S KEEPER
HOW AMERICAN LUTHERANS FOUGHT TO PRESERVE THE EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH OF RUSSIA IN THE USSR, 1921–1939

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of History
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Matthew Heise
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Approved by _____
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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | viii |
| COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | x |
| ABBREVIATIONS | xi |
| CHRONOLOGY..... | xiii |
| CHAPTER ONE | 1 |
| A WORLD IN FLUX: WAR, REVOLUTION, AND REFORMATION | 1 |
| A WAR THAT UNITED EAST AND WEST | 4 |
| THE NLC AND RUSSIA ... THE BEGINNING..... | 7 |
| Laws against Religion..... | 10 |
| THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR..... | 17 |
| FINDING A WAY INTO RUSSIA..... | 23 |
| ARA Opens the Door to a Relationship with Lutherans in Russia | 29 |
| “You Reached Your Brotherly Hand Across the Wide Ocean”: Morehead Arrives in Russia..... | 34 |
| Christmas, January 1923..... | 71 |
| THE FINAL ACCOUNT: WHAT DID ARA AND THE NLC ACCOMPLISH?..... | 72 |
| ARA Leaves Russia..... | 80 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 83 |
| THE RELIGIOUS NEP: A TIME OF HOPE FOR THE LUTHERAN CHURCH..... | 83 |
| Negotiating for Luthco | 93 |
| THE FIRST ALL-RUSSIAN LUTHERAN SYNODICAL CONVENTION..... | 96 |
| Siberia: A Rescue Mission for the Church and the Problem of Sending Funds..... | 113 |
| The Siberian Mission Journey—1925 | 119 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| A LUTHERAN SEMINARY IS BORN IN THE USSR | 123 |
| THE STATUS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 1920S–1926: GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS | 131 |
| 1927–1928: A JOURNAL, ETHNIC RECONCILIATION, THE FIRST GRADUATES, AND ANOTHER SYNOD | 144 |
| The Third Seminary Year-First Class Graduates-June 1928 | 158 |
| The Changing of the Guard at St. Peter and Paul in Moscow | 162 |
| The General Synod of 1928 | 164 |
| “They Would not See His Face Again”: A Final Mission Festival in the Volga | 175 |
| CHAPTER THREE | 180 |
| THE VELIKI PERELOM (GREAT TURNING POINT) OF 1929:..... | 180 |
| DEATH KNELL FOR THE LUTHERAN CHURCH? | 180 |
| Closing Lutheranism’s Oldest Church: St. Michael’s in Moscow | 183 |
| Pressure Applied to Leningrad’s Lutheran Institutions | 186 |
| WINTER 1928–1929..... | 191 |
| SPRING/SUMMER 1929..... | 194 |
| FALL 1929 | 208 |
| Collectivization 1929: “Here, One Is Not Allowed To Live Anymore” | 211 |
| The Lutheran Seminary’s Problems: Fall 1929 | 222 |
| WINTER 1929–1930..... | 241 |
| Latvian Lutherans: Trying to Balance Church and State..... | 241 |
| Morehead’s Fervor for Missions and Optimism: “Is God’s Purpose ... accomplished?” | 244 |
| The Hansen–Muss Case..... | 247 |
| Hansen’s Interrogations | 253 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Life in the Russian Lutheran Church Carries on Despite the Arrests..... | 257 |
| A Somber Christmas: 1929..... | 258 |
| New Year 1930: Attacks against the Churches and Seminary Continue..... | 262 |
| Hansen–Muss Case Expands–1930: “I do not consider myself guilty” | 265 |
| The Show Trial of Pastor Albert Koch: Grossliebenthal, Ukraine | 270 |
| September 1930—Hansen-Muss Case Decided: The Church is Broken | 280 |
| CHAPTER FOUR..... | 286 |
| THE LUTHERANS’ ROAD TO GOLGATHA..... | 286 |
| THE SERVANT OF THE CHURCH AS AN ENEMY OF THE STATE | 291 |
| The World Condemns Persecution: Shocking the Moral Sense of the Civilized World | 295 |
| Words of Encouragement: “Stand and eat, you have a long way to go” | 308 |
| 1931: “WILL THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH BE BROUGHT TO AN END THIS YEAR?” | 314 |
| Malmgren’s Lament in the USSR: “Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here”..... | 318 |
| The Advancing Darkness: “Morning Comes, and also the Night”..... | 322 |
| Malmgren and Morehead’s Complicated Communications | 325 |
| When Christmas was Illegal, but Still Celebrated | 327 |
| 1932–SPIRITUAL LIFE OF RUSSIAN LUTHERANISM: TRAPPED IN SNOW AND ICE..... | 331 |
| The Seminary Graduates of 1932: “A Glimmer of Light in the Dark” | 343 |
| The Territory of Ingria: A Lutheran Haven within the USSR? | 346 |
| THE OGPU PRESSURES MALMGREN AND CONFLICTS WITHIN THE CHURCH: A SAD AND MUDDLED AFFAIR | 350 |
| CHAPTER FIVE | 365 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1933–1935: TAXED AND PERSECUTED OUT OF EXISTENCE? THE SEMINARY’S DEMISE..... | 365 |
| A Harvest of Sorrow: Return of Famine?..... | 370 |
| BISHOP MEYER’S WARNING: “[THE GOVERNMENT] IS THE ANTICHRIST, BE ON YOUR GUARD!” | 374 |
| THE SOVIET UNION AND AMERICAN DEMANDS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM..... | 382 |
| 1934 — Holding out Hope: “The Lord of the Church Can and Will Help Us, When His Time Comes” | 388 |
| THE TRAGEDY OF THE MEYERS: MARTYRS TO THE CAUSE..... | 394 |
| 1935–THE PULSE OF THE CHURCH GROWS WEAKER: THE MOST DIFFICULT YEAR FOR THE CHURCH SINCE 1929..... | 419 |
| CHAPTER SIX..... | 457 |
| 1936–1939: THE DEMISE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE USSR | 457 |
| THE MAN WHO “TOUCHED THE WHOLE WORLD”: DR. JOHN MOREHEAD (1867–1936)..... | 457 |
| “Then It Came”: The Remnant of Pastors Dimishes Further | 465 |
| SHADOWS OF THE GREAT TERROR: “THOUSANDS OF SEEDS ... CAST TO THE WIND” | 476 |
| The NKVD Big Lie: Linking the Russian Lutheran Church to Hitler | 487 |
| The Stalin Constitution of 1936: Revival of Hope or False Portent?..... | 493 |
| The Hidden Story of Pastor Alexander Streck | 498 |
| “Do You Believe in God? The Soviet Citizen’s Surprising Answer in 1937..... | 505 |
| 1937–THEIR BLOOD CRIES OUT! THE GREAT TERROR AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE LUTHERAN PASTORATE IN THE USSR..... | 510 |
| The Martyrdom of Pastor Alexander Streck: “I was blessed to once know such great men!” | 514 |
| The Ingrian Lutheran Pastorate is Decimated | 517 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| The Execution of Pastor Helmut Hansen (1892–1937) and Other Heroes of the Faith | 525 |
| The Forgotten Hero of the Lutheran Church: Rev. Kurt Muss, The Lonely Martyr | 531 |
| Last Christmas in Leningrad: Erasing Three Centuries of Lutheran Presence..... | 535 |
| 1938–THE CHURCH DESTROYED: THE ANTICHRIST REIGNS VICTORIOUS FOR “A LITTLE SEASON” | 547 |
| Nothing Sacred: Turning Churches into Soviet Space | 556 |
| Under the Watchful Eye of the NKVD: Rounding Up the Remainder of the Hansen- Muss Case Participants | 561 |
| Being German Proves Fatal: The Fate of Leningrad’s Lutherans | 568 |
| Last Church Standing: The Village of Koltushi and the End of Organized Lutheranism | 581 |
| Epilogue: The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail..... | 583 |
| APPENDIX ONE..... | 593 |
| PHOTOS FROM THE DISSERTATION | 593 |
| NOTES ON SOURCES FOR RESEARCH | 617 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 620 |
| VITA | 633 |

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Being the grandson of Germans from Russia, the topic of Soviet persecution of Lutherans was always in the back of my mind as I served on the mission field in Russia (1994–1996, 2001–2014). But in 2012 it received an impetus when I spoke to the congregation of St. Michael’s Lutheran about a martyred pastor who served in their church in the 1920s, the Rev. Kurt Muss. After the service concluded, parishioner Olga Ryumina came up to me and asked me what I knew about Kurt Muss. Well, compared to her and her daughter Tanya, it soon became apparent—not much. The Ryumina’s would begin to help me research the topic, connecting me to literature and the letter and photo archives of the Muss-Tumm family, which they possessed. Ultimately, while I would enter the Russian State archives, I encouraged the bishop of the church to write a letter so that Tanya could do research in the KGB archives. It served all of our purposes as the keys to dusty archives revealed the history you are about to read.

So I am profoundly grateful to the Ryumina family, first and foremost. I am also grateful to Bishop Aari Kugappi of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia, for taking my research seriously and wanting to uncover the lost history of martyrs and heroes of the Faith who retained their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ against incalculable odds. I also want to thank Pastor Dmitry Lotov, who researched in Moscow’s FSB (formerly KGB) archives in order to learn the fate of his predecessor at St. Peter and Paul Lutheran, the Rev. Alexander Streck. Raisa Mikhailovna was very kind to direct this foreigner to books related to my topic in the Russian State Library in Moscow (the former Lenin Library). Nadezhda Cherepenina opened the doors of the Russian State Archives in St. Petersburg for me and fellow archivist Larissa went out of her way to grant me access to church documents. Mikhail Shkarovsky directed me to find the means to get access to the FSB Archives. Daniel Johnson kindly alerted me to the vast correspondence

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ABBREVIATIONS

[ABBREV] "[Abbreviation Description]"

ACRRM- American Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities

ARA- American Relief Administration

CAI- Central Aerodynamics Institute

CPUSA- Communist Party of the U.S.A.

DPZ- Dom Predvarityelna Zakluchony (House of Preparatory Incarceration)

ELCA- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

ELCR- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia

FELRCCP- Free Evangelical Lutheran-Reformed Church of a Congressional Position

FSB- Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii (Federal Security Bureau of the Russian Federation)

GAKHN- Gosudarstvennaya Akademiya Khudozhestvennikh Nauk (Government Academy of Arts and Sciences)

GULAG- Glavnoye Upravleniye Lagerej (Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps)

GPU- Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravleniye (State Political Directorate)

JJDC- Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

KGB- Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)

LWC- Lutheran World Convention

MINL- Moscow Institute of New Languages

NEP- New Economic Policy

NKVD- Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)

NLC- National Lutheran Council

OGPU- Obyedinyonnoye Gosudarstvennoye Politicheskoye Upravleniye (Joint State Political Directorate)

REP- Russian Evangelical Press

USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VDGE- “Faithful to Him to the Grave” (Russian phrase)

VTsIK- All-Russian Central Executive Committee (Communist Party)

YMCA- Young Men’s Christian Association

ZHAKT- Zhilishno-Arendnoye Kooperativnoye Tovarishestvo (Housing and Leasing Cooperative Partnership)

CHRONOLOGY

- 1917— February— Czar Nicholas II abdicates and a Provisional Government is formed
- 1917— October—World War I ends; 400th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation
- 1917— October/November— Bolshevik Revolution overthrows the government and establishes a Communist government
- 1917—November to October 1922— Russian Civil War
- 1918— January— Decree on the Separation of the State from the Church and the Church from the Schools
- 1921—December— Dr. John Morehead of the NLC enters Russia to extend aid to Lutherans and others suffering from the famine
- 1924— September—Leningrad Lutheran seminary begins classes
- 1929—April— Law on Religious Associations is decreed
- 1929—December— Leningrad Lutheran Pastors and Sunday School Teachers are arrested
- 1930—September—Leningrad Lutheran Pastors and Sunday School Teachers are sentenced
- 1934—April— Bishop Theophil Meyer dies
- 1936— Dr. John Morehead dies; Bishop Arthur Malmgren immigrates to Germany
- 1937–1938— Joseph Stalin’s Great Terror
- 1939— August— All Lutheran Churches in Russia are closed

CHAPTER ONE

A WORLD IN FLUX: WAR, REVOLUTION, AND REFORMATION

1917 was a year that many Lutherans worldwide had been eagerly anticipating.

Celebrations marking the 400th anniversary of the Reformation had been in the planning stages for several years, and now despite the cataclysm of a world war, they would be observed and no doubt with particular fervor. One of the American planning committees had been formed as early as 1914 and had united representatives of the General Council, the General Synod and the United Synod South. Another committee was known as the Reformation Quadricentenary Committee and was led by two Missouri Synod pastors, Otto Pannkoke and William Schoenfeld. The goal of the committees was to highlight the contributions of the Reformation to civilization.¹ As for the church body known as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, it was in the process of commissioning a new translation of the Book of Concord that would ultimately be released in 1921.² The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s publishing arm, Concordia Publishing House, also printed a general book of articles on the theme of the Reformation in all of its aspects. It was edited by William H.T. Dau and entitled *Four Hundred Years*.³ Articles ranged from recounting Luther’s life and work to topics like “Luther and the Constitution of the United States.” An ocean away, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia was similarly compiling a set of articles

¹ Frederick K. Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert: The Story of the National Lutheran Council (1918–1966)*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1968), 9.

² Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), vii–viii.

³ William Herman Theodore Dau, *Four Hundred Years: Commemorative Essays on the Reformation of Dr. Martin Luther and Its Blessed Results, in the Year of the Four Hundredth...* (Forgotten Books, 2017), Kindle, Location 85, 5555.

into a book edited by Reverend Theophil Meyer entitled *Luther's Heritage in Russia*. In the book, the almost 350 year-old history of the Lutheran Church in Russia was chronicled, the authors solemnly reflecting not only upon the joys but also the persecutions of the past.

In St. Petersburg, the heart of the Lutheran Church in Russia, many events were scheduled to celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation. At the largest church in the very center of the city, St. Peter's, three evenings were planned. On the first evening Pastor Kentmann presented on the basics of the *Augsburg Confession* while during the following two evenings, he read Luther's work on "The Freedom of the Christian." All of these readings/discussions were followed on Reformation Day by a morning service led by Pastors Kentmann, Paul Willigerode and Karl Walter. There was also a celebration for the youth of St. Peter's Lutheran school, with Principal Erich Kleinenberg and his assistant, Alexander Wolfius, presenting, and the girls' choir performing. The day ended with a church packed full of all of the German-speaking Lutheran congregations in St. Petersburg robustly singing the hymns of the Reformation.⁴

Commemorating the anniversary of the Reformation at St. Peter and Paul in downtown Moscow, a fifteen-minute walk from the Kremlin, Reverend Meyer spoke of the dangers currently threatening Lutherans in Russia: "But has not much of our sacred heritage been born in the sounds of the Reformation? Thanks be to God, the echo of revolution is silenced in our hearts by the echo of the Reformation!" The congregation followed Meyer's stirring words with the singing of "*Ein Feste Burg*."⁵ Those words of Meyer would sound a theme repeated by others in the coming years: the spiritual theology and musical strains of the Reformation versus the

⁴ Theophil Meyer, *Наследие Лютера в России: К 400-летию Юбилею Реформацию Отмечатому Евангелическо Лютеранскому Общинами в России [Luther's Heritage in Russia: On the Occasion of the Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Reformation in the Evangelical-Lutheran Community in Russia]*, (Moscow: Gotika, 2003), 91–92, 221–23.

⁵ Daniel H. Johnson, *Loyalty: A Biography of Richard Gustavovich Reusch* (St. Cloud, MN: SunRay, 2008), 88.

worldly politics and atheistic anthems of the Bolshevik Revolution. One week later on November 7, Russian history would take a tragic turn as the sounds of revolution would resonate loud and clear.

Ironically, the tragic events taking place on the battlefields of Europe that Reformation Day in 1917 would soon result in a peace that would allow the Lutheran churches of these two world powers, Russia and America, to establish more intimate contacts. At first glance, the Lutheran churches of both nations had much in common. Questions about the loyalty of ethnic Germans in Russia and America led to suspicion among those considered more “native” within their respective countries. Due to the very language they used in their worship services, both groups of Germans were accused of being sympathetic to Kaiser Wilhelm II’s imperialistic ambitions.

But now that the “war to end all wars” had exacted destruction of an unprecedented scale on the European continent, the interest of American Lutherans was drawn to the shattered lives of their brothers and sisters beyond the borders. The fact that there were many immigrants from the Volga region who had resettled in the American Midwest virtually compelled Lutherans to take an interest. They retained contact with their families overseas and would act upon the consciences of their fellow Lutherans in America in the future. So as a result of the war, American and Russian-German Lutherans began a partnership that would only take on added meaning as the Bolshevik Revolution began its assault upon religion and the Lutheran Church in Russia later that year. American Lutherans would come to appreciate the deeper meaning behind the biblical phrase, “my brother’s keeper,” and a remarkable man would soon step to the forefront and keep the plight of Russia’s Lutherans foremost in their minds for many years to come.

A War that United East and West

As the Great War wound down towards its conclusion, the European continent was reduced to a vast cemetery. British historian Michael Burleigh described the plethora of cenotaphs, memorial arches, crosses and obelisks that proliferated throughout the European landscape in the aftermath of the war. Surely, he reasoned, the loss of nine million men and untold suffering on a continental scale would force future archeologists to ponder what had led Europe to such madness. Poets and writers like Rudyard Kipling, Karl Krauss (*The Last Days of Mankind*) and Erich Maria Remarque speculated on what it all meant, lamenting this “Lost Generation.”⁶

Back in America, sympathetic Lutherans had already been coming to terms with the pressing needs of their own parishioners serving in the war. On October 19, 1917, the Lutheran Commission for Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Welfare was established. Its primary task was to provide spiritual succor through the employ of Lutheran chaplains at training camps for the army and navy. Along with its concomitant “seelsorger” activity, the existence of such an organization went a long way towards ameliorating the suspicion other Americans had towards the loyalty of German-Americans of Lutheran heritage.⁷

Due to the positive results of cooperation between American Lutheran church bodies, Pastors Lauritz Larsen and Frederick Knubel felt compelled to create a more permanent inter-Lutheran cooperative agency.⁸ This commission soon took the form of the National Lutheran

⁶ Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 1–2, 9–11.

⁷ Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert*, 9–11.

⁸ Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert*, 11–12. Knubel was a pastor serving in Manhattan and a representative of the General Synod. In 1918 he would be elected the first president of the United Lutheran Church in America, where he would serve for the next 26 years.

Council (hereafter, NLC), founded on September 6, 1918 in the Auditorium Hotel in Chicago.⁹ At its April 15, 1919 meeting, the NLC described itself as representing the majority of Lutheran churches in America, such as “the United Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Augustana (Swedish) Synod, the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Synod of Iowa and other States the Buffalo Synod, the Suomi Synod, the United Danish Church and the Lutheran Free Church.” As an organization of national scope, the NLC sought to establish representation within the halls of government in Washington, DC, hoping thereby to facilitate its work overseas. As they became increasingly aware of the great suffering among European Lutherans, American Lutherans could no longer ignore the cries for help coming from that quarter. Writing to U.S. Secretary of State Frank L. Polk, NLC Secretary Lauritz Larsen pleaded for permission “to send a commission of not more than six members to bring greetings to the Lutherans of Europe, to study ecclesiastical conditions among them, and to give such moral, spiritual and financial assistance as may be found necessary to aid them in the rehabilitation and reconstruction made necessary by the destructive influence of the great war upon their church work.”¹⁰

In reply, William Philip, Assistant Secretary of State, recommended that three representatives be sent and then only temporarily to France. Afterwards, dependent upon conditions on the European continent, they might be allowed to expand their work and visit other countries. The three chosen by the NLC were Dr. John A. Morehead, Dr. Sven G. Youngert and Rev. G.A. Fandrey. Morehead, the President of Roanoke College in Virginia, was chosen to be the chairman of the commission. His assistant, Dr. Youngert, served as a professor at the

⁹ Samuel Trexler, *John A. Morehead: Who Created World Lutheranism* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2010), 63–64.

¹⁰ Lauritz Larsen to Frank L. Polk, April 15, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Augustana Theological Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois while the other committee member, Rev. Fandrey, was a pastor in the Iowa Synod.¹¹ Summing up his own perspective on his new duties, Morehead said, “Personally I have felt compelled to respond to the call of the Council as the call of God. ... I am heart and soul in sympathy with your instructions for the pure faith of the Gospel as laid down in the *Augsburg Confession*.”¹²

Dr. Morehead was by all accounts a quiet, mild-mannered Southern gentleman, a scholarly type who had limited experience overseas. He had a knowledge of German since he had taken graduate studies at Leipzig University for one year, but the overwhelming task of helping restore to life the Lutheran churches in Europe would be a formidable venture for which no preparation could have sufficed. His biographer, Samuel Trexler, elaborating on this point, summed matters up succinctly: “The Europe which Morehead did so much to feed after the World War was as remote to him in his early life as Mars.”¹³ Now, the southern United States could rarely be mistaken for Mars, but truth be told, Morehead was not entirely unaccustomed to the concept of reconstruction. Having been born in southwest Virginia in 1867, he grew up on a farm under the trying circumstances of a nation reeling from a devastating civil war. Soon enough, Morehead would see firsthand the destruction wrought by another civil war, this one taking place in Russia amidst the conditions of a horrific famine.¹⁴

Indeed over the next sixteen years Morehead would develop such an intense friendship with the bishops and pastors of the Russian Lutheran Church that he would do all in his power to keep it alive despite the severe persecutions of the communists. His health would suffer greatly

¹¹ William Philip to NLC, April 22, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; NLC Meeting, April 22, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Trexler, 65.

¹² NLC Meeting, April 26, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 43, 146.

¹⁴ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 30, 34, 51.

as a result, but he would use all of his contacts and resources, including a United States president, to keep a seminary functioning and pastors serving their people. Through his leadership of the NLC and the Lutheran World Convention (hereafter LWC), these two Lutheran organizations would become powerful sources of financial support for the decimated Lutheran churches of Russia after war and revolution had driven them to the brink of despair.

The NLC and Russia ... the Beginning

As the NLC discussed the initial trip of the three commissioners to Europe, one of the topics frequently touched upon was whether liberal or more orthodox Lutheran influences would win the day on the continent. Aware of the trends towards liberal theology upon the continent, Council member Dr. F. Richter mused that the NLC could not lend its support to “Christless churches.” But from its very beginning, the NLC cast its glance to the eastern fringes of Europe. It was interested in the conditions in Russia, especially after the victory of the Bolsheviks. Richter expressed his concern that the German Lutheran churches in Russia would now be cut off from Germany as many pastors would return to their homeland. “The people will be as sheep without shepherds. Here the American Church should have a great mission.”¹⁵ That mission, though, would have to wait for a more appropriate time. Dr. Morehead and his colleagues soon received visas to visit Lutheran churches in Europe and begin reconstruction work. Most of the initial work of the NLC was focused upon the Lutherans in European nations severely affected by World War I, ranging from France to Poland.¹⁶ Despite that massive undertaking, though, soon events of an alarming nature would draw the NLC eastward. Russia would beckon.

Shortly after the Quadricentennial celebrations of the Reformation in Russia were conclud-

¹⁵ NLC Meeting, April 26, 1919 and March 13, 1920, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁶ NLC Meeting, April 26, 1919 and March 13, 1920.

ed, modern history resumed its course. Seething anger over a seemingly pointless war with inestimable loss of life and a lack of bread led Russians to rebel against their ruler, Czar Nicholas II. The 300-year rule of the Romanov family was abruptly brought to an end in February 1917 as the Provisional government under the authority of Alexander Kerensky took power. In the beginning, Lutherans were encouraged, perceiving the revolution as a “liberating event” for the church.¹⁷ Their previous pessimism was based upon the fact that despite living for centuries in Russia and demonstrating their loyalty to the state, German Lutherans were often considered a “fifth column” by the Czar’s administration during World War I.

The official use of the German language was forbidden at that time, although as regards church services it only seems to have affected congregations in the Ukrainian region. Still, Bibles and books could no longer be imported and charitable institutions were forcibly requisitioned by the Czarist authorities. When the buildings were returned, they were in such a deplorable condition that it would cost great sums to repair them. Pastors, especially those of Baltic German heritage, were deported because they had received mission funds from abroad. Rev. Richard Walter of Sts. Peter and Paul in Moscow had his home searched seven times all because he had shown concern for prisoners of war in Moscow.¹⁸

The most horrible example of the Czarist regime’s anti-Germanism occurred when a pogrom was carried out against the German population of Moscow in May 1915. With the Moscow police force taking a laid-back approach, a three-day riot against Russian-Germans resulted in the plundering and burning of businesses and churches, and even led to several

¹⁷ Johannes Schleuning, Heinrich Roemmich and Eugen Bachmann, *Und siehe, wir leben!: Der Weg der evangelisch-luthersichen Kirche Russlands in vier Jahrhunderten*, (Erlangen, Germany: Martin Luther-Verlag, 1977), 105.

¹⁸ Richard Walter Report, July 18, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

murders.¹⁹ Therefore given the deteriorating relationship between Russian-Germans and the Czarist government, it could hardly be a surprise that they had high hopes after the February Revolution. They were not to be disappointed, either, as the Provisional Government immediately released prisoners and allowed banned Lutheran pastors to return.²⁰

In the summer of 1917, Bishop Conrad Freifeldt of St. Petersburg was allowed to hold a church conference with the hope of forming a new ecclesiastical structure. The Lutherans under Freifeldt desired to democratize their Church, allowing more rights for the congregations. Latvians, Finns, Swedes and Estonians also participated in the conference with the stated goal of holding a General Synod in January 1918.²¹ So Lutherans in Russia were cautiously optimistic that there were now positive signs that the new government would allow them to return to some kind of normal church life.²² But in October of that year, those hopes were dashed. The Provisional Government was in turn usurped by a new group of anti-government rebels, die-hard communists known as the Bolsheviks. As philosophical materialists, the Bolsheviks were intent upon eradicating all traces of religion from Russian society. While they would initially move in a far more pragmatic manner than most historians might acknowledge, for example, retreating when they encountered resistance, there was little doubt about their ultimate goal: the extermination of religion within the Russian empire.²³

¹⁹ Victor Dönninghaus, *Die Deutschen in der Moskauer Gesellschaft: Symbiose und Konflikte [1494–1941]* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), 373–74.

²⁰ Richard Walter Report, July 18, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²¹ Litzenberger, Olga. *Евангелическо-Лютеранская Церковь в Русской Истории (XVI–XX вв.) [The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russian History (16th–20th c.)]* (Moscow: The Lutheran Heritage Foundation of Education and Culture, 2003), 227–32. The synod would not be allowed for yet another six years [1924].

²² Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 106.

²³ William B. Husband, *Godless Communists: Atheism and Society in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932*, (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), 48. “Soviet society would be nonreligious rather than antireligious in the immediate future.”

Naturally, as the state church of the czars, the Russian Orthodox Church suffered the full brunt of their blows. But since Lutherans had endured persecution under the rule of the czars, in the beginning they hoped that the Bolsheviks' more democratic tendencies might allow them to survive, albeit under the rule of a government admittedly averse to religion.²⁴ However, the first actions of the new government must have given them cause for concern. Those actions were not only directed against the Orthodox but were a concerted attack upon all Christian denominations.

Shortly after taking power in October 1917, the Bolshevik government set about reversing the laissez-faire attitude towards religion that the Provisional Government had held. In a general decree issued on October 26, all land was nationalized including that held by the church. On December 11, all schools were put under state control. Five days later, the Communist Party enabled local judges to issue divorces, to be followed on December 18 with a decree that the state would only recognize civil marriages. While churches could still conduct marriages, they lost their previous authority and subsequently were ordered to transfer their birth, marriage and death records over to the state.²⁵

Laws against Religion

But matters were about get worse. These initial actions of the government were but a precursor to the landmark January 20, 1918 Decree on the Separation of Church from State and School from Church. This decree would prove to be the primary operating statement of the Bolshevik government towards religion throughout the 1920s. Firstly, by separating church from state, old traditions like the use of religious oaths and Christian symbols in state institutions and

²⁴ Richard Walter Report, July 18, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁵ Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), Kindle, Location 8454.

buildings were forbidden. Secondly, by separating school from church, Christian schools were now outlawed. Historic Lutheran schools like St. Anne's in St. Petersburg were nationalized, the former teachers for the most part fired, and a new generation of teachers employed who no longer taught religion. St. Anne's was now labeled School Number 11.²⁶ Other Lutheran schools also could not teach religion, like Sts. Peter and Paul in Moscow, who lost control of their school board and saw their academic standards fall precipitously.²⁷ St. Peter's Lutheran school in St. Petersburg was unique in that its administration and staff was given a period of grace, so it was able to survive until Principal Erich Kleinenberg and the Lutheran teachers were fired in the late 1920s.²⁸

Through this January decree and the nationalization of land and property, the very notion of church property had become anachronistic. Congregations, now known as "religious groups," had lost their legal status and thus had their all of their property confiscated. St. Peter's Lutheran in St. Petersburg had its property valued in several millions, so this was a considerable loss.²⁹ If a congregation wanted to use its own building, often property that had been built and maintained for centuries, permission had to be requested from the government!³⁰ Although the Bolsheviks in most instances allowed the use of the buildings, their message to Christians was clear: The government now owned the buildings and could use them for any secular or anti-religious purpose

²⁶ Archimandrite Augustine, "Annenschule," in Karev, V., ed., *Немцы в России: Энциклопедия Том 1, А-И* [*Germans of Russia: Encyclopedia. Volume 1, A-II*] (Moscow: ERN, 1999), 43.

²⁷ Richard Walter Report, Archives of the ELCA. Sts. Peter and Paul in Moscow had built a boys' school during the war for 650,000 rubles, the equivalent of \$325,000.00. That school now became state property.

²⁸ N.P. Улянов, "Судбы Учителей Петришуле, 20–30 г." ["Fate of the Teachers at the Peterschule, 1920–30s"] in *Немцы в России: Люди и Судьбы*. [*Germans in Russia: People and Fates*] (Saint Petersburg, Russia: 1998), 203.

²⁹ March 21 Report, NLC, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁰ Husband, *Godless Communists*, 45–46.

that they chose.³¹ To receive permission to use the church building, “religious groups” had to form a *dvatsatka* (the Russian number for twenty) of twenty parishioners operating along the lines of a church council. The *dvatsatka* would then sign an agreement with the local authorities who would allow them to use the building as long as they maintained and insured it.³²

The outcome of the Bolsheviks’ actions was to take religion from being a public matter and relegate it to the private sphere. An inclination towards pragmatism may have led Vladimir Lenin and other moderates to first write in the January Decree that “religion is the private affair of every citizen of the Russian Republic.” He soon rethought and replaced this phrase with the more exclusive, “the church is separated from the state.”³³ Later in July 1918 Lenin would advocate using the phrase “freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda” in the new constitution. In this way it sounded as if religious believers were being given equal rights with atheists in Russian society. But due to the weakening of the church through the January 20 Decree, the Bolsheviks knew very well that there was no real equality of expression. They held all of the cards.³⁴

Of course, one of the biggest cards was the Bolsheviks’ wholesale theft of church property and funds. For unlike the state Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church had for the most part, without state support, amassed a large nest of funds and been self-supporting for centuries. Hospitals, schools for the deaf, old folks’ homes and orphanages, all of these were examples of the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia. But now former charitable institutions, founded and maintained by the Church, instantly became state property. Although indigents were

³¹ Robert Conquest, *Religion in the USSR* (London: Bodley Head, 1968), 14.

³² Edward E. Roslof, *Red Priests: Renovationism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Revolution, 1905–1946* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 23.

³³ Husband, *Godless Communists*, 47, 184.

³⁴ N.S. Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia: 1917–1942* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), 22.

allowed to stay in the homes for which the Lutheran Church had provided, the Church would have to find additional funds to pay for fuel and board since its treasury had been siphoned off as if by professional criminals.³⁵

The clergy itself was in dire straits. Not only were the congregations' sources of income emasculated, but the pastors themselves were reduced to the role of second-class citizens, or "non-productive elements," as the Bolsheviks described them. The reality of the clergy's reduced status included the following: (1) The right to vote was taken away; (2) Food ration cards were no longer given to them;³⁶ (3) The parsonages were either confiscated by the state or the number of rooms was reduced. To add insult to injury, they also had to pay rent now; (4) They could no longer supplement income by teaching; (5) Higher taxes were enacted on them and also upon their children's study in state-run schools.³⁷ Many pastors had previously taught German to supplement their income, but now the law forbade them from teaching.³⁸ By 1923, the children of clergy would no longer even be accepted into higher schools of education.³⁹

A good example of the troubled state of the Lutheran Church was conveyed to the NLC by Rev. John Mueller of Pittsburgh in May 1919. Translating documents given to him from Russian-German Lutherans, Mueller exposed the truth behind the new society developing in Russia and its dangerous implications for their fellow Lutherans. The author of one of Mueller's

³⁵ Richard Walter Report, Archives of the ELCA; *Germans in Russia*, Volume 1: 754.

³⁶ Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1997), 61. The state bakeries would not sell to clergy, and since there were no private bakeries, pastors would have to rely upon the good will of their parishioners.

³⁷ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!* 108; Heinrich Roemmich, Edited by Oscar Sommerfeld, Translated by Frederick Lenz, *The Rose and the Sickle: Survival of the Lutheran Church in Russia* (Saskatoon, SK: Division of Communication: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, 1984), 12.

³⁸ March 21 Report, NLC, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, January 10, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁹ Roemmich, *The Rose and the Sickle*, 13.

letters, a former Lutheran pastor in St. Petersburg who requested anonymity, described conditions up to his departure from Russia in September 1918. To begin with, he said, the Lutheran Church is bankrupt.⁴⁰ Reminding his readers that the Lutheran Church had long been accustomed to providing for itself and its institutions (charitable homes, churches and schools), the pastor elaborated upon how the Church had been reduced to bankruptcy. First, the nationalizing of the banks invalidated all of the Church's substantial capital. The relief fund of the Lutheran Church, one and half million rubles (approximately \$750,000), was tied up in Treasury notes that had now been absconded by the Bolshevik government. Secondly, it expropriated homes that local congregations had owned and could rent out for income. Thirdly, although wealthy parishioners initially tried to make up for lost funds, they soon lost their savings when the government confiscated their personal funds. The parishioners were reduced to selling their own furniture, paintings and other valuables in order to survive until this, too, was forbidden.

The end result of these deliberate actions by the Bolshevik government was that the pastors and church officials could no longer be paid. The classless society and the violence the Bolsheviks used to create it led to an increase in the death rate, which proved to be no respecter of status. Rich and poor alike died in the streets. Many Lutheran pastors felt compelled to move to the Baltic States and Germany, leaving behind their furnished homes with what little they had saved from their meager salaries. Others were imprisoned or exiled to Siberia. Lutheran teachers were forced out of their homes into communal apartments, taking their meals in general

⁴⁰ Oscar Mees to Johannes Schleuning, November 4, 1920, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. A good guess as to the identity of the pastor would be Wilhelm Kentmann.

kitchens.⁴¹ In conclusion, Pastor Walter cried, “If help can be given, it must be quick, before all are dead. God have mercy upon us!”⁴²

At the same time these troubles were occurring, Bishop Freifeldt was engaged in secret correspondence with German diplomats. In a series of September 1918 letters, he spoke of his surprise that given the nature of the Germanophobia existing in Russia since the days of the war, even a large sector of the ethnic Russian population could no longer support the rule of the Bolsheviks and looked to Germany for help. In fact, the treaty signed between Russia and Germany was disappointing to most Russian citizens like Freifeldt, who had hoped that Germany would be “the salvation from hell” for “our country.”⁴³ The Bolsheviks’ attacks on religion had up to this point concentrated primarily upon the Orthodox Church and its outspoken Patriarch Tikhon. Tikhon had placed an anathema upon the Bolshevik state, calling them “agents of Satan... monsters of the human race.”⁴⁴ Not only the confiscation of church property, but the brutal murders of Bishop Vladimir of Kiev by drunken soldiers in late January 1918 as well as the Czar’s family in Yekaterinburg in July had been an unmistakable demonstration to the patriarch of the Bolsheviks wicked nature.⁴⁵ After the attempted assassination of Lenin in late August by a Socialist-Revolutionary Party anarchist, Fanny Kaplan, the so-called “Red Terror” was unleashed upon the presumed enemies of the government. With this action “prison hostages” could be shot, among them those listed as class enemies, former Czarist officers, capitalists and priests. The goal of the terror, though, seemed to be intimidation of the masses rather than simply exacting revenge upon

⁴¹ John Mueller to H.G. Stub, May 20, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴² Richard Walter Report, 1919.

⁴³ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russian History*, 256–57.

⁴⁴ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Kindle, 8471.

⁴⁵ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Kindle, 8471.

former enemies from the Czarist regime.⁴⁶ Whatever the case, the Bolsheviks did not repeat the mistake of indecisiveness and timidity that had defined the Provisional government under Kerensky.

One surprising result of the hardships encountered by all Christian denominations was the ecumenical comradeship that began to develop between Lutherans and Orthodox. On September 29, 1918, Freifeldt, using his ties to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, took a bold step by interceding for the Orthodox Church. Freifeldt wrote, “We are in the middle of circumstances of genuine persecution towards Christians... Protests by the clergy of all denominations are considered counterrevolutionary, and the current government is answering with terror, but in the beginning only towards the Orthodox Church.”⁴⁷ While acknowledging that not one Orthodox priest had come to the defense of Lutherans during their time of persecution during World War I, Freifeldt opted to take the high road. He asked the German diplomats to intervene on behalf of their Christian brothers in prison, including 34 Orthodox priests and Metropolitan Veniamin of St. Petersburg, all of whom were arrested that summer. Metropolitan Veniamin and other Orthodox priests would eventually be shot along with their lawyer in August 1922, but Patriarch Tikhon accepted the Lutheran Church’s note of sympathy with thanks: “Your friendly letter we receive and accept as a pledge of the readiness of Christians of all denominations to expend all of their strength for the good of the Motherland and as the husbanding of the ‘full armor of God,’ standing against the ‘gates of hell.’”⁴⁸ Sooner or later, Bishop Freifeldt knew that the Bolsheviks

⁴⁶ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 23–24; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), Kindle, 21101.

⁴⁷ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russian History*, 256–57. By the middle of 1922, Freifeldt would update that statement and acknowledge that while the attention of the government was initially upon the Orthodox Church, it would soon be turned against the Lutherans, too. See Kahle, 61.

⁴⁸ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russian History*, 256–58.

would be no respecter of denomination and that the terror would strike the Lutherans, too.

The Russian Civil War

Given the attacks upon all Christian churches in Russia, it's not too difficult to comprehend why the average Russian citizen expressed antagonism towards the increasingly dictatorial actions of the Bolshevik government. As a result, a civil war broke out in December 1917 between the Bolsheviks (known as the Reds) and the Whites, including but not exclusively numbering supporters among the former Czarist regime. It would last until 1920, when the White armies effectively fled from Russia.⁴⁹ Obviously, Lutherans were stuck in a quandary as they had suffered under both regimes, Czarist and Bolshevik. Given their general non-political orientation, Lutherans preferred to be left alone, an increasingly unrealistic option in war-torn Russia. Through all of these difficulties, the NLC continued to accumulate information, but due to the conditions in Russia could not send direct aid immediately. The new European Commissioner for the NLC, Professor George Rygh of the Norwegian Lutheran Synod in America, shared a letter with supporters that he had received from twelve Finnish pastors.⁵⁰ These pastors had fled from Russia due to the malicious actions of the Reds, who had been robbing and burning villages in the Saint Petersburg region, an area where close to 200,000 people of Finnish or Swedish ethnicity lived. Due to White General Nikolai Yudenich's May 1919 assault on Saint Petersburg with 20,000 Estonian troops, those of Finnish extraction were now considered suspect and forced to join the Red Army.

As parents and their children suffered and died from the hunger and cold, 8000 Lutheran parishioners succeeded in fleeing to Finland. Having joined these refugees in Finland, the

⁴⁹ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Kindle, Locations 315, 370.

⁵⁰ Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert*, 43.

Finnish pastors appealed to the NLC in broken English, “we have the boldness to reach unto you the hand of the Macedonian man. Come here and help us in the restoring of the churches and parsonages instead of the destroyed ones in the day when the bolshevism there shall perish.”⁵¹ 1000 dollars were immediately cabled to NLC representatives in Helsinki for distribution to the refugees with the promise of more aid in the future. In their appeal to “help build the bridge of brotherhood between the noble people of America and us unlucky people,” the Finnish pastors articulated the NLC’s desire to be about “the Master’s will in helping to feed the hungry, clothe the naked.” The fact that these Ingrian Finns and Swedes were Lutherans reminded American Lutherans that their close relatives in the Faith were suffering beyond anything that they had ever experienced.⁵²

Regions in the south of Russia, primarily the Ukraine but also the Volga region, were even more horribly affected by the civil war. George Rygh had been informed of conditions in the Volga in December 1919 when he met with a Russian-German pastor in Berlin, Johannes Schleuning. Schleuning was born in the Volga colonies in 1879 and had served a congregation in Saratov since 1911. But in 1918, under threat of prison and death, he fled to Germany. As the head of the *Verein der Volgadeutschen*, Schleuning appealed to the NLC for help in rebuilding the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Volga region, where he still believed it had a role to play in expanding the Gospel among the “peoples of the East.” He even proposed opening a new seminary in the Volga region, a testament to his zeal but also to his lack of judgment given current conditions in the country.

⁵¹ Finnish Pastors to George Rygh, March 17, 1920, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Kindle, 2377.

⁵² NLC Meeting, March 13, 1920, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; “The Appeal of the Finnish Pastors in Russia,” 1922?, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Aware that there were hundreds of thousands of Volga Germans in America and citing the work of Russian-German Mennonites in America, Schleuning further proposed making an NLC sponsored visit to America to familiarize Volga German immigrants with the current misery of their kin in Bolshevik Russia. To ease the immediate needs of the 500 refugees in Germany, the NLC dispatched 25,000 Deutsch Marks to Schleuning's *Verein der Volgadeutschen* in Berlin.⁵³ The NLC was often forced to decide between supporting competing organizations, because there was yet another refugee aid organization, "The Committee of German Groups from the Countries of Old Russia," led by Baron Eduard von Stackelberg. It, too, was based in Berlin and had been in existence since the spring of 1919. Although assisting Russian-Germans in the matter of emigration and immigration, the committee also aspired to restore normal farming life in the Russian-German colonies. To that end, they, too, sought to send one of their own representatives to America, Karl (referred to as Charles in the U.S.) Glöckler from southern Russia.⁵⁴

Glöckler would come to America armed with numerous slides, including photos of the corpses of Lutheran pastors murdered at the hands of the Bolsheviks. His slides would vividly illustrate the misery and poverty brought upon the southern Russian region due to civil war and the policies of the Bolsheviks. Working closely in conjunction with the NLC, through whom the funds would be distributed, the Committee of German Groups from the Countries of Old Russia would elicit more trust and be looked upon more favorably by the NLC than the *Verein der Volgadeutschen*. But as late as the middle of 1921, the NLC still could not see a reliable course for distributing funds upon a regular basis among Lutherans in Russia.⁵⁵

⁵³ John Morehead to Lauritz Larsen, December 1920 and Oscar Mees to Johannes Schleuning, December 17, 1920, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁴ Karl Glöckler to NLC, June 21, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁵ Lauritz Larsen to NLC, July 27, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

In March 1921, through mission contacts in Leipzig, the NLC now received a highly detailed report of conditions in Russia during the civil war and its aftermath. For the beleaguered Russian-German Lutherans of central, southern Russia and the Ukrainian regions, conditions appeared to be worse than in any other region of Russia.⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, in those areas the battles were not only between the Reds and Whites, but also included separate anarchist groups of soldiers roaming the countryside. The leader of the so-called Greens was the notorious militarist, Nestor Makhno. Makhno's band of about 40,000 soldiers was initially allied with the Reds, but shortly after Red General Leon Trotsky had appointed him a commander, he set out on his own due to disagreements. Makhno was a genuine anarchist, supporting the abolition of all state authority. Because of his inability to remain loyal to any authority, Makhno quickly became disillusioned by the activities of the Reds and their secret police, the Cheka, especially objecting to their forcible food requisitions from the peasants. However, Makhno was no friend to the Whites, either. He called for the extermination of the rich bourgeoisie as well, and that meant he was especially opposed to the Russian-Germans who were wealthy farmers.⁵⁷

The March 1921 report of 23 pages sent to the NLC had been funneled to them through the offices of Dr. Carl Paul, the Director of the *Leipzig Missionswerk* and a professor at Leipzig University.⁵⁸ If the NLC had any doubts that it must quickly do something for Lutherans in Russia, this report would have dispelled them. At the end of World War I, German troops had remained in the Ukrainian regions, so the German community there felt well-protected. But when the troops inevitably withdrew, the civil war between Reds and Whites, as well as the "bands of

⁵⁶ NLC Report, March 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁷ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Kindle, 2435.

⁵⁸ NLC Report, March 1921; Carl Paul, Wikipedia.de, last modified October 29, 2017, https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Paul.

robbers” under Makhno’s control, decimated the countryside. Disease and epidemics followed in the wake of war, and with the dearth of doctors and medicine, the body count rose. For example, the Lutheran congregation of Rostov-on-the-Don would normally experience 30–40 deaths a year, but this number rose to 200–300 in 1920. Villages could often change hands twenty times or more during the skirmishes. Those villagers who couldn’t defend themselves would often be horribly abused, and those who lived on isolated and wealthy estates rarely escaped alive. German colonists learned to form their own self-defense units, in order to survive the attacks from so many different quarters.⁵⁹

Not only the general community life, but also the state of everyday life in the church was in decline as well due to the civil war. Pastors were used to traveling and serving congregations in surrounding villages, but those activities came to a standstill due to unsafe conditions on the roads. Given that most pastors had already lost their bread ration cards, their parsonages and could no longer obtain new shoes or clothing, they were in a desperate state. The following stories paint a picture of increasing despair among the Lutheran villagers in the Ukrainian and central Russian regions:

A report from Sumi, a village in the Kharkov Province: The year 1920 has dealt our Church many heavy blows. The heaviest blow of all for us was the death of our pastor, Felix Spörer. After almost 25 years of service, he succumbed to spotted typhus, sincerely mourned and greatly missed by the congregation. Under the economic conditions now prevailing it is impossible to call another pastor. It was not even possible to invite one of Pastor Spörer’s colleagues to officiate at his funeral. A member of the Consistory and a friend of the family conducted the ceremonies at the grave. Soon afterwards the widow of Spörer and her children were evicted from their home, as the parsonage was put to other uses.

A report from Voronezh: Pastor J. Fastena of Voronezh was compelled to flee last October (1919) with his family. He fled to the colony of Riebendorf, hoping to be

⁵⁹ NLC Report, March 1921. These actions would later be used in false accusations of anti- communist activity against pastors like Albert Koch of Grossliebenthal, a village 30–40 kilometers from the Black Sea port city of Odessa. See *Russian Evangelical Press*, no.8, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

able to return within a short time. But in the meantime the Whites had left the city and the Reds had again taken possession. All deserted houses were plundered. So the pastor lost all his possessions. The furniture and books were used for lighting the stoves. Christmas 1919 his wife became ill and died on New Year's Eve. Her unexpected death was a terrible blow. But this was only one of his afflictions. The youngest son was lost amid the tumult and confusion of war and no one knows whether he is alive or dead. The daughter is an invalid. All efforts to return to his congregation came to naught. At present Pastor Fastena is serving the vacant parish of Riebendorf, whose pastor, Rev. Uhle, was compelled to flee; however, he is seriously thinking of removing to Riga.⁶⁰

But if these reports were troubling, other news from the provinces was downright horrifying. In the village of Grunau, Pastor Hohloch, described as "one of the most charming and lovable personalities among the native Colonial clergy," was martyred in most horrific fashion.⁶¹ As Makhno's troops readied themselves for more looting, the farmers of Grunau set up a defense force for protection. Pastor Hohloch's son was a former officer and so he took command of the village forces. After putting up a valiant resistance, the Makhno band was victorious and sought their revenge. Pastor Hohloch was tortured for hours and mutilated until he died from his wounds. The son, hearing his father's cries, shot himself in order to avoid the torture. Another son also perished in the battle. The widow fled to the village of Berdyansk with her children.⁶² On November 14, 1920, the civil war officially came to an end, the overwhelming man-power and weapons of the Red Army too much for the Whites to overcome. Close to one million soldiers from both Reds and Whites died in battle, but over two million died from disease, malnutrition, cold, and suicide. It is said that ninety-one percent of the Civil war's victims were civilians, an extraordinary number in comparison to other world conflicts. Even more damaging

⁶⁰ NLC Report, March 1921. Fastena would announce his departure from Russia by April 1921. See Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, April 23, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶¹ NLC Report, March 1921.

⁶² NLC Report, March 1921.

to Russia, almost two million citizens emigrated abroad, most of them professionals and representatives of the intellectual class.⁶³ For the Lutheran villages and city churches, life would never be the same. Especially in the villages, a way of life had been destroyed—a harmonic relationship between fellow Lutherans that had been established since Catherine the Great invited Germans to settle the lands of the Volga region and southern Russia in the middle of the eighteenth century. Pastors, many of them of foreign origin, fled back to their historic homelands. Villages and churches were burned and destroyed. Of the one hundred-sixty German Lutheran congregations remaining in Russia by March 1921, half of them were said to be without pastors. Church life had ground to a virtual halt. If anything of the former life was to be salvaged, a nation that had not been severely affected by the world war would have to provide aid. In other words, the NLC needed to find a way into Russia.⁶⁴

Finding a Way into Russia

With the end of the civil war and the land in ruin, starvation was on the horizon in the countryside. In an April 23, 1921 letter to Dr. Paul, General Superintendent of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, Rev. Theophil Meyer, spoke of the very real possibility of a bad harvest in the south. Naturally the pastors had little to no means of income for the foreseeable future, so Meyer wrote to Paul about his plan to support pastors and their families. Through the diplomatic pouch of the German Foreign Office, he proposed that they could receive funds from those of German Lutheran heritage around the world who wanted to support the Church. His source in the embassy would be Gustav Hilger (1886–1965), a German embassy representative

⁶³ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Locations 3269, 3359, 3377.

⁶⁴ NLC Report, March 1921.

based in Moscow. Hilger would direct the relief actions of the German Foreign Office for those suffering from the famine in Russia (1921–1922).⁶⁵

The wheels had been set in motion by Paul's correspondence the previous October with a Pastor Baschwitz in Kursk. The war was all but ended at that time, and it was clear that word had gotten out to the world at large about the great suffering of Russian citizens. Meyer spoke about the "indescribable difficulties" that Lutheran pastors had experienced through the recent wars, and so he was looking for "any proof of brotherly love." His desire was to quickly expand that brotherly love into a great "help program" [Hilfsaktion] sponsored by Americans and interested parties from other lands like Germany.⁶⁶ Meyer also hoped to add a fund for the retired pastors as well as their widows and orphans. By his count, of the 174 pastors who should have been serving, 97 had been lost through death or emigration. Naturally, the 77 remaining pastors would be forced to travel to nearby villages in order to serve vacant congregations. But now the widespread poverty had given rise to increased criminal activity, so it was very dangerous for pastors to travel large distances by themselves.⁶⁷ Not only that, they could also be arrested for engaging in religious activity outside of their own congregations. In Meyer's opinion, it was essential to find a means of support for pastors since their parishioners could no longer support them by virtue of the general poverty in the land.

Since it was too difficult to get clothing and goods directly to people, and cash would have been even more difficult, Meyer proposed a different plan. It would be better to put funds into a

⁶⁵ Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, April 23, 1921; Viktor Krieger, translated by Alex Herzog, *Volga German Intellectuals as Victims of Political Persecution* (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 2009), 17.

⁶⁶ Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, January 10, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶⁷ Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, January 10, 1921.

bank in a city like New York and label the account “Capital of the German Lutheran Pastors in Russia.”⁶⁸ The pastors could then accumulate a pension and aid for dependents if they died, dependent upon the fact that they remained in service to the Lutheran Church in Russia. Although the pastor wouldn’t be able to receive the accumulated funds just yet, the fact that he had money secured in a safe bank would help him remain at his post for the time being until conditions improved.⁶⁹ Meyer especially appealed to the generosity of the Americans, represented by Dr. Morehead, but the proposed action would have to be conducted in the strictest of secrecy. Still smarting from foreign intervention in northern Russia during the civil war, the Bolsheviks now labeled personal relations with foreign powers as a state offense, subject to imprisonment. Meyer cautioned that any correspondence be kept to a minimum and be sent through Hilger. If any personal messenger was to be sent to Dr. Paul from him, and there were plenty of options as pastors were emigrating at an alarming rate, the password to be used would be *Pastorenhilfe*.⁷⁰

While Meyer’s original plan of relief would ultimately not be enacted, in time his general idea of providing regular support for pastors and their families would. Meanwhile his password soon began to bear fruit, as Meyer responded in thanks to Fridtjof Nansen for the *Pastorenhilfe* later that summer. Russians had long admired Nansen, a famous Arctic explorer, for his exploits, so he had accumulated valuable political capital in the country. Through his aid organization, *Nansenhilfe*, he was able to assist in the *Pastorenhilfe*.⁷¹ But despite his fame, he still was not able to create a path for the NLC to enter Russia. Writing to Lauritz Larsen earlier in April, Nan-

⁶⁸ Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, January 10, 1921.

⁶⁹ Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, January 10, 1921.

⁷⁰ Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, April 23, 1921, NLC, March 13, 1921 and Theophil Meyer to Carl Paul, January 10, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷¹ Theophil Meyer to Fridtjof Nansen, August 29, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. The author has even spotted a statue of Nansen on the street near the Primorskaya metro station in St. Petersburg.

sen embarrassedly informed him that he had perhaps promised too much when he said that he would negotiate with the Bolsheviks for the NLC's entry into Russia. The Bolsheviks were even turning back his own representatives, although he had enough of his people remaining in the country to administer *Nansenhilfe*.⁷² Larsen appreciated his honesty and reassured Nansen that the NLC, after consultation with the American State Department, was convinced that it was not the proper time to enter Russia. Even the American Relief Administration under the direction of Herbert Hoover, despite all they had done for war-torn Europe, had not secured access to Russia. Furthermore, Larsen also worried about the strain such an undertaking would be for the 54-year-old Dr. Morehead, who would be working in "unsettled conditions." And yet, no doubt with the March 21 report on conditions in Russia fresh in his mind, Larsen admitted that the "thousands of innocent sufferers in that ill-fated land" were not far from the thoughts of the NLC.⁷³ As a result, he wrote to General Superintendent Meyer and Bishop Freifeldt on May 13 that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia was not far from their thoughts at the NLC, praying that "the Almighty Lord of the Church" would give them strength in their trials and suffering and persistence to remain faithful to "God's revealed truth." Although the NLC had decided it could not as yet find a way into Russia, it was determined "to realize the plans of love and service as soon as possible." That time quickly approaching.⁷⁴

While Dr. Morehead was administering NLC aid to Europe, he made the acquaintance of Fritz Tömmmler of *Nansenhilfe*. Larsen's contact with Nansen had allowed the two to become aware of one another, so they met at the Hotel Adlon in Berlin on July 31 where Tömmmler gave

⁷² Fridtjof Nansen to Lauritz Larsen, April 1, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷³ Lauritz Larsen to Fridtjof Nansen, March 16 and April 25, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁴ Lauritz Larsen to Conrad Freifeldt and Theophil Meyer, May 13, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Morehead firsthand information of the conditions in Russia. Through the ministrations of Tömmmler, who carried his letters as he traveled back and forth between Berlin and Petrograd, Bishop Freifeldt was able to securely and in uncensored fashion converse with those in the West.⁷⁵ So it seems that *Nansenhilfe* hadn't forgotten the American request, because Morehead was finally able to give NLC funds directly to Freifeldt through Tömmmler. The 10,000 Reichsmark gift from the NLC was for clothing to be distributed to Lutheran pastors and their families in Petrograd.⁷⁶

Tömmmler had indeed been busy. Freifeldt also wrote to Dr. Paul in August, thanking him for the assistance that the *Leipzig Missionswerk* had rendered to the Russian Lutheran Church through Tömmmler. Two million Soviet rubles had been delivered to General Superintendent Meyer in Moscow, although Freifeldt informed Dr. Paul that they had unfortunately paid three times the accepted rate to purchase those rubles in Berlin. (They had paid 10,000 Reichsmarks). The funds had been sent to needy churches in the Yaroslavl and Samara regions, where a cholera epidemic as well as a potentially very poor harvest were making life exceedingly difficult.

Conditions were indeed very bad in the Volga region. Prices were spiraling out of control for basic foodstuffs and clothing throughout the entire country. As a result, expenditures were quickly dwarfing income. As prices rose, and especially prices for wood used as heating fuel, the coming winter looked grimmer than the previous one. Still, because of the help that had arrived, many pastors would remain at their posts. As a native of Estonia, Freifeldt even confessed that he had entertained thoughts of emigration, especially since he had a wife and four young children

⁷⁵ St. Petersburg was now named Petrograd, but would soon to change to Leningrad after Vladimir Lenin's death.

⁷⁶ John Morehead to Fritz Tömmmler, August 1, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

(only two were of school age, though, and he was 74 years old, celebrating his 50th year in the ministry in 1921!!). But with the securing of American help through the NLC, Freifeldt now saw the “finger of God”, urging him “to remain here longer.”⁷⁷

Writing to Larsen in German to express his appreciation, Freifeldt greeted him as he had been greeted, “You who were formerly unknown, are now known.” Apologizing that he could not read English, Freifeldt reminded Larsen that they had a deeper language in common, the language of the heart which unites the children of God. Acknowledging the receipt of what came to two million rubles, he spoke of the “mountain of need” that had accumulated among the pastors and their families. But just when it seemed to overwhelm and bury them, from the hills came their salvation! Freifeldt hoped that this would be proof of God’s mercy to encourage the pastors to remain at their posts despite the coming winter, which would be hard.⁷⁸ These temporary steps by the NLC would initiate a sustained program of aid that would last until well into the 1930s.

Adding fuel to the newfound hope of the NLC to alleviate the dire economic conditions in Russia, the famed Russian writer Maxim Gorky now signaled to the Western world the Bolsheviks’ willingness to allow aid to come to the Russian people. Although Patriarch Tikhon had already announced such an appeal, in late July the Bolsheviks allowed Gorky’s appeal, “*To All Honest People*,” to be published in the West. Gorky spoke of a crop failure brought on by drought, leaving out, of course, the forced food requisitions as well as the lax response of the Bolsheviks to the obvious signs of danger. In his appeal he avoided mention of Lenin and Trotsky but did utilize Russian cultural figures that Europeans and Americans admired, crying,

⁷⁷ Conrad Freifeldt to Carl Paul, August 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russian History*, 385.

⁷⁸ Conrad Freifeldt to Lauritz Larsen, August 9, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

“Gloomy days have come to the country of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Mendeleev, Pavlov, Mussorgsky, Glinka, etc.”⁷⁹ As difficult and humiliating as it was to grovel to the West, the situation was perilous enough that the Bolsheviks had little choice. They knew that their country, and more importantly, their hold on political power, could not survive without help. The way was now open for what would become a flood of foreign aid and the NLC would play a key role working among their fellow Lutherans.

ARA Opens the Door to a Relationship with Lutherans in Russia

A quasi-private agency known as ARA (American Relief Administration) had already been distributing over 150 million dollars worth of food to children in central, eastern and southeastern Europe and the Middle East since the end of World War I. Sufficiently experienced by its trial under fire, ARA was the brainchild of Herbert Hoover, a mining engineer who had been appointed to manage American food aid in postwar Europe by President Woodrow Wilson. After contentious negotiations, Russian negotiator Maxim Litvinov and his American counterpart, Walter Lyman Brown, signed on August 20 what became known as the Riga Agreement between the Bolshevik government and ARA. The Bolshevik government was obliged to bear the costs for transportation, facilities and supplies while ARA provided money for the food. Litvinov did, however, insist that an official from the Bolshevik government be allowed on ARA’s local food committee. ARA caved on this point and it would prove problematic in the future, especially for Lutheran pastors who assisted with food distribution.⁸⁰

Taking advantage of this open door, Dr. Morehead worked furiously to get the NLC into

⁷⁹ Bertrand M. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 26–27.

⁸⁰ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 28–30, 45.

Russia under the administration of ARA. Because of the NLC's work in postwar Europe, the NLC was obviously no novice in humanitarian endeavors. Hoover recognized the NLC's experience and permitted it to come in under ARA's wing and be allowed access to its warehouses and food supplies.⁸¹ The NLC would in the process reimburse ARA for the food for which it had contracted. Furthermore, Morehead also learned that no private American organization would accept clothing for shipment to Russia but ARA would. Morehead had been waiting for this opportunity, so by November he was on his way to the Russian border, stopping off in Riga, Latvia, the entry point to Russia at that time. At long last, he would personally experience the conditions that he had read about in Russia for the past few years.⁸²

In order to prevent duplication in food aid, Hoover convinced President Warren G. Harding to designate ARA as the sole vehicle for American relief to Russia. The logic behind this move was to keep the Bolsheviks from playing off one relief agency against another. In support of this policy, the secretary of state was told to issue passports to Russia only for those under the umbrella of ARA. Although there were a few organizations that worked out separate arrangements, like the Quakers and the JJDC (Jewish Joint Distribution Committee), ten other organizations entered Russia as affiliates of ARA. The NLC would be one of them.⁸³

The ARA parameters for working in Russia were helpful to the NLC, because there were many organizations crisscrossing the American Midwest, promising to send aid to the relatives of Volga German immigrants. In this respect, the NLC tried to discourage duplication on its own shores although not always with success. Some of those organizations involved in relief included: The Volga Relief Society [Portland, Oregon]; the Central States' Volga Relief Society

⁸¹ Lauritz Larsen to George Borell, September 6, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸² Lauritz Larsen to Reinhold Birk, November 21, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸³ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 47.

[Lincoln, Nebraska]; the Relief Committee for German-Russian Colonists in Glasco, Kansas, headed by Lutheran pastor W.L. Scheduling [who would soon join the NLC's team]; a Sutton, Nebraska based Reformed Church organization; and the *Verein der Volgadeutschen* based in Berlin, which at least for the moment was working directly under NLC auspices. Lauritz Larsen took pains to assure Americans of Volga German origin that Dr. Morehead himself would be on the ground in Russia shortly, observing and making certain that distribution was proceeding fairly and effectively. Although the NLC was committed first and foremost to helping fellow Lutherans, it did not discriminate between denominations when people were suffering. Nonetheless, the Sutton, Nebraska organization under Reformed pastor, Rev. Reinhold Birk, wanted assurances that Reformed Christians would also receive aid as their relatives were contributing funds that would be channeled to Russia through the NLC. Larsen assured Birk that those gifts designated for Reformed villages would be delivered to their proper place. (As an example, in the Fall of 1921 Birk sent clothing to the ARA offices in Riga. They were then transported under ARA control through the NLC to the mixed Reformed/Lutheran villages of Worms and Rohrbach in the Ukraine).⁸⁴

The NLC saw the Volga Relief Society as its main competitor, all the more so as it was not a Lutheran but a Congregationalist entity. The fact that they were contesting for funds in the American Midwest among Volga German Lutheran immigrants as well was a testament to this fact.⁸⁵ At times the competition could get acrimonious, for example, when a Russian German

⁸⁴ Lauritz Larsen to Reinhold Birk, November 12, 1921; Lauritz Larsen to John Miller, November 18, 1921; L. Hopp to Lauritz Larsen, November 29, 1922; Lauritz Larsen to Reinhold Birk, April 17, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Emma Schwabenland Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society* (Lincoln, NE: The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1982), 84–85.

⁸⁵ Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 34; Lauritz Larsen to John Morehead, December 29, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Evangelical Christian by the name of Dr. Jakob Fritzler made his way to the States under the auspices of the Volga Relief Society.⁸⁶ Since the NLC had thought it best to limit the number of groups collecting money for support within Russia, it had tried to dissuade Fritzler from coming to America.⁸⁷ Pastor W.L. Scheduling, who was working in tandem with the NLC now as the head of the Relief Committee for German-Russian Colonists, traced Fritzler to Colorado where one congregation had given him \$5000.00 even though its committee had no idea where to send the money they had raised for him! Due to his tendency to slander the work of the NLC, they believed Fritzler to be duplicitous and warned others against receiving him.⁸⁸ Fritzler would cause dissension among congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in the future, too. However much the NLC might want to complain publicly about these actions, it had to move gingerly when disputing over theological distinctions to the representatives of ARA, which naturally as a humanitarian organization was only interested in functioning smoothly. The Volga Relief Society was held in equal respect with the NLC in the eyes of ARA, so any dispute between the two was considered an embarrassment to ARA.⁸⁹ In order to distribute food effectively in the Volga region, the Volga Relief Society sent its own secretary, George Repp. ARA Assistant Secretary Frank Page and Director Herbert Hoover had interviewed Repp in New York before he set sail for Europe on September 17 [1921]. Both were suitably impressed and heartily approved of him as the Society's choice to work in Russia.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Olga Litzenger, *Евангелическо-Лютеранская Церковь и Советское Государство, 1917–1938* [*The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*] (Moscow: Gotika, 1999), 386.

⁸⁷ Oscar Mees to Edmund Schmid, October 14, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸⁸ W.L. Scheduling to Lauritz Larsen, December 17, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. For example, Fritzler had told a congregation in Hastings, Nebraska that the NLC had collected rotted clothing.

⁸⁹ Frank Page to Lauritz Larsen, January 28, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁰ Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 46.

On the other hand, some of those fundraisers whom the NLC had financially sponsored, like Johannes Schleuning, turned out to be disappointments. Although the NLC had paid for his travel to America, Schleuning sought to raise funds in the American Midwest for his *Verein der Volgadeutschen* in Berlin, even though he had promised to work through the NLC and send funds through it for the relief of Volga German Lutherans in Russia. Eventually the NLC was forced to disown him not only for raising funds for his own organization but for working through other organizations like the German Red Cross. (For example, Schleuning had gone to a Baptist church in the Fall of 1922 and had sent the money he raised to the German Red Cross; meanwhile, the NLC was paying for his expenses while he was in the States).⁹¹ Since the NLC had developed a trusted working relationship with ARA, it didn't want that harmony damaged by a "lone ranger" like Schleuning. He soon got the message from NLC Executive Secretary Mees that they were not amused by his "double game."⁹² Expressing himself in no uncertain terms, Mees complained to Larsen: "The contract with Pastor Schleuning did not provide permission for him to talk pastors into designating their money for the Berlin organization [Verein der Volgadeutschen]. I hope you do not think that my correspondence is too sharp. I would like to bean him on the head with a brick."⁹³ Schleuning got the hint and soon moved over to the Iowa Synod, working primarily under its auspices.⁹⁴ In a letter to then Bishop Meyer in 1926, it was apparent that Dr. Morehead had simply lost faith in Schleuning's usefulness or honesty. In his remarks, Morehead intimated that Schleuning had acted as a conduit between the NLC and Lutheran pastors in Russia, sending on to the NLC a letter from a Pastor Feldbach thanking them for a \$10

⁹¹ Oscar Mees to Lauritz Larsen, August 9, September 9 and October 25, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹² Oscar Mees to W.L. Scheduling, October 18, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹³ Oscar Mees to Lauritz Larsen, August 9, 1922.

⁹⁴ Mees to Scheduling, Oct 18, 1922.

gift sent at Christmas in 1925. Morehead's embarrassment was all the more acute due to the fact that Schleuning had long since left their employ but apparently had not apprised Lutheran pastors in Russia of that fact. In addition, even if they wanted to utilize him, the German citizen Schleuning was no longer of any use to the NLC since he had burned his bridges with the Soviet government and would not be allowed to return. Meyer also seemed to have soured on Schleuning.⁹⁵

But ultimately the reason that the NLC wanted to control its fundraisers was that once a Russian-German came to America, he could speak directly to his own people in German and sometimes literally to former friends or parishioners. A good example of its reticence was exemplified by the case of Pastor Albert Schneider, who raised funds from a Missouri Synod congregation in Milwaukee even though the pastor initially didn't want to give him permission to use the pulpit. When it appeared evident that many of Schneider's former parishioners were members of the congregation, the Missouri Synod pastor was prompted to rethink his answer. Schneider apparently had a good meeting with the synod president, Dr. Friedrich Pfothenhauer as well, perhaps due to Pfothenhauer's being born in Germany.⁹⁶ Whatever the case, Schneider, too, eventually suffered a falling out with the NLC. His ability to connect with German speakers in America outside of the NLC's influence led him to associate with the *Verein der Volgadeutschen*, thus terminating his relationship to the NLC.⁹⁷

“You Reached Your Brotherly Hand Across the Wide Ocean”: Morehead Arrives in Russia

On December 10, Dr. Morehead arrived in Moscow, courtesy of Colonel William Haskell's

⁹⁵ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, September 30, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁶ W. L. Scheduling to Lauritz Larsen, December 8, 1921, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA

⁹⁷ Oscar Mees to John Morehead, April 17, 1923.

private train compartment. Haskell was a West Point graduate (1901) and a veteran of World War I. After the war, he had served under Herbert Hoover in providing food relief to Romania and Armenia. Now ARA's primary task was to provide food for children, a duty in which the NLC would also participate. ARA had already opened a kitchen in Petrograd on September 6, but given the extent of the need, adults would soon be added to the number of those served by food aid.⁹⁸ As he traveled through western Russia to Moscow, Morehead noted the extreme cold, wondering how the Volga Germans could survive such a climate, poorly fed and clothed as they were. He was reassured that help was on the way in the form of 43 bales of clothes, already being transported from America to Moscow. Snugly ensconced in the comfortable train compartment of the U.S. government, Morehead read up on current conditions in Russia, perusing a book recently published by British journalist, Arthur Ransome, *The Crisis in Russia*. Although Ransome was favorably inclined towards the Bolshevik experiment in Russia [but not in Britain], Morehead was seeking to gather information from any quarter in order to wisely aid Christians in Russia.⁹⁹

Dr. Morehead immediately set to work, gathering information, first from ARA and then from the Lutheran Church officials. ARA knew where the famine was at its worst, so Morehead was able to divine from their records the probable situation of Lutheran citizens. After discussions with ARA personnel, Morehead made the personal acquaintance of General Superintendent Meyer, learning from him how many Lutherans were affected by the famine and where they

⁹⁸ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 89; Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 53, 60–61, 71.

⁹⁹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 89–91. Ransome was actually a secret agent for the British government. However, due to his sympathy for the Bolsheviks, they had to proceed carefully with him. They feared that he might share secret information detrimental to other Russians or British officials with the Bolsheviks. One British intelligent agent summed up his positives and negatives succinctly: 'He will report what he sees, but he does not see quite straight.' See Robert Service, *Spies and Commissars* (Public Affairs, 2012), Kindle, 4554, 4570, 4589.

were located. The congregations were spaced throughout the Russian landscape, scattered from Petrograd northwards to the White Sea, then down south to Odessa on the Black Sea, and finally out to the vast reaches of Siberia. Morehead soon came to appreciate “that Russia is a country of splendid distances.”¹⁰⁰ After deciphering the logistics involved in his mission, Morehead recognized the impossibility of traveling 2000 miles from Moscow to Odessa and then waiting for instructions on how to proceed from the New York offices of the NLC. It would take at least six weeks to send and receive word, so Morehead decided that there was no other option but to become an affiliate of ARA, requesting that they be allowed three representatives on the Russian staff. Morehead, Pastor Scheduling and Pastor A. C. Ernst were to be the first representatives from the NLC working through ARA. Morehead now worked out a plan with Haskell: The NLC would devote approximately \$15,000.00 a month to the feeding of children [ARA’s program], and then be allowed to use \$17,000.00 for the feeding of adults.¹⁰¹ The \$32,000.00 would be deposited in an ARA bank account in New York City. From that account, the NLC would be allowed to draw the appropriate amount of money or food throughout the month. At the end of the month, the Moscow office of ARA would cable the amount of NLC expenditures during that month and the NLC would pay it. The plan required the NLC to keep the account in New York maintained at the level of \$32,000.00.¹⁰²

Included in the \$17,000.00 expenditure was the feeding of Russian pastors and their families, a move that Morehead made unilaterally, judging the desperate condition of the Church and its pastorate after his first visit to the Volga region. He decided that a \$10.00 food package along with an additional monetary gift would be given monthly to the 100 remaining pastors as a

¹⁰⁰ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰¹ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹⁰² Lauritz Larsen to Theodore Benze, December 29, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

means to help them and their families survive. Morehead reminded the NLC of the realistic situation since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917: (1) Pastors had left in droves due to lack of material support; (2) The Church had lost its property and thus a main source of its income to pay pastors; (3) Persecution was widespread, affecting their ability to teach and subjecting them to claims of espionage. In addition to these problems, Morehead became aware of yet another very serious obstacle: the children were now educated in Communist schools, subject to atheist education. The concern for their children's future was the final straw for many pastors and their wives who had decided to leave the country. But since the NLC stipends had been put into effect, Morehead noticed that only one pastor had left Russia. For Morehead, the stipends accentuated the importance of the NLC's work in keeping pastors on the field.¹⁰³

From the American side, given the large number of Volga German immigrants in America, there was an earnest desire to send food packages to their families. The problem was that they didn't trust the Communist government to deliver them. This had been one of the more contentious issues in the negotiations of the Riga Agreement between Litvinov and Brown. The Americans, however, insisted upon the right to deliver individual food packages which had proved so successful in Central Europe. The Bolsheviks knew full well, though, that those packages would most likely be sent by those who had fled Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution. Valuing control of its citizenry, the Soviets were naturally suspicious of permitting closer contact between their citizens and foreigners, especially those who had deserted the communist experiment. As if to add insult to injury, the proposed program of a food remittance package would also be structured to profit ARA. For example, each \$10.00 food package would bring a \$2.25 profit. Obviously ARA saw this as a way to funnel more funds into food procurement, although Hoover cer-

¹⁰³ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

tainly was not above giving a good lesson in capitalism. The Bolsheviks were not amused.

After a week of tough negotiations, the Communist government signed on to the agreement after being assured that they could control the program and ultimately terminate it after three months. The program would work in the following way: A person would pay his ten dollars and send it to ARA, who would then locate the recipient through the post. The recipient would then go to a local distribution center in Russia and pick up his package. But for those giving to the NLC, the benefactor could sidestep ARA and send his check to the NLC office in New York with the name of the recipient. Dr. Morehead or one of his assistants would then contact that person and make sure he received the food packet. Morehead would then draw on his account with ARA in Moscow and the NLC would resupply their New York bank account, keeping it at the \$32,000.00 level. The food remittance package was no small matter for the recipients. It was estimated that it would feed a family of three for one month. The package included: 49 lbs. of flour; 25 lbs. of rice; 3 lbs. of tea; 10 lbs. of fat; 10 lbs. of sugar; 20 one-pound cans of preserved milk, adding up to 117 lbs. in total! Although food packages could be delivered, it's no wonder that many recipients during the severe famine periods would rather go to the distribution point than trust the mail system. In the end, for most Russians ARA became synonymous with food and therefore life.¹⁰⁴

The effect of the food packages upon the Lutheran pastors and their families was immediate. Pastor Arthur Kluck, serving in the village of Frank in the Volga region, had actually assisted in the distribution but now experienced the other side of American generosity. As he wrote to Pastor Ernst to express his thanks, he related how his own household was weakened by sickness and in need. His wife Bertha was nursing their firstborn. His father had just gotten over

¹⁰⁴ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 91–95; Lauritz Larsen to L. Hopp, December 17, 1921.

spotted typhus while his sister was laid up with spotted typhus and inflammation of the lungs.

The widow of a local pastor named Somelt was destitute. But now through the generosity of the American Lutherans, all of them would survive. Kluck eloquently summed up the impact of these gifts:

The world has never seen what the Americans in our hunger regions have done. It is hard to grasp it. ... But even more important than the physical is the spiritual, the inner help, that we have experienced from our brothers in the faith. We now know: they are carrying us over there within their prayerful hearts; they want to help, to build up again the broken church, they come with faith and their Christian love ... and we gain new courage, new hope, receive new power ... then one can be comforted: in the Kingdom of God there is yet life. The cause of Jesus Christ will last into all eternity. But above all there is one thing: we will never forget that you didn't leave us lying in our own blood; you didn't put a price on the hunger and epidemics; you didn't let us doubt and die on the inside. No, on the contrary. You reached your brotherly hand across the wide ocean, you lifted us up in body and soul, you bound up our wounds, and you healed us from our pains. And even if thousands of obstacles are placed in our way, they can be overcome in the Faith that can set us high upon a rock. This has been from the Lord and it is wonderful in our eyes.

Kluck certainly was a wordsmith, and in the future his talents as a preacher and leader in the Lutheran Church would be appreciated by Superintendent Meyer.¹⁰⁵

While they gathered funds from Americans who had relatives in Russia, the NLC was also constantly aware of those who were spreading false information about ARA. The "Northwest Scandinavian Section of the Friends of Soviet Russia" criticized Hoover for "...imposing imperialistic and reactionary conditions" upon Russia through its program of food aid. Calling for "Famine Relief without Counter Revolutionary Conditions," the Soviet sympathizers appealed to not only feed those who were starving but to support the Russian workers' revolution.¹⁰⁶ Since they were seeking the support of Americans of Scandinavian background, Lauritz Larsen felt compelled to rebut them in a letter to the editor of *Skandinaven*, based in Chicago. Larsen spoke

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Kluck to A.C. Ernst, May 10, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰⁶ Lauritz Larsen to Editor of *Skandinaven*, April 13, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

on behalf of Lutheran Americans of Swedish, Danish and Norwegian ethnicity like himself. Decry-ing the impulse to inject politics into a humanitarian tragedy, Larsen informed the editor that the NLC was working with the only entity that could do anything in Russia at that time: ARA. Therefore anyone wanting to help the people of Russia was better off working with a truly American organization like ARA.¹⁰⁷

The NLC felt it imperative to keep abreast of the efforts of communists in the United States to fool average Americans into supporting the Bolshevik regime in Russia. Dr. David Dubrowsky took over as the representative for the Bolsheviks in America when the so-called “Bolshevik ambassador to the United States,” Ludwig Martens, was deported. While Dubrowsky admitted to being a representative of the Bolshevik government, he would not admit that the Russian Red Cross was affiliated with the communist state. He and other Soviet sympathizers fund-raised under the organization “The American Committee for Russian Famine Relief.” On January 2, 1922, a meeting was held in Chicago in support of the starving in Russia, where the open communist beliefs of the participants were on display. Rousing cheers were heard for Lenin, Trotsky, the Bolshevik government in Russia as well as the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA). Isaac McBride, who worked for the American Committee for Russian Famine Relief, confessed that the Friends of Soviet Russia was just a little too transparent in its communist affiliations. Instead he funneled funds through Dubrowsky who in turn passed the money along to the Russian Red Cross, which was under the control of the Bolshevik government. As McBride asserted, “We are going to milk the bourgeoisie of this country, and they will help us to keep up the struggle against themselves.”¹⁰⁸ The 1922 “Memorandum upon

¹⁰⁷ Lauritz Larsen to Editor of *Skandinaven*, April 13, 1922.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum upon the Russian Red Cross, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

the Russian Red Cross” in the NLC’s possession relayed all of this information to Lauritz Larsen so that he could inform any potential supporters of NLC aid to Russia that not all relief organizations were committed to non-political goals. The Volga Relief Society must have seemed like choir boys in comparison to the communist agents in the United States.¹⁰⁹

Fortunately for Morehead, Larsen was taking care of the information war with the communists in America. For his part, Morehead realized the importance of observing conditions firsthand in order to better appreciate the logistics of the feeding program. So he set out for the Volga in a special Russian Pullman car, accompanied by General Superintendent Meyer and his wife Eugenie, who provided him translation from the Russian. Between themselves they conversed easily in German, which Morehead had learned from his days at the University of Leipzig. Frau Meyer took care of the kitchen in their compartment, cooking the contents of tinned food, mostly corned beef, on a primus. As Morehead’s assistant, Meyer was officially recognized as an employee of ARA by the Soviet government. Such an association would prove troublesome with the Soviet government for other pastors working with Morehead, and Meyer may have suffered some consequences from his friendship with Morehead. But he seems to have been able to escape this scrutiny relatively unscathed before his natural death in 1934.¹¹⁰

Using a very comfortable automobile secured for them by the Soviet government, Meyer,

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum upon the Russian Red Cross, 1922. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, classified documents made their way into the public sphere. Historians Harvey Klehr and John Haynes worked with Russian archivists to publish the information in several books. For example, they write that the aforementioned David Dubrowsky broke with the CPUSA in 1935, eventually testifying before the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities. There he admitted that the CPUSA received money from the Bolsheviks through their front groups. In a secret document, it appears that the CPUSA planned to steal as much as 40% of the funds raised for famine relief. This display of impudence was actually too much for the Comintern, who refused. It leads one to wonder how many funds raised by these communist front groups went to famine relief. See Harvey Klehr and John Haynes, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 109–14.

¹¹⁰ Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 123; John Morehead, “In Memory of Bishop Meyer,” 1934, (Lutheran World Conference) LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Ernst and Morehead drove to the Volga River valley capital, Saratov, in February 1922. They were not alone as *Nansenhilfe*, the Swedish Red Cross, and Britain's Save the Children were also working in the drastically affected Volga region. According to government records, the percentage of those citizens suffering from hunger quickly grew from 56.7% in August 1921 to 96.9% by the time Morehead made his first visit. It seems that in the autumn of 1921 the peasants, overpowered by hunger, immediately ate their own bread as soon as it was prepared after the harvest. By the time Morehead arrived, there was no bread left because the farmers were still obliged to pay a grain tax on whatever remained!¹¹¹ Morehead noticed how people would flood into cities like Saratov when the food supply was exhausted in the villages, crowding into government homes that were nothing more than unheated barracks. The temperature had plummeted to 16 below zero on the day that he arrived in February. Numerous cases of spotted typhus were recorded in the barracks and the stench was overwhelming; and yet the people remained because even in such dire conditions it was better than starving. He commented on the scene unfolding before his eyes: "If Dante ever imagined a more horrible scene he failed to include it in his *Divine Comedy*."¹¹² Indeed what Morehead saw in Russia in 1921–1922 would remain with him for the rest of his life. It would motivate him to superhuman feats of perseverance whenever he became tired of the travel or Soviet perfidy.

While visiting a simple home in the Volga Lutheran village of Krasnii Yar, Morehead and his entourage made the acquaintance of a not untypical family. The husband had left three days ago for Saratov in order to find work. The wife, whom he described as an attractive woman thirty years old, attempted to greet them but fell back quickly onto her chair from exhaustion. One

¹¹¹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 91; A. A. German, *Немецкая Автономия на Волге 1918–1941* [*German Autonomy on the Volga 1918–1941*] (Moscow: MSNK Press, 2007), 121–22.

¹¹² Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 92.

child lay dead on a cot while another lay sick with fever. Later as they traveled further south to Kharkov in the Ukraine, they made the acquaintance of Pastor Stender, a native of Courland (modern day Latvia) and the twelfth of a direct line of pastors in his family going back to 1635! His congregation could no longer pay him as they were obviously suffering themselves. As a result, two of his children had died of tuberculosis while two of the four children remaining were now suffering from the same disease along with his wife! These were the kinds of ordinary parishioners' and pastors' families that the NLC had come to feed and evidence that their arrival resulted in the saving of thousands of lives.¹¹³

This exhausting winter 1922 journey throughout the Volga, Ukraine and the Crimea would serve to introduce Morehead to many of the extraordinary pastors populating the Lutheran village churches in Russia. In the moments of trial that would face them in the not-too-distant future, Morehead would do everything in his power to secure the pastors' freedom from imprisonment and provide support to their families. It was not an easy journey with the danger of communicable disease (spotted typhus was especially prevalent) and crime ever present. As General Superintendent Meyer said, "Whoever takes a long journey nowadays goes like a soldier onto the battlefield, not knowing whether or how he will come back."¹¹⁴ The danger of travel in Russia during the famine would be aptly conveyed to Morehead when he met with Pastor Georg Rath later on his way to the Crimea. Surprised by the bedraggled appearance of the pastor, who headed a large district of churches in the Ukraine, Morehead was at first taken aback. But after conversing with him about establishing a committee to distribute the food, Morehead delicately decided to offer him his extra set of clothes. Rath replied that he was not ashamed of his appear-

¹¹³ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 93–95; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 390.

¹¹⁴ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 17, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

ance, as thieves had robbed him of his best clothes two weeks ago on a train while he was returning from a visit to a mission congregation. “But, oh, how thankful I am that you can give me a decent suit for this committee meeting.”¹¹⁵ Such experiences were not uncommon for Russians traveling in those days but were a revelation to Morehead.

General Superintendent Meyer was soon forced to leave the Americans in Saratov, as he had to attend to his own large parish in Moscow and preparations for the Lenten season. But upon his return to Moscow, he immediately sent a letter thanking Morehead for the opportunity to travel with him and simultaneously visit the pastors of the region. He was thrilled that by Morehead’s calculations, the NLC kitchens could serve approximately 15,000 children in the Volga region. The letter especially articulated his joy in knowing that he had made the acquaintance of like minds, foreign Lutherans who shared a common love for their “dear Lutheran Church.” Being able to travel with Morehead also afforded him the chance to pursue a higher goal, meeting with and hearing from his fellow pastors in the Volga region. Since the NLC paid for travel, pastors were now coming to Saratov regularly from the surrounding villages to meet with Pastor Ernst. One even arrived on a camel! After the Decree on the Separation of Church and State, there had been great concern about whether there would even be a church in the future. Parishioners and their pastors were in despair, so Meyer emphasized, “every gift from the NLC is a greeting from our comrades in the Faith and an encouragement to remain firm in the Faith of our fathers.”¹¹⁶

Morehead now continued his journey farther south to the Black Sea port of Odessa. There

¹¹⁵ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹¹⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 17, 1922 and March 3, 1922; A.C. Ernst to Lauritz Larsen, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

he found about 50,000 Lutherans in the Odessa district, including Latvians, Swedes and Germans. He described the parishioners as "...educated, developed, stable, earnest, conservative, faithful people."¹¹⁷ One of the men who made a very strong impression upon him was Albert Koch, the pastor in the neighboring village of Grossliebenthal. Koch served on a committee appointed by Morehead that assured Germans in America that the funds they sent would get to their relatives in Russia.¹¹⁸ Morehead would describe Koch in the future as "a lovable character, energetic in devotion to his work as a Christian minister, and fearless in the performance of his duties."¹¹⁹ Koch would work closely with Morehead's co-worker, Pastor W.L. Scheduling, who would come on the field in autumn of that year.¹²⁰

As he traveled over to the Crimean peninsula and the northern shores of the Black Sea, Morehead made the acquaintance of the veteran pastor, Ferdinand Hörschelmann. The pastors in this area generally made a greater impression on Morehead than those in the Volga region. It's not certain what criteria he used to make this judgment, but if Pastor Hörschelmann was the measure, there is little reason to doubt as to why he would be impressed.¹²¹ Hörschelmann's dignified white mane testified to his long years of pastoral experience, having served the congregation of Neusatz in the Crimea since 1887. The father of eleven children (with only eight surviving at the time of Morehead's visit), Hörschelmann was born in 1855 of Baltic German stock in the vicinity of Reval (today known as Tallinn). As a native of what is now the country of

¹¹⁷ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, February 14, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁸ Lauritz Larsen to Jacob Gruebele, April 5, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁹ John Morehead to President Herbert Hoover, July 10, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²⁰ Albert Koch to W.L. Scheduling, July 17, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²¹ Wilhelm Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinden in der Sowjetunion, 1917-1938*, (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 332.

Estonia, Hörschelmann matriculated at Yuryev University in Dorpat (1876–1882), the primary university for seminarians serving Lutheran congregations in Russia since its opening in 1801. Hörschelmann was a respected preacher who during World War I, when the German language was banned in sermons, continued to boldly preach in German.¹²²

Hörschelmann became a co-worker with Morehead in the distribution of food and clothing to the 30,000 Lutherans in the Crimea. On his own initiative, Hörschelmann established a congregational committee for the distribution of humanitarian aid and also a free kitchen for those of any denomination.¹²³ While Hörschelmann worked tirelessly for the people of his region, he also noted that human nature was making the distribution of clothing more complicated. Writing to Pastor Scheduling about the Christmas 1922 delivery, he lamented that in times of scarcity, the old adage of “one for all and all for one” quickly goes by the wayside. Too often the committee would succumb to giving support to those who were poor due to laziness or sluggishness. The hard workers would get by no matter what, but Hörschelmann believed that it was simply unjust to do this. Meanwhile, the government was busy propagandizing the lower classes, telling them that they were being exploited by the kulaks, or bourgeoisie. It’s clear that Hörschelmann was not of this mindset and wanted his people to value hard work and thrift. He advised the NLC to permit the pastors to manage the distribution of food and clothing as they would do it more equitably. He himself was thankful that the NLC had given enough to support his household of 14. He noticed that there were more and more petitioners coming to his door and he was happy that he could favor them with the extra food he was given. Since the grain tax reduced the people to

¹²² Private Document Collection of Ferdinand Hörschelmann Family; Johannes Völl, “Zum Gedenken an Pastor Ferdinand Hörschelmann,” *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland* (Stuttgart: Die Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1964), 139–141; O. Kubitskaya, *Немцы России: Энциклопедия, Том 3, П- Я (Germans of Russia: Encyclopedia. Volume 3, P- Я)* (Moscow: ERN, 2006), 708.

¹²³ *Germans of Russia*, 3: 549.

poverty, they found it difficult to support the pastor. Hörschelmann told Pastor Scheduling straight out that were it not for the foreign aid, my family wouldn't have the necessities for daily life; "We give God praise every day to be thankful for the cornucopia of America; no one is suffering lack, so we haven't deviated much from our daily lifestyle. We have also not been affected by the typhus epidemic that has hit almost every family in the village. But things will get worse as the number of petitioners at our door has increased. How good it is that the pastor has a few more chunks of meat for them!"¹²⁴

Perhaps nothing summed up the situation facing the pastors and parishioners in Russia better than a letter Pastor Alexander Streck of the Volga village of Grimm sent to Pastor Ernst in May 1922. Streck carefully laid out all of the pressures that had been weighing upon pastors like him since 1918. Without an organized church due to the October Revolution, the Communists had tried to set up a rival church in the Volga region expressly under their influence. In November 1918 Streck and Pastors Eduard Eichorn (Ust-Zolicha) and Friedrich Wacker (Norka) had been called to a special session with the Bolshevik authorities. The commissar, David Schultz, was to be the head of a Volga church that would have no connection to the General Consistory in Moscow under General Superintendent Willigerode. The proposed Church would ostensibly represent the interests of the people/parishioners while the talar (pastoral collar) and the collection plate were to be forbidden as "counter-revolutionary." When Pastor Wacker objected to the plan, he was kicked off the church committee. Streck himself was threatened with prison because he had engaged in secret communications with General Superintendent Willigerode. In short, a coup had taken place.

In 1919 the Russian civil war came to Streck's village when General Denikin's White

¹²⁴ Ferdinand Hörschelmann to W.L. Scheduling, February 5, 1923, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Army had a major engagement with the Red Army and lost. Ironically, the aftermath of the battle proved fortuitous to the Lutherans as Schultz was called away further south to the village of Rosenberg. The proposed church in the Upper Volga region seemed to have been forgotten by the state for the present. But the saddest effect of these troubled times was the people were losing faith in God and drifting away from the church. Reflecting upon all the vices becoming prominent in the Volga region, hatred, envy, wrath, broken marriages and the like, Streck quoted Isaiah 1:5, declaring, “the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint.”¹²⁵ But when conditions appeared to be at a nadir, the gifts from the NLC arrived. Streck remembered the day well: “But like lightning from the distant heavens came ... the gifts of love from American Lutherans, the gifts which should strengthen the body and will be accompanied by hopes and prayers that would contribute to the faith and love to the Church.”¹²⁶ Streck believed that the following gifts would help keep the pastors at their posts: (1) The ten dollar packages; (2) The children’s’ clothes; (3) and since November 1921, the opening of the American kitchens for the hungry.¹²⁷ Since many pastors had fled the region after it had been flung into poverty and the civil war had raged about them, it would be difficult to deny that the American Lutheran aid had literally saved them.

As impressive as the work of the NLC was in the Volga and southern Russian regions, the Congregationalist-supported Volga Relief Society also provided much needed aid to Lutheran communities, especially along the Volga. The aforementioned Lutheran pastor Alexander Streck from the village of Grimm wrote the Society, thanking it for its food aid: “Already in September we heard a message that resounded in our ears as a welcome song out of a distant beautiful land,

¹²⁵ Alexander Streck to A.C. Ernst, May 6, 1922, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²⁶ Alexander Streck to A.C. Ernst, May 6, 1922.

¹²⁷ Alexander Streck to A.C. Ernst, May 6, 1922.

‘Help is coming from America!’...On the fifteenth of November as I sat in my study thinking unhappily of all the dis-tress and suffering around me, a guest was announced. He entered with the words, ‘My name is Repp, and I come from America.’ In my joy I felt like answering, ‘Blessed be the day of thy coming, brother from afar.’”¹²⁸ Pastor Streck never forgot the generosity of the Americans. When the American Embassy opened in Moscow in 1934, he would take the opportunity to serve as a pastor to Protestant employees.¹²⁹

Lutheran pastor Friedrich Wacker of Norka also did not reject aid from the Volga Relief Society, all the more so as it was founded by immigrants from Norka and the aid was distributed in Russia by the Norka-born George Repp.¹³⁰ Describing the opening of one kitchen on November 14, Wacker wrote of the “pieces of bread which blinded one with their whiteness.”¹³¹ The children had not seen such bread for years, having become accustomed to bread made out of clay or mixed barley with watermelon rind, not “beautiful, clean flour.”¹³² In one of many letters of thanks to the Volga Relief Society, Wacker explained to them that no child who was fed in the ARA kitchens had died since the food was first brought to Norka. “If you could have seen the miserable faces of the youngsters on November 14th ... you would have realized clearly that they would have all died without the help of you people in America.”¹³³ Naturally Wacker would also receive aid from the NLC and be grateful for it, but the squabbles between the two organizations would at times put him in an uncomfortable position. The fact that the Volga Relief Society and

¹²⁸ Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 64.

¹²⁹ William Bullitt to Walton Moore, November 14, 1936, 361.6121/16, Record Group 59, United States National Archives II.

¹³⁰ Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 36–37, 54, 57.

¹³¹ Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 58

¹³² Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 59.

¹³³ Haynes, *A History of the Volga Relief Society*, 67.

the NLC assisted all people regardless of denomination illustrates that they were both committed to Christian charity. To the Lutheran pastors who saw only the eyes of their hungry children, the infighting between the two would have been mystifying. Thankfully they seemed to be unaware of the bickering that did not always reflect well upon two fine Christian organizations that had done so much to relieve suffering.¹³⁴

As the feeding program continued to expand for the NLC, it decided to add another American worker in the person of Gustav Beschorner. Beschorner was commissioned by the NLC as its official lay representative in the Volga region, effective January 16th.¹³⁵ Born of German parents in 1880 in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, Beschorner made his way to America in 1902. In a typical American success story, he worked in the steel mills of Pittsburgh, learning enough English to study at a business college in Lincoln, Nebraska. There he earned his degree in 1904. More recently, he had been the circulation manager for a German language newspaper, the *Omaha Daily Tribune*. While working at the newspaper, he became acquainted with the many Germans from Russia populating the Midwest and had been moved by their faith. Beschorner would be responsible to ARA, who would manage the work of establishing kitchens in a particular famine area. The NLC, for its part, would provide the funds for the kitchen and also pay Beschorner as its employee. He in turn would travel throughout the Volga region,

¹³⁴ Edgar Rickard to Henry Wekesser, April 17, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. ARA representative Edgar Rickard had to reprimand Dr. Henry Wekesser of the Central States' Volga Relief Society, who often coordinated their activities with the Volga Relief Society based in Portland, Oregon. Wekesser had published a letter from Rev. Jacob Wagner who worked with George Repp. Wagner had stated that the Volga Relief Society was the only dependable organization working with ARA in Russia, while the NLC, the Quakers and the Mennonites could not be trusted. Future NLC employee, Gustav Beschorner, for his part, would emphasize the work of the NLC to the detriment of the Volga Relief Society. Unfortunately, ARA was forced at times to referee between the two organizations. See Edgar Rickard to Henry Wekesser, April 17, 1922; Oscar Mees to Lauritz Larsen, September 11, 1922 and Frank Page to Oscar Mees, September 14, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁵ Lauritz Larsen to NLC, January 16, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

making sure the kitchens were operating effectively. The kitchens would be labeled: “American Relief Organization, maintained by the National Lutheran Council of America.”¹³⁶

After his long journey and return to Moscow from the Crimea, Dr. Morehead was feeling the effects of the difficult travel in a famine-wracked land. When he arrived, it was discovered that he had a fever and was vomiting blood, the result of an internal ulcer.¹³⁷ Although he soldiered on in Russia for several more months, it was evident that he would need to get medical care outside of Russia. The perilous nature of the work in Russia must have been brought home to Morehead when he had been asked to conduct the funeral for ARA worker, Harold Blandy. Blandy had contracted typhus and died in Ufa on May 17. The Soviet government responded by giving him what amounted to a state funeral in Moscow. As Morehead was likely the only minister on the field, he was asked to perform the service. Morehead referred to Blandy’s sympathy for the Russian people, highlighting a letter sent to his mother a few days before his death. Quoting Blandy, Morehead read how he couldn’t return home “till my work is finished.”¹³⁸ The Soviet government pulled out all the stops for the funeral. Numerous photographs were taken and a film was shot of the funeral, including a seven-mile procession through Moscow to the Riga train station. Morehead most likely rubbed shoulders with some of the Soviet elite on this day, but the danger of working in Russia while he himself was not healthy surely wasn’t far from his mind.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Lauritz Larsen to P.C. Galprin, January 6, 1922; Gustav Beschorner to Lauritz Larsen, January 4, 1922; Lauritz Larsen to Frank Page, February 28, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁷ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, August 1, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁸ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 239.

¹³⁹ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 239–40. To underscore the danger of working in Russia, later that year Morehead learned the fate of ARA worker, Philip Shields, when he returned to America. Morehead knew the family well from his parish days in Richmond, Virginia, and was saddened to learn of Shields’ apparent murder on the Russian field. The official theory was that he was murdered because he detected a theft of four tons of sugar, valued at \$500.00, a fortune to most Russians at that time. ARA was absolutely convinced that he was innocent of any corruption, although his American friends who served with him on the field in Simbirsk became quite certain that he committed suicide over a failed love affair with a married woman. The Moscow ARA office was inclined to

On May 31st, Morehead and A.C. Ernst left Moscow for Western Europe. Having just completed yet another trip through the Ukraine and the Crimea, Morehead appealed to ARA to raise the monthly NLC support to \$43,000.00 until the harvest. This additional aid would be focused primarily upon the Ukraine (the Odessa, Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav districts), the Crimea, Rostov-on-the Don and the northern Caucasus regions.¹⁴⁰ Ernst happily reported to ARA that the five months of NLC operations in the Volga had been so successful that virtually no deaths were reported from starvation except for refugees. The old can-do spirit had revived among the Volga Germans as they returned to their fields, refreshed and apparently sowing twice as much land as the previous year. Ernst noted that even though horses and oxen had died or been eaten by many families, they themselves plowed the fields with a renewed spirit. The NLC could take pride in the fact that it had saved countless lives among the Volga Lutherans.¹⁴¹

With all the Americans except Beschorner out of the field for the NLC, there was obviously a need for additional personnel. In response, Lauritz Larsen set sail for Europe on July 29, providing temporary assistance until another pastor could be sent.¹⁴² But since Pastor Ernst was also ready to return to America on July 21, in order to keep the work of feeding moving forward Meyer offered the services of a seminary student named Kurt Muss.¹⁴³ Muss was a native of

agree, although uncertain. *New York Times*' journalist, Walter Duranty, alluded to a crime of passion. ARA stuck to the murder theory, though, to spare Shields' mother any more grief. [Her husband had died a few months after her son]. Morehead was asked by the family to inquire with the ARA, and he did; but he remained of the opinion that Shields was murdered. Explaining these events to the NLC board upon his return, Morehead echoed Meyer in requesting prayer for those NLC workers on the field: "There is no man that goes into this service in Russia that is not in danger...." See Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 258–59, 313–17; NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹⁴⁰ Frank Page to Lauritz Larsen, June 15, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴¹ June 7, 1922 report from ARA, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. Unfortunately due to a heat wave, many of the crops were damaged, rendering Ernst's optimism a bit premature. Furthermore, the farmers really did need draught animals to help with the harvest. The food aid would thus continue to be of importance. See Oscar Mees to A.C. Ernst, August 4, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴² Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 96.

¹⁴³ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923; Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, June 12, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Saint Petersburg, born in 1896 to an ethnic German family that owned an engraving business. He had been educated in the highly respected Lutheran schools, attending St. Anne's school in his hometown before moving on to Yuryev University in Dorpat (1916–1918). Due to the Bolshevik Revolution and Estonia's subsequent independence from Russia, Muss was forced to leave Dorpat and return home. His plans stifled by political events and yet desiring to continue his theological studies, he enrolled as an auditor at the Petrograd Orthodox Theological Institute in March 1922. Muss made it clear that he was Lutheran and would not serve in the Orthodox Church. His only desire was to continue his theological studies. After two semesters, arrangements were made for Muss to continue his Lutheran theological education at the University of Leipzig for the winter semester. Bishop Freifeldt had even intended to ordain him as a pastor later that year, but Muss first agreed to replace Morehead and Ernst for the summer.¹⁴⁴ Until his planned departure for Leipzig, Muss covered a significant region in southern Russia for the NLC, managing the distribution of food to people in the area of Rostov-on-the-Don and the northern Caucasus region.

As Soviet citizens, Meyer and Muss were well aware that one could not willy-nilly decide to expand work to an area, however adversely affected by the famine. But Muss would prove to be an energetic, highly efficient worker for the NLC, having a heart for people and genuinely committed to the propagation of the Gospel. When the ARA official told him that not only were there 700 food packages for Rostov but also for the northern Caucasus, he had a decision to make. Since there was no official agreement to work in the northern Caucasus, it was difficult to unilaterally approve delivery. Muss had only been asked to prepare for future work in that

¹⁴⁴ Private Document Collection of Kurt Muss Family; *Germans of Russia*, Volume 2, 577; Mikhail Shkarovsky, "Пастор Курт Мусс и Община Русских Лютеран в Петрограде-Ленинграде" [Pastor Kurt Muss and the Congregation of Russian Lutherans in Petrograd-Leningrad], April 27, 2011.

region, the plan being for Morehead to continue the work later after his recovery. But as the need was growing and there was no help on the horizon, Meyer gave Muss permission to distribute the food.¹⁴⁵ They decided that alleviating the suffering of the people was more important than paper agreements, so the \$7000.00 of food packages for each region would be delivered after all.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately Meyer and Muss' decision to put the needs of the Lutheran parishioners first would attract the unwanted attention of the Russian secret police known as the Cheka.

As Lauritz Larsen was crossing the border into Russia in August, a particular incident crystalized for him the importance of the NLC work for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia.¹⁴⁷ He and an ARA courier seemed to be the only passengers in their car not traveling to a convention to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. As they crossed from Latvia into Russia, the other passengers instantaneously burst into a chorus of the *Internationale* (the Communist anthem) in twelve different languages. Larsen had recently attended an international conference for Protestants in Copenhagen before arriving in Russia. During that conference, the participants sang *A Mighty Fortress* in a variety of languages. Larsen noted that he had heard German, French, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish sung. Reflecting upon these two incidents, Larsen summed up the coming spiritual battle in Russia and all of Europe: "The forces of Christianity are trying to get the Christians of the world to sing together. The forces of anti-Christians are trying to get their people and those who may still be Christians to unite with them in singing their godless, materialistic and revolutionary and orthodoxal songs." Addressing the board of the NLC, Larsen concluded, "And gentlemen, the struggle between these two forces is

¹⁴⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, June 12, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁶ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁷ Lauritz Larsen to Theophil Meyer, August 16, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

best understood after a visit to Russia.”¹⁴⁸

Larsen’s fears would only be reinforced after spending the next few months in Russia, but Morehead had already begun to see the danger of the communist indoctrination of a new generation into their materialistic beliefs. Barely able to control his outrage, he reiterated to the NLC board a conversation he had with a pastor in Alexandrovsk of the Ukraine. During school celebrations at Christmastime 1921, the pastor spoke of how the new communist principal of the former Lutheran school addressed the children. Conducting what amounted to a Soviet Christmas program in the large school auditorium, the principal remarked how the children were accustomed to getting presents at Christmas. So he asked them, “Kneel down and pray to your God for Christmas gifts.” When none appeared after their prayers, he then said, “Ask this Soviet government for Christmas gifts.” After the children had asked the Soviet government, “the curtains were drawn back and there was a beautiful Christmas tree and there were presents for all the children and there were songs.”¹⁴⁹ Morehead had no doubts that the Soviets were using every means to fight for the souls of future generations. The NLC would have to counteract their propaganda, doing everything in its power to help their fellow Lutherans stand firm in the faith. Morehead was doing exactly that until physical exhaustion from the travel and problems of administering aid overwhelmed him.

As Larsen traveled around the Lutheran colonies, he increasingly saw the need to publicize the reasons for NLC activity in Russia. Because of this concern, he tended to chafe at the lack of acknowledgment for Christian support given to the work of ARA. When he went to Colonel Haskell with his complaints, Haskell cautioned him to be patient. ARA was already planning to

¹⁴⁸ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹⁴⁹ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

leave Russia in August and the NLC would need a separate agreement with the Soviet government to continue operations. The government would view in hostile fashion any emphasis upon their Christian faith. Larsen must have been further discouraged in his discussions with Dr. Edmund Walsh, the administrator of the work among Catholics in Russia. He discovered that although Catholics had signed a separate agreement with the Soviet government, it would not acknowledge any special religious privileges for them.

Larsen's own impressions of the Soviet government were extremely negative. He described the officials as "arrogant and self-satisfied," recognizing in them a determined foe with whom he had never before battled.¹⁵⁰ The government was intent upon controlling independent thought in the nation, because during Larsen's brief tenure approximately 220 intellectuals were expelled from Russia (including their wives and children) in what British historian Lesley Chamberlain has labeled Lenin's "Paper Civil War."¹⁵¹ After Lenin's initial letter in mid-May to the leader of the Cheka, Feliks Derzhinsky, the secret police began rounding up and cleansing the country of influential philosophers, journalists and historians in mid-August (when Larsen would have arrived in Russia).¹⁵² The so-called "Philosophy Steamer" included such brilliant intellects like religious philosophers Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergey Bulgakov, as well as Evgeny Zamyatin (author of the famed dystopian novel, *We*, about an all-powerful state).¹⁵³ Similarly the Catholic bishop of Petrograd was harassed and placed on trial for not agreeing to certain statements of the government. Although the bishop was eventually given a suspended sentence, the Orthodox

¹⁵⁰ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹⁵¹ Lesley Chamberlain, *Lenin's Private War: The Voyage of the Philosophy Steamer and the Exile of the Intelligentsia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 36.

¹⁵² Lesley Chamberlain, *Lenin's Private War*, 81. 100–1.

¹⁵³ Lesley Chamberlain, *Lenin's Private War*, 303, 307.

Metropolitan of Petrograd, Veniamin, was not so fortunate.¹⁵⁴ In the first major trial of church figures, Veniamin was accused of fomenting counter-revolution by agitating against the Soviet government. At this time the government was seeking to confiscate church valuables in order to sell them for famine relief. Despite the fact that the Metropolitan had basically agreed to hand over church valuables, the Soviet government wanted to make an example of him and portray the Orthodox Church as a proponent of counter-revolution. Although Veniamin had in no way advocated the use of violence, many of the Orthodox faithful were outraged by the charges and responded angrily to the arrest of Veniamin and other clerics. Nine separate Petrograd Orthodox churches met the Soviets with physical resistance when they came to remove church valuables.¹⁵⁵

Since Larsen had entered Russia in August, he could not have remained unaware of these incidents, as well as the trial taking place in Petrograd. The issue of the requisition of church valuables dated back to February 26 of that year, when the Soviet government issued a decree calling upon the churches to give up all gold, silver or precious stones under the pretext of assisting famine relief. Two days later, Patriarch Tikhon laid down the gauntlet stating that this would be impossible for the Church.¹⁵⁶ In its defense, the Orthodox Church had hardly been indifferent to the people's suffering. Tikhon had already in the summer of 1921 organized special collections for famine victims, including appeals to foreign countries for aid.¹⁵⁷ But when it came to the requisition of church valuables, he took a firm stand and threatened to defrock priests and excommunicate laymen who turned over to what amounted to "consecrated vessels."¹⁵⁸ The de-

¹⁵⁴ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹⁵⁵ John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917–1950* (New York: Little, Brown, 1953), 121–23.

¹⁵⁶ Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia*, 28–29.

¹⁵⁷ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8568, 8577.

cree for confiscating church valuables reached a boiling point on March 13 when Soviet officials raided an Orthodox church after a Monday service in Shuia, a small industrial town just north of Moscow. Parishioners responded with fury against the Soviet officials, driving them out of the church. Two days later, the Soviets returned with troops and fired upon the large crowd of parishioners defending their church, reportedly killing four or five of them. Although accounts differ as to the numbers, it appears that approximately ten parishioners and five soldiers were seriously injured in the clashes. The result of the government's violent action was that 120 pounds of silver items were confiscated from the church.¹⁵⁹

We now know from documents made public in the 1990s that Lenin seized upon the incident to smash the Orthodox Church. Calling upon this moment as “uniquely favorable,” Lenin believed that with the famine at its height, people would not be sympathetic to a Church that hoarded its treasures or that could be portrayed as having done so.¹⁶⁰ Making a direct appeal for violence, he rallied his comrades, saying, “we must now give the most decisive and merciless battle to the Black Hundreds clergy and subdue its resistance with such brutality that it will not forget it for decades to come...The greater the number of the representatives of the reactionary bourgeoisie and reactionary clergy that we will manage to execute in this affair, the better.”¹⁶¹ There was going to be no compromise. The propaganda campaign against the church's treasures had already begun in the Soviet press back in February. Although Patriarch Tikhon recognized the church's dilemma and had offered to raise an amount of money equivalent to the church's valuables, this was not acceptable to Lenin. As a result, Tikhon was arrested in May and the

¹⁵⁹ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 44–45; Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia*, 29.

¹⁶⁰ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8639, 8644, 8656.

¹⁶¹ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location, 8667, 8680.

issue of confiscating church valuables continued to foment disorder in the country leading up to the Church trials in Petrograd in August.¹⁶² The Orthodox people were in a fighting mood, convinced that they were fighting for their Church's very existence. They would not be wrong.

Nevertheless, the contrast with the Lutherans was striking. When Superintendent Meyer was informed by the government that churches should submit their gold and silver valuables to the state, his reaction was different. Since Morehead attended Meyer's parish of Sts. Peter and Paul when he was in Moscow, he remembered well the Sunday after the Soviet decree was issued. When Meyer called for a meeting of church members after the service, feelings ran high against submitting to the government in this request. After all, the historic silver communion set had been in the church for over one hundred years. Morehead recalled the manner in which Meyer addressed his parishioners, with "great love and tenderness": Paraphrasing Meyer's words, Morehead said:

My beloved people! My children in the Lord! Let us not resist our own government to which we are in duty bound to be loyal but let us obey the laws and deliver up these sacred vessels of the church as our sacrifice that the starving may be fed. Should they require us to give up, besides these sacred vessels, our church itself and even that sacred volume, the Bible in the pulpit; if the Word of God be held in faith in our hearts, they cannot rob us of our God and Savior and of our holy religion. If we were robbed of this historic building, the Church of our fathers and all it contains, the church of God among us would not be destroyed, for the true church is the workmanship of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament; the true church is a temple built of human stones, the hearts and souls of those who trust and follow the Lord Jesus in sincerity and in truth. In all things pertaining to the order of this world, we must obey the law as good citizens but in all things belonging to conscience and the essential things of the Christian religion, we must obey God rather than man.¹⁶³

Meyer's words were a forthright exposition of Lutheran doctrine *visa vie* church and state, God and Caesar, in comparison to the Orthodox Church. Church silver was not essential to the

¹⁶² Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8581, 8611, 8624.

¹⁶³ John Morehead, "In Memory of Bishop Meyer," 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

church's existence. The church existed where its signs were present, Word and Sacrament. One could compromise on church silver but not on the Word of God. Such a perspective would be helpful to Lutheran believers as their Church gradually lost more and more of its rights over the years and when St. Peter and Paul actually would lose their church building in 1938. One can only wonder how many people remembered the words of Pastor Meyer and continued to hold on to the faith that was more than bricks and mortar, or silver and gold. His protege, Kurt Muss, would echo similar sentiments in the future when confronted by the Soviets.

While the congregation was persuaded by Meyer's arguments and agreed to give up their church valuables, eventually some families of the congregation provided a different solution. They attempted to raise double the amount that the government had initially required in order to save the church silver. To do this they gave from their own household collections of silver ornaments, spoons and plates. This possibility was offered to churches by the government in a decree issued on June 17, where it would be allowed in certain circumstances to offer a substitute payment to the government fund in exchange for keeping the church valuables. Showing that their cynicism knew no bounds, while the government demanded double the price of the church valuables as the price for amnesty (which is what St. Peter and Paul had provided), it also reminded the churches that all church property and valuables actually belonged to the state anyway.¹⁶⁴

As Larsen was adjusting to his new surroundings in Moscow, the Soviet government was also co-opting the Orthodox Church by utilizing dissidents known as the Renovationists. Their movement, known as "the Living Church," sought reforms that would make the Church more

¹⁶⁴ John Morehead, "In Memory of Bishop Meyer;" Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 137.

democratic and sympathetic to the Bolsheviks. As such, several of their officials were summoned to incriminate Metropolitan Veniamin during his August trial. The Orthodox faithful now turned their anger upon the Renovationists. During the trial, a woman struck Renovationist priest Alexander Vvedenskii with a stone, severely wounding him. However, with dissident priests from the Renovationists joining Vvedenskii in testifying against Veniamin and his fellow priests, the court concluded its trial by condemning ten of the defendants to death. Events had actually gone far beyond what the Renovationists desired. They appealed to the government now for clemency, Vvedenskii himself arguing for leniency by stating that the government had proven its case of counter-revolution. (The basis of the charge of counter-revolution was that that the command of the Patriarch to excommunicate those who had given up church valuables had driven parishioners to violence). Apparently the government did relent to some extent, commuting the death sentences of six of the accused. But the damage had been done. The remaining four defendants were executed, including Metropolitan Veniamin. A famous photograph of Veniamin standing meekly yet boldly before his Soviet interrogators has since become iconic for Orthodox believers.¹⁶⁵

That fact that Lenin had already ignored an offer by the Vatican in May to pay the amount determined by the state for Orthodox and Catholic Church valuables laid bare the state's hypocritical claim, that it was removing church valuables due to the country's need for funds.¹⁶⁶ To top off the state's duplicity, the Soviets had confiscated crown jewels from the Czarist regime valued at close to one billion Russian rubles. *Izvestia* reported that by the end of the year the

¹⁶⁵ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 66–67. Lauritz Larsen must have acquired a copy of this picture since it exists in the NLC files of the ELCA Archives in Chicago.

¹⁶⁶ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8744.

state had gathered a smaller sum from the Church, close to 4 million dollars. Needless to say, virtually none of that money was used for famine relief; reportedly, a little less than one million was supposedly spent on flour from Finland.¹⁶⁷

The Living Church would never be fully trusted by the Russian people, the Petrograd Orthodox believers accusing them of having Metropolitan Veniamin's blood on their hands. Of course, the Soviet state could care less about the Living Church since it was committed to the eradication of religion anyway. It was simply a useful tool that would be discarded at the appropriate time.¹⁶⁸ Although no one could know at the time, in the not-too-distant future the Lutheran Church would see its own pastors standing in the dock like Metropolitan Veniamin, giving the faithful witness. Taking all of these events surrounding the Orthodox Church into account, Larsen concluded that any negotiation with such an unreasonable government was better left to Morehead. Colonel Haskell encouraged him in this decision. In fact, Morehead had cultivated contacts within the Lutheran Church who might be able to reason more effectively with the Soviets than an American. As a matter of fact, in the Fall Superintendent Meyer was in the process of receiving approval from the government for a Lutheran Church conference to be held in January 1924. In his November 13 letter to Morehead, Meyer explained how he personally went to the People's Commission of Internal Affairs and was given a friendly reception. Obviously the Lutheran Church was perceived as less of a threat than the Orthodox Church, with its obedience to the state's view on church valuables likely playing a role. In any case, Meyer's persistence had a positive impact. He followed up this success by petitioning for the opening of a seminary in Moscow, although he had no illusions that this would be easier than

¹⁶⁷ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 662.

¹⁶⁸ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 71–73.

the approval he had received for the church conference. Nevertheless, he appealed to the NLC to stand ready to provide financial assistance, just in case the answer was given in the affirmative.¹⁶⁹

A “Powerful, Invisible Hand from the Dark”: The Cheka’s Arrest of Kurt Muss

During his autumn travels in the famine regions, Larsen noted the extraordinary vigilance of the Cheka.¹⁷⁰ Their inherent suspiciousness would prove tragic for the NLC mission in southern Russia. Writing from his sickbed in Bad Homburg, Morehead urged Meyer to have Kurt Muss write a report on his management of the feeding program in southern Russia and have it sent to him through the mailroom of ARA in Moscow.¹⁷¹ By August 2, he received Muss’ report and apparently was quite pleased. Muss had even provided photographs from his service that summer to those in the affected regions.¹⁷² Morehead acknowledged Muss to be a “vigorous and attractive personality,” equipped with “faith, devotion and courage” to serve the suffering people of the famine regions.¹⁷³

Larsen then passed Muss’ report on to Pastor Scheduling, who by mid-September had arrived on the field. While urging him to be cautious with the report and make certain that no one knew that he possessed it or who had written it, Larsen nevertheless worried that the report might get into the hands of communists.¹⁷⁴ Most likely, it was Muss’ honesty that got him into trouble with the Cheka. With regard to the famine in Rostov-on-the-Don, Morehead must have grimaced when he read that Muss had written: “The famine in this section was not an act of God but was

¹⁶⁹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, November 13, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁰ NLC Meeting, January 18, 1923.

¹⁷¹ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, July 8, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷² John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, August 2, 1922; Lauritz Larsen to Kurt Muss, September 11, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷³ John Morehead to Robert Withington, February 8, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁴ Lauritz Larsen to W. L. Scheduling, September 24, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

due entirely to the withdrawal of their reserves of grain from the farmers by the government.”¹⁷⁵ Of course, everyone knew that Muss was speaking the truth, but Morehead guessed that a Soviet censor had opened Muss’ letter and read the offending comments. Muss was subsequently arrested.¹⁷⁶ Morehead had already betrayed some anxiety about employing locals while in his hospital bed in Germany that summer, writing to Larsen that a member of the NLC should be distributing the aid in Rostov and the Caucasus.¹⁷⁷ His concern certainly was not with the attributes of Muss, which he himself highly valued. But he certainly could not have been unaware of the potential danger for Russians working with ARA. In fact, one of ARA’s biggest complaints was that its Russian employees were not immune from arrest. This had been one of the most vexing issues in the negotiations for the Riga Agreement, therefore the wording concerning Russian employees of ARA had in the end been left vague. Unfortunately some of the 120,000 Russians employees of ARA were often subject to the charge of harboring an “anti-Bolshevik past,” thus opening them up to a charge of espionage.¹⁷⁸

For example, a highly educated, reliable secretary named Miss Strashkevich in Moscow’s ARA office mysteriously failed show up for work on Thanksgiving Day in 1921. After ARA employee Farmer Murphy discovered that she had been arrested for espionage, he complained to authorities, seemingly to no avail. But to Murphy’s amazement, and apparently not due to ARA intervention, she simply appeared at the office on Easter Sunday in 1922. It was as if she had been “...risen from the dead” after her long imprisonment, Murphy exclaimed. This incident,

¹⁷⁵ John Morehead to Robert Withington, February 8, 1935.

¹⁷⁶ John Morehead to Robert Withington, February 8, 1935.

¹⁷⁷ John Morehead to Lauritz Larsen, August 4, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁸ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 398–99.

though, led Murphy to muse, “It is as if some powerful, invisible hand had reached out of the dark, quietly plucked someone from beside you and drawn her back into the dark.”¹⁷⁹ That was the omnipotent power of the Cheka in Russia. All ARA could do was threaten to shut down feeding operations in particular regions if the Soviets did not respect their right to employ Russians without undue interference.¹⁸⁰ Certainly the NLC could now empathize with ARA, having lost a friend to the prison cells of the Cheka.¹⁸¹

So what was the actual reason for Muss’ arrest? It’s difficult to say for certain, but in relation to his work in Rostov and the Caucasus, Scheduling mentioned “some little men did not like his way of doing it.”¹⁸² It is known from ARA records that Rostov’s Soviet authorities were a prickly bunch of characters. ARA official James Hodgson found the local officials to be expert in issuing ultimatums, lax in paying the salaries of his Russian employees and stingy in providing funds. “It was like finding water in the Sahara,” Hodgson grumbled, “only worse.”¹⁸³ Certainly they cannot have enjoyed observing a Soviet citizen like Muss working so amicably with Americans, so Morehead’s fears about employing a Russian in this capacity would have been well founded. But Scheduling seems to indicate that these officials did not report Muss to the Cheka.

Scheduling’s own opinion coincided with Morehead’s in that he felt it was a mistake to commission a Soviet citizen for such work. Utilizing his contacts, Scheduling also found out that

¹⁷⁹ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 400–401.

¹⁸⁰ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 404–8.

¹⁸¹ Fortunately, the Cheka didn’t get its hands on a letter that Morehead sent to Larsen in the States from his sanatorium in Baden-Baden, Germany. In it he innocently referred Larsen to the “...finding of our agent, Mr. Kurt Muss, in the Caucasus and Rostov.” The Cheka would have interpreted such language in the most conspiratorial of terms. See John Morehead to Lauritz Larsen, August 18, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸² W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸³ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 186.

the Cheka's attention was aroused when it saw a theology student handling large sums of money and doing so in a free manner. That must have alerted them to the existence of a potential report, although Larsen had taken precautions. Scheduling initially read the report from Larsen in Riga, where Larsen told him that due to his suspicion of the Cheka, he had mailed his briefcase in and out of Russia in the ARA mail pouch. Somehow, and it was not unprecedented, the Cheka must have opened the pouch and read the offending lines that had concerned Morehead.¹⁸⁴

The Cheka had already begun to closely observe Muss' movements in October, even censoring his mail.¹⁸⁵ In November they finally struck, arresting Muss in Petrograd just as he was planning to embark for the University of Leipzig. His passports (for internal and external travel) were taken away from him without explanation. Scheduling, who was hoping to use Muss as a translator in the south, went to Petrograd to visit Muss' mother and see what could be done. He approached ARA supervisor, Don Renshaw, but was disappointed in his reticence to help.¹⁸⁶ Renshaw, in fairness to him, was considered a reputable ARA official. He had had his own dispute with Soviet authorities in February when they had opened his and his traveling companions' trunks and even attempted to open the ARA mail pouch. It caused a big brouhaha between the Soviets and Americans since there actually were some Americans bringing out large quantities of souvenirs (furs, rugs, jewels, etc.). The scandal was blown out of proportion by Soviet newspapers so that Representative Plenipotentiary of the Soviet government to foreign relief organizations, Karl Lander, took advantage of a promise once made by Haskell, allowing him to open ARA mail pouches and trunks. The NLC was not the only one using the ARA mail

¹⁸⁴ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924.

¹⁸⁵ Shkarovskii, "Pastor Kurt Muss."

¹⁸⁶ W. L. Scheduling to Lauritz Larsen, January 6, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; W. L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924.

pouches to send sensitive information, as journalists, too, took advantage of the safe transmission of controversial articles. Since Lander's request took place at the time of Muss' arrest, and ARA mail pouches apparently were being opened upon occasion even before that time, it is likely that the Cheka read Muss' report.¹⁸⁷

As Scheduling dug deeper into the court case against Muss, he understood that he would be charged with "economic sabotage" due to the NLC allegedly having published his report in American newspapers. Of course it wasn't true. The NLC had been very meticulous about endangering any of its Russian Lutheran contacts.¹⁸⁸ Scheduling fell into despair when he heard the charge of economic espionage. He had already gone to Colonel Haskell and other ARA officials with Muss' older brother Conrad, pleading for help. They admitted to Scheduling that having Muss carry out the work and write the report were most likely what caused the problem. ARA official Cyril Quinn emphasized that the real problem was not so much the content but the fact that a Soviet citizen had written the report.¹⁸⁹ Dr. Theodore Benze, who had just arrived in Russia to assist the NLC, carried their appeals all the way up to Lander, too. But Soviet promises to help were not followed up with any positive action.

While Muss was having charges lodged against him in a Petrograd court, he mentioned the

¹⁸⁷ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 109, 181, 676–83.

¹⁸⁸ Lauritz Larsen to Oscar Mees, Sept 24, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. Superintendent Meyer would send sensitive reports almost yearly on the condition of the Church labeled "Confidential." The information gleaned could be very useful even for publicity purposes. But NLC officials would take extraordinary care that no one would publish the name of the author or contents. If it was known that they were writing such reports, the danger to Meyer and other Lutheran pastors in Russia would be very real.

¹⁸⁹ W. L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924. In a similar example at the same time as Kurt Muss' predicament, ARA employees Ekaterina Rumiantseva and a Professor Katsaurov were sentenced on May 10, 1924 to ten and five years respectively, for writing a report to district supervisor Charles Willoughby on agricultural conditions in Belarus (then known as White Russia). These reports were not uncommon, but charges of "American imperialism" and innuendos of "ARA espionage" were bandied about. *Izvestia* captioned its article on the trial as "Spies of the ARA in the Role of Benefactors." Herbert Hoover was furious, probably after having already heard of Muss' case. See Patenaude, *Big Show in Bololand*, 728–29.

name of Pastor Scheduling while he was on the stand and was informed by the judge that Scheduling would offer no more assistance for him since he had been shot in Moscow. Naturally Muss was so distraught that his sister, Luisa, went to Renshaw to ascertain whether the judge's words were true or not. Again, Renshaw did not check on this statement nor did he tell her that it was highly improbable. Poor Luisa Muss had to travel all the way to Moscow to find out that Scheduling indeed was still among the living. Shortly after that, Kurt Muss was transferred to Butyrki prison in Moscow, known for its rather harsh regiment. Scheduling spent the next several months doing whatever he could for the family. Although his intentions were pure, initially he made the mistake of offering cash to assist Muss' mother, Alexandra, which she immediately and coldly rejected. When Luisa and Conrad came to Moscow to visit him, though, Scheduling bought baskets of food for them to give to Kurt. That was a more acceptable form of charity. Since he was interacting with the Muss family, Scheduling was aware that he was being watched by the Cheka (now known as the GPU). In order to protect Kurt, Scheduling made certain that nothing of this financial assistance appeared on his books. It would have only justified the accusation that Muss really was an economic spy for America.

Scheduling, like Morehead, was of the opinion that the NLC had to do all within its power for Muss since he had suffered on their account.¹⁹⁰ From his side, Morehead called upon his most influential contacts, pleading for them to intervene on behalf of Kurt Muss. One of those contacts was none other than Herbert Hoover, who had highly placed connections in the Soviet government and Washington. After making a thorough investigation of the Soviet accusation that Muss' report had been published in American newspapers, Morehead was absolutely convinced

¹⁹⁰ W. L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924. Russian historian Mikhail Shkarovsky says that Muss found himself under arrest on December 23rd, not November, like Scheduling. But Shkarovsky mentions that Muss was in Butyrki prison on the 23rd, so that was likely the date when he was transferred to the prison in Moscow. See "Pastor Kurt Muss."

that they were filed as “confidential reports” and that there was no trace of them in the American press. He then asked Benze and Scheduling to pass this information on to ARA official, Cyril Quinn, and have him convey it to Karl Lander. Sadly, all of his efforts were to no avail.¹⁹¹ By April 11, Muss had been transferred into the hands of the Cheka and placed in solitary confinement. Furthermore, Scheduling had also gotten word that his sentence would most likely be three years in the distant northern labor camp near Archangel. A little over one month later while Scheduling returned to Moscow from one of his trips to Rostov, he was met by a crying Luisa Muss. Finally, the judgment had come down via administrative order.¹⁹² In a terse statement on May 18 given to ARA Executive Assistant, Philip Matthews, a Miss Pokrovskaya answered on behalf of Karl Lander—“In reply to your letters from March 20 and May 2 we inform you that the Russian employee of ARA, Citizen Kurt Muss, on the basis of the charges brought against him, has been found guilty and sentenced to three years in a concentration camp.”¹⁹³

Upon being apprised of the charges, on April 28 Kurt Muss declared a hunger strike to the death.¹⁹⁴ Ironically, some prisoners in Russia had used the hunger strike to some success, having their sentences delayed as a result. Although it is not exactly certain where Kurt Muss got the idea of the hunger strike, a fairly good guess would be an incident that American Socialist Emma Goldman publicized in her account of the years following the revolution. In 1921, Goldman described how anarchists had launched a hunger strike to the death since they had been imprisoned

¹⁹¹ John Morehead to Robert Withington, 8 February 1935; John Morehead to O.T. Benze and W.L. Scheduling, April 9, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁹² W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, April 11, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. Shkarovsky indicates that Muss was sentenced on April 13. See “Pastor Kurt Muss.”

¹⁹³ Pokrovskaya to Philip Matthews, May 18, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA—author’s own translation from Russian.

¹⁹⁴ Shkarovsky, “Pastor Kurt Muss.”

in Taganka Prison in Moscow and basically left to rot by the Bolsheviks. Muss was in Moscow's Butyrki Prison, but word had most likely gotten around. (The hunger strike of the anarchists ended successfully when foreign sympathizers intervened on behalf of the Taganka prisoners and they were deported).¹⁹⁵ Muss continued the hunger strike for eleven days, all the while Scheduling pleading with him to give it up. His deportation to the Solovetsky Island concentration camp was delayed in the meantime, until June or July. When the time came to leave, Scheduling feared that Muss might do something dangerous such as try to escape. When he had secured Muss' promise that he would not do so, Scheduling set about purchasing items that would help him survive the three years in the Arctic north. Heavy shoes, underwear, woolen shirts, and a large amount of tobacco and cigars were purchased. Scheduling, of course, knew that American tobacco would come in handy as an item for trade while Muss was in prison.

After Kurt left with the other prisoners for the north, Conrad and Luisa Muss visited Scheduling in the Brown House, the ARA residence in Moscow where Scheduling and Morehead lived while they were working in Russia. Scheduling's heart was breaking. He harbored guilt feelings yet realized that he had done everything possible for Kurt. Scheduling never forgot that night, how Kurt's siblings cried about their brother's fate while he commiserated with them.¹⁹⁶ Throughout the ordeal, though, Dr. Morehead never forgot Kurt Muss. They would be inseparably linked through ARA and the NLC's work in Russia and for the rest of his life, he would petition for Kurt up to the highest office in the land. Most importantly, he and the NLC

¹⁹⁵ Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1923, Kindle), Chapter 29. ARA employee Farmer Murphy's Miss Strashkevitch and her fellow prisoners in a Moscow jail cell had also threatened a hunger strike back in 1922, so hunger strikes were not at all unprecedented. See Patenaude, *Big Show in Bololand*, 401.

¹⁹⁶ Skharovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss;" W. L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 1, 1924.

continually prayed to “Almighty God” for Kurt Muss’ release and would in due time be amazed to see how God would answer their prayers.¹⁹⁷

Christmas, January 1923

In 1923, Christmas was celebrated on the same date, January 7, as the former state Orthodox Church. The Lutherans had generally followed this practice so that all Christians in the country would celebrate the holy days of Easter and Christmas together.¹⁹⁸ Pastor Scheduling enjoyed his first Russian Christmas, noting the packed throng at St. Peter and Paul where close to 4000 people flooded into the cathedral for the Christmas Eve service. Although church attendance had decreased dramatically since the Bolshevik Revolution, on this night the people came. Seeing the two large Christmas trees and hearing the old familiar German Christmas carols resonating throughout the church, Scheduling’s experience provided evidence that the Christian faith was far from dead.

In his Christmas Eve sermon, Superintendent Meyer made reference to the gifts from “our brothers over the ocean” that have brought joy to us.¹⁹⁹ All of the poor in the congregation had been given food and clothing in time for Christmas. As Scheduling spent Christmas Eve with the Meyers’, he recalled Meyer mentioning that he had never seen the church so crowded. That realization must have enraged the Bolsheviks, who had to be aware that they had not won the battle against religion yet, especially as St. Peter and Paul was only a fifteen-minute walk from the

¹⁹⁷ John Morehead to Robert Withington, February 8, 1935.

¹⁹⁸ Theodore Benze to John Morehead, June 17, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. This would actually change in 1924, as Superintendent Meyer noted in a sermon on June 17. Lutherans in Russia would henceforth follow the Western church calendar.

¹⁹⁹ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, January 6, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Kremlin.²⁰⁰ While the Lutherans celebrated Christ's birth, the Communist Party made plans for a public burning of religious figures. The so-called *Komsomol* (youth) Christmas would constitute a mock religious celebration replete with effigies of various divinities.²⁰¹ As the bells chimed on the morning of Christmas Day, Scheduling noted that there were few signs of a demonstration against Christianity. But as dusk set in and the darkness gathered, fires were seen in the city. Scheduling himself didn't see any images burned, although he assumed they probably had been. But he did notice that the people responded to the atheist provocations with a certain degree of apathy.²⁰² Agreeing with Scheduling's impressions, Social Democrat G.P. Fedotov wrote of how the entire population of Moscow, not only believers, was horrified and embarrassed by what they saw. Even though the participants tried to engage the onlookers in their blasphemous revelry, Fedotov said that "...there was not a drop of popular pleasure in it."²⁰³ As a result, when the 12th party Congress of the Communist Party met in March, a resolution was adopted that in the future atheists should refrain from offending the sensibilities of believers in such a manner. The Party reasoned that a little more tact would be needed for the time being before the masses would accept atheism.²⁰⁴

The Final Account: What Did ARA and the NLC Accomplish?

As the worst of the famine now seemed to be behind them, ARA made plans to exit Russia. The relationship between ARA and the Soviet government had grown colder over time and it

²⁰⁰ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, January 6, 1923.

²⁰¹ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8781, 8794.

²⁰² W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, January 6, 1923.

²⁰³ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8808.

²⁰⁴ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 8808, 8823.

was evident that the great task of alleviating the famine was now practically completed. The Soviets had been issuing new demands that the Americans pay for the housing of its personnel in Moscow and that it pay for Russian employees of ARA. When ARA's Cyril Quinn quoted the Riga Agreement, Karl Lander didn't contradict him but stated that the Soviet government didn't have the money for these expenses.²⁰⁵ Local Soviet officials felt even more emboldened by the central government. Pressure and interference was increasingly being placed upon the pastors involved in food and clothing distribution. Morehead noted how the Soviets called for the pastors' removal from distribution of food and clothing although the NLC trusted them and wanted to give moral support to the role of the Lutheran Church in the community.²⁰⁶ Oftentimes facile excuses were fabricated in order to get control of the distribution. For example, in Simferopol in the Crimea, the Soviet representative complained that the NLC only fed Lutherans in the villages. When Lander's office brought this accusation to ARA's attention, Scheduling explained to ARA official Philip Matthews that first of all, the NLC often worked in villages that were 100% Lutheran. Secondly, since the NLC received its support from Lutherans in America, naturally they would feed Lutherans. But whenever there were non-Lutherans in a village, they would never neglect to feed them, too. It seemed obvious that the Soviets were more interested in controlling the NLC feeding program than in ensuring fairness in the distribution.²⁰⁷

Superintendent Meyer further related that the Soviets were not averse to harassing and exerting physical pressure upon the church. He described how rough, communist-types and government employees would gather in the courtyard of his church and see how the distribution was being carried out, undoubtedly looking for some fault. At other times, crowds of young men

²⁰⁵ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 190.

²⁰⁶ John Morehead to Oscar Mees, February 1, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁰⁷ W.L. Scheduling to Lauritz Larsen, December 21, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

would shout vile remarks from the courtyard towards the church during services, even throwing objects into the church building as well as at Meyer. In response to these physical and verbal assaults, the police would do nothing. Since Meyer's sister, Tilly [Mathilda], was primarily employed in the distribution of the goods, the pastor asked Scheduling to intercede with ARA in finding a different distribution point.²⁰⁸ As a result, Scheduling would seek a room for distribution in the ARA building while Tilly Meyer would become an official ARA employee on February 27th.²⁰⁹

In March, Scheduling would give details to Morehead about the Soviet harassment, which included a demand for bribes from the relief workers. In the Odessa region, for example, District President Schilling was ordered to give 20% of the food delivery to the government. When Scheduling arrived, he absolutely refused to pay a bribe. But upon reflection, he reconsidered his refusal, realizing that his action would bring down the law on Schilling. So instead of direct confrontation, Scheduling convened a meeting with an ARA official and his Soviet counterpart and an agreement was hatched that would allow 20% of the food to go to a government children's home. The ARA official made sure the kids were being fed, but still, the Soviet representative was finding ways to interfere.

In the Alexandrovsk region in the Ukraine, District President Rath had an even tougher time. There the demand for a bribe was as high as 50% of the food which the NLC had procured! Rath remained firm in not giving in to the Soviet representative, and the representative was supposed to have been recalled. A stamped copy of Rath's right to distribute food without cost

²⁰⁸ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, January 6, 1923; W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, "Confidential," 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁰⁹ Theodore Benze to Director of Administrative Office for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, February 27, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

was also to have been sent. But even though the NLC appealed through ARA all the way up to Lander, the Soviet representative remained on the job and continued to cause trouble. While these cases were not the norm everywhere, the time of severe famine was already past. Scheduling thought that this fact coupled with the natural animosity of the communists towards religion and those minority groups who had their own churches played a role in the government's intransigence. Clearly, it was time to for the foreigners to go. As long as organizations like the NLC remained in Russia, they would be a continual reminder to the government that it was forced to rely upon the hated capitalists for its survival.²¹⁰

ARA had saved the lives of innumerable Russians, many of whom would never forget the largesse of the Americans for years into the future. Although statistics of this nature (e.g., how many people were saved?) are always subject to interpretation, the number of deaths was a little more calculable. The Soviets estimated that 5 million deaths had occurred during the famine while Quinn placed the number between 1 and 1.25 million. ARA employee Harold Fleming, trained in economics at Harvard and Oxford, estimated that hunger killed 1.5 million and that without ARA aid double that number would have died. In the end, the amount of money ARA spent was a figure at which one could more reasonably arrive—approximately 50 million dollars was spent by the Americans with just under one million food packages being delivered.²¹¹

The NLC also had its own statistics to measure the help that had been given to Lutherans in Russia. By the middle of 1923, the NLC calculated it had spent approximately \$750,000.00 in clothing, food remittance packages and food kitchen assistance in the Volga and southern Russian regions.²¹² A professor from Odessa and a native Russian-German, Karl Glöckler had

²¹⁰ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, March 30, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²¹¹ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 196–98.

²¹² Theodore Benze to John Morehead, July 5, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

traversed the Midwest with his slides of Russia and the famine. He was not shy to estimate how many lives were saved. He offered up the figure of 100,000 men, women and children. But more importantly, Glöckler emphasized the greater spiritual regeneration that NLC aid had occasioned. During the famine, people had begun to lose hope and with it their faith. Therefore speaking from the viewpoint of a Russian-German, Glöckler saw a deeper meaning behind the American Lutherans' assistance: "Imperishable are the bonds, tied by the generosity of American believers in the person of the National Lutheran Council, between themselves and the Lutherans in Russia. Formerly we were only vaguely conscious of our brethren in America. All the more were we joyfully surprised and deeply impressed by their fraternal love towards us in our affliction."²¹³

The leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia echoed his sentiments. The President of the Odessa Synod, Georg Schilling, stated: "At this time the delegates mentioned the inestimable aid which the Lutheran congregations had received during the period of great distress from the National Lutheran Council, through their representatives, Prof. Dr. J.A. Morehead, Dr. Benze and Pastor W.L. Scheduling and resolved to express to the National Lutheran Council and its representatives their deep-felt thanks. May the bond of understanding and love which thereby joined our congregations and our American fellow believers be more and more strengthened."²¹⁴ In what would be his last letter to Dr. Morehead, Bishop Freifeldt concluded: "I cannot pass up the opportunity to give expression to my deepest gratitude that the American National Lutheran Council has saved our church from utterly perishing, not only through its magnanimous gifts of love in this time of distress and destruction of all that we formerly created

²¹³ Charles Glöckler, "What the National Lutheran Council has done for Russia," December 1, 1922, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²¹⁴ Georg Schilling to NLC, Sept 17, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

in the spirit of faith and love, but also that its representatives in Russia, Prof. Morehead, Dr. L. Larsen as well as you (Dr. Benze) and Pastor Scheduling, have shown such sympathy and understanding to us that the reception of these benefits has been made easier and refreshing. For that I will never forget you.”²¹⁵

While the leaders of the Lutheran Church certainly appreciated the support of the NLC, what did the average parishioner think? The NLC files contain evidence that the average Lutheran in the Volga or southern Russian regions was overwhelmed by the generosity that saved his life and assured him that he had true brothers and sisters in Christ on the other side of the Atlantic. As Scheduling returned from a trip to Odessa and the surrounding villages, he related this story: “The first home I entered in Grossliebenthal was that of a farmer. He has no relatives in America. When I had introduced myself, the Hausfrau ran into the other room and brought out a warm winter overcoat which she had received from America, asking that I convey her thanks to America.”²¹⁶ The believers in the Grossliebenthal District were all grateful that the NLC, who had given virtually the only aid in their district, gave freely not only to Lutherans but to all sufferers regard-less of confession.²¹⁷ Lauritz Larsen took from his visits the following message: “Thanks to the National Lutheran Council we are saved.”²¹⁸ Back in the States, Charles Glöckler translated and compiled other testimonies: A 9–½ year old boy from Petrograd, Ernst Becker, lost his hearing through illness brought on by the famine. His mother, Elisabeth, a widow, received NLC help that was distributed through General Superintendent Arthur Malmgren. In the

²¹⁵ Conrad Freifeldt to Benze, April 29, 1923 and Theodore Benze, "Freifeldt Funeral," June 3, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²¹⁶ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, May 2, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²¹⁷ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, May 2, 1923.

²¹⁸ Lauritz Larsen to L. Hopp, January 6, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

village of Russenbach on the east side of the Volga, a young boy named Richard Schädel thanked the NLC for feeding his class of thirty children through the kitchens operated by Gustav Beschorner.²¹⁹ Countless others were recipients of the aid that not only saved the lives of children and adults, but also were a visible witness that the Lord had not forgotten them in their suffering and despair.

Scheding was constantly reminded of God's providence as he traveled throughout the Volga and southern regions of Russia. He would enter a village in a car lent to him by ARA, usually scaring the living daylights out of people who had never before seen this modern contraption. The reaction of many people was to jump on or behind a fence, quickly scattering out of the way. The children were more intrigued, curiously approaching the car trying to figure out what it was. In one comical instance, the car slid into a horse and sled, pushing the horse through a picket fence into someone's front yard. Thankfully no one was hurt, although, Scheding wryly noted, "...the horse driver shouted some compliments to our chauffeur, which we did not understand luckily."²²⁰ Whenever introductions were made, Scheding's former work among Volga Germans in America usually resulted in some villagers having heard of him, whereupon he would mention the names of their relatives in America and pretty soon a lively conversation began. Of course, when they realized that he was there to bring aid, sometimes even from their family members, joy would overwhelm them.

Pastors were always happy to see him since some had not received a visit from a fellow pastor for years, thus having no one of the profession with whom to share the trials and tribulations of the past years. Scheding could give them monetary support and talk about future plans

²¹⁹ Charles Glöckler to Oscar Mees, Feb 10, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²²⁰ W.L. Scheding, February 16, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

for the reconstruction of the church, all of which encouraged them to no end. When Pastor Albert Koch of Grossliebenthal met Scheduling for the first time, he threw his arms around his neck, hugging and kissing him for joy. All of these incidents made a profound impression upon Scheduling and motivated him to persevere in the tireless work he carried out so effectively for the NLC.²²¹

Of course, seeing children in rags with the expectation that winter was coming was always a sobering thought and concentrated Scheduling's attention upon the work. Bringing medicine, too, was a Godsend as many people were ill, some with malaria. Scheduling lost track of how many quinine tablets he distributed, many to himself, too. But whenever he heard a description of the daily routine: waking up, going to work all day, and finally returning home to the only meal they would have that day, a diet consisting of hominy grits, if you were lucky, he was heartbroken. And if you weren't fortunate, dinner offered black bread and tea, or possibly cocoa. Suffering created a kind of complacency among the population. Among the children, crying had ceased because it couldn't be answered. Stoicism and a waiting for death had become the outlook for most. These were pictures Scheduling drew for his readers in an article called "Life at Ebb Tide," imploring American Lutherans to care and show God's love to the suffering. Through the work of the NLC, they had been able to save a church and a people—for the time being. The names of Bishop Freifeldt and General Superintendents Meyer and Malmgren were now more than just names upon stationery—they were genuine friends and brothers in the Faith.²²²

²²¹ W.L. Scheduling, February 16, 1923 and W.L. Scheduling to Lauritz Larsen, December 21, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²²² W.L. Scheduling, "Life at Ebb Tide," July 11, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

ARA Leaves Russia

On June 4, 1923, Colonel Haskell announced the end of the ARA program with its personnel to be withdrawn by mid-July.²²³ The NLC now had some important decisions to make. Should it remain in Russia? Certainly Dr. Morehead was more than ready to commit the NLC to future work in Russia. But how? The work of the NLC had always been predicated upon more than just humanitarian aid, as essential as that was for the survival of the Lutheran Church.²²⁴ Without the feeding program of the NLC, the parishioners of Russia's Lutheran Church would have fallen into irreparable despair. In essence, the Church would have died along with its parishioners. So said the leaders of the Church, but the many letters of thanks that the NLC received from its Lutheran recipients in Russia also accentuated their opinion.

Now that the people seemed to be revived in spirit and health, the NLC needed to turn its attention, and quickly, towards the future development of the Church. It would soon lose its office space at the Brown House because ARA had given a deadline of May 20 to move out. Since Colonel Haskell wanted to close up shop, the NLC needed a working agreement with the Soviet government. ARA could only promise to facilitate the NLC's operations until June 30.²²⁵ So it was time not only to rent another facility but also to think seriously about what the NLC could do by itself under the Soviet regime. ARA had been a lifeline of protection in times of difficulty, a resort to which the NLC would no longer be able to turn. For example, when Russian Lutheran pastors would not be allowed to distribute aid in a particular village due to the intransigence of local Soviet officials, Scheduling would appeal to ARA. Its officials would then

²²³ Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*, 186.

²²⁴ John Morehead to Lauritz Larsen, August 9, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²²⁵ Theodore Benze to John Morehead, May 2, 1923 and Don Haskell to Theodore Benze, June 5, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

carry out the deliveries without Soviet interference. The Soviets really didn't have a choice since they could only antagonize ARA so much without losing their food aid. In this way the NLC often had their "big brother" intervene successfully for them.²²⁶ Like other organizations, the NLC had also relied upon the ARA mail pouch, but now it would have to find a secure source to send its mail outside the prying eyes of Soviet censors. Dr. Morehead had likely foreseen the eventuality of ARA's departure already back in the summer of 1922 when the NLC sought through ARA's mediation a separate agreement with the Soviet government. But the day when the NLC would have to deal strictly with the Soviet government had now arrived.²²⁷

So on April 9, Morehead wrote to Benze and Scheduling that they should "kindly proceed with all speed in the making of the Special Agreement" with the Soviet government.²²⁸ Morehead requested their frank assessment on a course of action for the future. What work in economic reconstruction was practicable? Should monetary loans be offered, or materials like agricultural machinery and seed? What charity or relief work might be necessary after the next harvest? These were questions that needed to be answered if the NLC was going to create appropriate conditions for its work with the Church.²²⁹ Of course, there was also a fear that the Kurt Muss Case might adversely affect any attempt to sign an agreement with the Soviet government for future work.²³⁰ The pressure to sign an agreement was now front and center, as Karl Lander sent out a circular to international organizations that the Soviet Union would appreciate their

²²⁶ W.L. Scheduling to Oscar Mees, Feb 1, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²²⁷ Theodore Benze to John Morehead, April 3, 1923 and John Morehead to Lauritz Larsen, August 9, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²²⁸ John Morehead to Theodore Benze and W.L. Scheduling, April 9, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²²⁹ John Morehead to Theodore Benze and W.L. Scheduling, April 9, 1923.

²³⁰ Theodore Benze to John Morehead, April 23, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

continued assistance, but that there would be new conditions now. Beginning his letter with thankfulness for the help of the international organizations, Lander spoke of how the Soviet Union would value assistance in the future with agricultural reconstruction and homeless children. But then, he cut to the point. The Soviet Union would not pay freight costs as it had during the days of ARA. If an organization wanted to work in Russia, it would have to cover costs for all of its transportation as well as purchase all food products and other objects within Russia.²³¹ It was indeed a new day.

²³¹ Karl Lander, June 27, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RELIGIOUS NEP: A TIME OF HOPE FOR THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

While the NLC was exploring options for continued work in Russia in the first half of 1923, American and Russian Lutherans were dealt a severe blow. Two giant figures of Lutheranism passed away, creating concerns about the future. Having returned home on December 9 after his extensive journeys throughout Russia that Fall, Dr. Larsen immediately set out on the road to tell the story of NLC aid to Europe and Russia. While speaking several times a day, combined with the physical exhaustion from traveling in Europe and Russia the past five months, Larsen fell ill and succumbed to pneumonia on January 28. Those who had only just made his acquaintance in Russia, as well as American Lutherans, were devastated. Larsen was only forty years old.¹ Superintendent Meyer held a special memorial service in Moscow in honor of Larsen the Sunday after his death.² As an additional sign of respect, he asked the NLC for a picture of the late Dr. Larsen that he proposed would hang in all of its churches, underscored with a reproduction of Larsen's signature. Having become too accustomed to death during the famine, the Lutherans of Russia could readily appreciate the sacrifices that Larsen had made on their behalf. But for the NLC, the steady hand of Larsen's leadership in the presidency was a monumental loss. On February 16, Dr. Morehead was called upon again, to take up the duties of Larsen but with a new title as Executive Director of the National Lutheran Council. Morehead

¹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 101; Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert*, 39.

² Theodore Benze to John Morehead, February 6, 1923.

would now manage the operations of the NLC not only in Europe but also in America.³

Russia, too, would descend into mourning when it was learned that Bishop Conrad Freifeldt had passed away after an operation at the age of 76. In a sense, it was not unexpected as Freifeldt had been in poor health, requiring a serious operation. He had delayed the operation until after Ascension Day so that he could attend the Confirmation of his youngest daughter, 15-year old Magdalina. Freifeldt had been the lone figure leading the 1.5 million member Lutheran Church, and given the struggles of war and revolution through which he had so faithfully led them, there was a deep sense of sorrow and concern upon his loss. When the Bolshevik Revolution had triumphed and the opportunity presented itself to leave Russia for Estonia, Freifeldt set a powerful example for hesitant pastors by remaining at his post as bishop. The son of an Estonian schoolmaster and a Swedish mother, Freifeldt had been educated in a German school and graduated from the University of Dorpat. He was one of the last of a disappearing breed, those educated at the historic Lutheran center of Dorpat and conversant in Estonian, having served in the Estonian congregation of St. John's in St. Petersburg as his first call. Freifeldt's funeral was held in his parish, St. Anne's in Petrograd, a Rococo style church dating back to the days of Peter the Great in the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was more than just symbolic that the two General Superintendents, Theophil Meyer and Arthur Malmgren, should provide the sermons for the service. They would be the two leaders who would have to usher the Evangelical Lutheran Church through the harrowing days that lie ahead.⁴

With a heavy heart, as his wife lay dying at this time, too, Malmgren chose John 21:18 as

³ Oscar Mees to Theodore Benze, February 21, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 101

⁴ Theodore Benze, "Freifeldt Funeral," June 3, 1923, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 65.

the text for his sermon. It was a theme aptly chosen as the elderly Freifeldt had, like St. Peter, been chosen by God to lead his church through fiery trials. Meyer chose Prov. 28:20, “A faithful man shall abound with blessings.” Freifeldt had indeed blessed numerous Lutherans with his service, Meyer especially remembering him from his student days. His three daughters were also a special blessing to him, and they would stand firm as faithful believers when the Church experienced severe persecution in the days ahead. After the benediction was pronounced, in a harbinger of the problems that a new church leader would have to navigate but also a sign of the wonderful diversity within the Church, each member of Lutheranism’s ethnic groups intoned a voice from Scripture in his own language: German, Estonian, Latvian, and Finnish with Benze reading in English on behalf of the NLC. Benze recalled his first meeting with Freifeldt, who received him graciously and then entered into an animated discussion on the latest research in Old Testament studies. Although he was ill at the time and in some ways cut off from the rest of the Lutheran world, he still had a love for exploring the deeper meaning of Scripture. Benze especially treasured his last correspondence with Freifeldt, as the bishop wrote of his appreciation for the brotherly love shown by American Lutherans through the NLC. Echoing St. Paul, although he would have liked to continue his work, Freifeldt concluded, “I am ready to leave this in the hands of God.”⁵

Not more than four days after Freifeldt’s funeral, the Church suffered yet another blow as the Latvian Lutherans in Russia lost their bishop, Johannes Gruenberg, to a heart attack. He had just celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Petrograd, the center of Latvian Lutheranism in the city. The Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath had sapped his strength and aged him considerably, as evidenced by two photos in the files of the

⁵ Theodore Benze, "Freifeldt Funeral," June 3, 1923.

NLC archives, contrasting his visage before the revolution and after. Just after the Freifeldt funeral and before Gruenberg passed away, Meyer and Malmgren had written a joint letter to Franz Rendtorff of the *Gustav Adolf Verein* in Leipzig. Referring to Bishop Freifeldt, they wrote, “Like no other, he understood how to hold the heterogeneous peoples of our church and their servants together. Therefore we look with greater concern towards the future than previously and pray to God that He would enlighten us, who now have to carry the entire responsibility [of the Church], with His Spirit.”⁶ Thankfully for the Lutheran Church, Meyer and Malmgren would prove to be more than capable in confronting the challenges that awaited them.

With Bishop Freifeldt’s passing, Meyer and Malmgren would now be expected to play even more prominent roles in the Church. The atmosphere in which they would work, while always stifling due to the atheistic nature of the Soviet government, had eased to some extent. In a joint decree issued by the Commissariats of Justice and the Interior on April 27, all religious organizations were given the right to hold provincial and central conventions and to elect their own executive boards, subject to approval by the state. Exacting its revenge against an old enemy, the state forbade the Orthodox Church from holding a convention although the Living Church (Renovationists) received permission. For the Protestant church bodies, permission was generally given as they, too, had been persecuted under the old regime.⁷

Superintendent Meyer announced the new decree during the June 17th Sunday service, requesting a congregational meeting be held after the service for the purpose of registering Sts. Peter and Paul under the new state guidelines.⁸ June proved to be a bellwether for the new tone

⁶ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 65–66.

⁷ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 31.

⁸ Theodore Benze, “The Church Year in Russia,” June 17, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

towards religion in Russia, as Patriarch Tikhon was released from prison on June 27. He had been incarcerated since May 1922, but now exited prison a far meeker soul.⁹ British Foreign Minister, Lord George Curzon, along with the Archbishop of Canterbury, had led the international outcry against Tikhon's treatment, demanding his release. While it may seem that the Soviets capitulated, their action, very likely intentional, was to split the church even further. The faction of Tikhon and the established church were pitted against the upstart Renovators, with the result that there were opposing Orthodox groupings. The Soviet state rather brilliantly defused international furor by releasing Tikhon and giving him relative freedom in his residence at Donskoi Monastery. Simultaneously, by releasing a propaganda film entitled "Tikhon after His Repentance," the government took pains to announce that he was now obedient to the state.¹⁰ Why did he repent of his actions towards the Soviet state? Historian John Shelton Curtiss felt that he feared suffering the fate of Metropolitan Veniamin, but his courageous statements against the government would probably preclude such a conclusion.¹¹ It is more likely that the patriarch submitted to the Soviet state in order to save the Church from the Renovators. Indeed, Tikhon was now free to speak out against the Renovators, and his credibility in the eyes of the government was furthered by his call for the Church to remain out of politics.¹² Furthermore, he also agreed to the government's switch to the Gregorian calendar. The calendar change had been enacted in hopes of dissuading Russians from celebrating the old church holidays, which had now become ordinary working days. But Tikhon would change his mind by the end of the year

⁹ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 33.

¹⁰ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 112–17.

¹¹ Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State*, 162.

¹² Roslof, *Red Priests*, 121, 123.

due to resistance among the Orthodox faithful.¹³ All in all, the state's actions turned out to be a masterstroke for promoting Orthodox disunity. The Renovationists, who had been used by the state to dethrone the old state Orthodox Church, were now themselves severely damaged because the people and a large number of priests thronged back to Tikhon.¹⁴

While this battle was taking place within the Orthodox Church in 1923, the Lutheran Church was enjoying what might be called a “Leninist thaw.” In an offhand remark, atheist propagandist, Emelian Yaroslavsky, claimed that there was no “Religious NEP” in Russia.¹⁵ But in reality, there was. The term NEP (New Economic Policy) had been coined when Lenin tried to grapple with the people's resistance to the abolition of money and trade, the economy having been completely nationalized during the Civil War period and its immediate aftermath, a policy known as War Communism. Forcible grain requisitions had proved especially unpopular, so they were replaced with a grain tax. The adoption of the NEP in March 1921 had freed up the market and resulted in a burgeoning of economic activity and growing prosperity. The NEP would actually last until 1928. But Lenin had made clear that NEP was only a tactical step backward for the time being. It was not envisioned to be permanent.¹⁶

This Leninist thaw or religious NEP, call it what you will, was to prove a Godsend for the Lutherans. In 1924 the Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union condemned the arbitrary closing of churches and crude propaganda efforts like those expressed at

¹³ Paul Gabel, *And God Created Lenin: Marxism vs. Religion in Russia, 1917–1929* (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2005), Kindle, 277–79.

¹⁴ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 120-125, 130.

¹⁵ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 110.

¹⁶ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 9109, 9134, 9148.

Christmastime in 1923.¹⁷ Like the economic NEP, the religious NEP would last until 1928 and provide the Lutheran Church with time to recover from its losses during the years of war and revolution.¹⁸ In the meantime, while the government was focused upon undermining the influence of the Orthodox Church, the Lutherans were being allowed greater freedom. In fact, the Lutheran Church had often declared that it was not opposed to the powers that be and that it took the teaching of Romans 13 (“give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s”) seriously. Meyer’s appeal to his parishioners to give up the congregation’s communion ware clearly illustrated that the Lutheran Church hierarchy considered physical objects in worship in an almost adiaphoric sense. Meyer stressed the permanence of the Word of God that could not be taken away as long as it remained within people’s hearts and minds. It was an object lesson that would bear repeating when objects more important than silver would be confiscated by the state.

Pastor Scheduling had often engaged in discussion with Soviet officials on the relationship between church and state during his visits to the Kremlin. As he wrote Dr. Morehead in a confidential memorandum, “Time and again I tried to hammer it into many officials even in the Kreml [n.b., German spelling], that the Lutheran Church teaches loyalty to every existing Government and that they should show me one pastor who has risen against the Government. ... I remember distinctly how one of the Commissars grinned at this my statement, but he finally admitted ...I was right.”¹⁹ Superintendent Meyer had likewise formed relationships inside the Kremlin and reiterated that the Lutheran Church was not anti-government. This certainly helped him to get a hearing and opened doors that were now being closed to the historic Orthodox Church. Ironically the persecution of the Lutherans under the old regime worked in their favor—

¹⁷ Roemmich, *The Rose and the Sickle*, 21–22.

¹⁸ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 110.

¹⁹ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, “Confidential,” 1923.

for the time being.

The times indeed were bringing Lutheran churches into closer contact. In August 1923, the first Lutheran World Convention was held in the German city of Eisenach, site of Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament. The participants hoped to form an outward expression of Lutheran unity based upon the Lutheran Confessions as the "indispensible foundation of the Lutheran Church."²⁰ Four years of a dreadful world war and continent-wide hunger trailing in its aftermath had forged a bond between American and European Lutherans.²¹ For Russian Lutherans, it was also an important moment because Superintendent Meyer received permission to travel to Germany for the first time.²² The liberality of the Soviet government in allowing him a visa was no small matter when one takes into account Kurt Muss' arrest as he attempted to leave for his studies in Leipzig only one year previous. Dr. Morehead no doubt rejoiced in the reunion with his traveling companion from the days of the famine in Russia. Meyer consulted with Morehead about fresh possibilities for work in Russia due to the more liberal decree on organizing religious institutions. When Meyer addressed the convention, Dr. Morehead's biographer Samuel Trexler described it as the "most moving address" of the convention: "I am sure none brought ... heavier luggage than I... as the representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia. I, of course did not have to pay excess baggage on the railroad, for my burden was not carried in trunks and traveling-baskets, but in my heart: and now I am here to unload it

²⁰ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 105–6.

²¹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 116.

²² Superintendent Malmgren had also received an invitation but was forced to refuse. His wife had become sick and died on July 4, leaving him a widow with three unmarried daughters. See Helmut Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe, Pfarrer, Bischof in Russland und der Sowjetunion* (Erlangen, Germany: Martin Luther Verlag, 2012), 60.

on other hearts.”²³ Expressing his gratitude to the Lutherans of the world, Meyer spoke of his regret that the late Bishop Freifeldt could not join them or Superintendent Malmgren, whose wife had died. As the lone representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, comprising over a million people, Meyer concluded, “As often as I look over the detailed lists of gifts I realize, with gratitude to God, that brotherly love has not grown cold in the Lutheran Church.”²⁴

Returning home refreshed and energized on September 29, Superintendent Meyer immediately went to the Commissariat of Internal Affairs and secured a promise to permit an All-Russian Lutheran Conference in late January 1924. All that remained was the working out of the details. Regional church conferences were already being held in the Volga District in mid-June and the southern Russia congregations in Odessa in mid-September. It was therefore essential to bring the entire Church together in order to unite all the various language and regional factions into one body. Among the topics Meyer proposed were: (1) A statement of the Lutheran Church’s confessional position; (2) The external organization of the Church and the inclusion of the congregations into districts of the whole Church; (3) Consultation on the filling of vacant congregations and the founding of a preacher’s seminary; (4) The elaboration of instructions for carrying out of the pastoral office in agreement with the Law on the Separation of Church and State; (5) The election of a bishop and the remaining officers of the Church.²⁵

This conference had been eagerly awaited since the dissolution of the Lutheran Church after the Bolshevik Revolution, so Meyer saw it as confirmation that the Church was taking meaningful steps to strengthen itself. The biggest problem facing the Church, though, was the shortage of pastors. The Siberian regions had over 100,000 Lutherans with only two pastors to

²³ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 109–10.

²⁴ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 109–10.

²⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 16, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

cover the enormous distances. Furthermore, the Muss Case had made it clear that students could not be sent abroad to study, and the Church could not expect that American and German citizens would be allowed to serve as pastors in Russia. Superintendent Malmgren had put into motion a proposal to form theological courses for “emergency preachers,” but the Church had neither the money nor the teachers for that. If steps were not taken to rectify the situation, parishioners would fill the office themselves and most likely be less concerned about their pastors’ theological capabilities.

In light of the need for pastors, Meyer felt compelled to begin negotiations with the Soviet government for the opening of a seminary. He planned to meet with the Commissar of Public Education and get to know him, intending to find out what conditions were necessary in order to establish a seminary. If the answer was favorable, he would begin looking for a house to rent in Moscow or its suburbs that could accommodate up to fifty students and two teachers. He proposed that one of the two teachers be an American, already having told Scheduling that Dr. Benze would be a good choice. The other position, he believed, should be held by a graduate of Dorpat University. Meyer considered it imperative to unite the various language and ethnic groups within the Church, and a Dorpat graduate generally could converse in Latvian, Estonian and German. If there was need for a third teacher, he proposed a pastor named Koch who lived in Vienna and was fluent in Russian. Braving a glimpse into the future, Meyer hoped that Lutheranism might be preached among ethnic Russians.²⁶

As Meyer hurried from one government office to another, his optimism and indefatigable nature was self-evident. A more reticent pastor might have hidden or lain low from the Soviet

²⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 16, 1923 and W.L. Scheduling to Theodore Benze, October 19, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 71–72.

authorities, but he charged ahead into the belly of the beast for the cause of the Lutheran Church. At the same time that he was successfully negotiating with the Soviet government, its schizophrenic nature was also noted given the pressure they exerted upon him in his own life. Since the early months of the year, he was operating under the very real threat that he would be thrown out of his home, which included several rooms on the premises of St. Peter and Paul. Since pastors had no legal rights, he would be left with very little recourse. Furthermore, shortly after his return from Germany, he was called before the Cheka for an interrogation. After answering many questions he and the organist of the church, Mr. Raudkepp, were allowed to return home. The unwanted consultation turned out to be nothing too serious, but it was a none-too-subtle reminder that Meyer and his activities were constantly under the watchful eye of the secret police.²⁷

Negotiating for Luthco

As 1923 drew to a close, the NLC was still engaged in negotiations with the Soviet government for continued work in Russia. Pastor Scheduling had made the rounds in the Kremlin before his departure from Russia in November. Scheduling was obliged to work through the governmental office of *Posledgol*, an acronym symbolizing “Consequences of Hunger” (*Posledstviya Goloda*). Apparently the August 1 deadline set by Karl Lander for organizations to register with the government fell victim to ARA’s negligence, because the NLC had been inadvertently left off the list of organizations with whom they worked. As a result, negotiations with *Posledgol* were only at the beginning stage in October.²⁸ Scheduling’s counterpart in the negotiations was Olga Kameneva, a woman who was intimately connected

²⁷ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, Oct 9, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁸ W.L. Scheduling cablegram, Nov 2, 1923, W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, Oct 5, 1923 and W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, Oct 9, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

with influential figures among the Bolsheviks. Her brother was none other than the firebrand Red Army commandant, Leon Trotsky, while her husband, Lev Kamenev, was a member of the governing apparatus of the Soviet Union, the Politburo.²⁹ Scheduling was impressed that an American pastor would be allowed to meet with her given that this was not the usual practice for an avowedly atheist government. As he arranged for the meeting in the Kremlin, he heard through her secretary that the Soviets desired that Luthco, the name that the NLC organization in Russia would take, should begin work soon. The secretary must have been a chatterbox, because he also informed Scheduling that *Posledgol* had always had trouble with the NLC's distribution of goods, a point that Scheduling countered by saying that it was generally due to the obstruction of local Soviet officials. Furthermore, since ARA had already left Russia, Scheduling wanted to learn how Luthco could get its 43 bales of clothing released from a warehouse in Moscow. Blaming ARA's mistakes in paperwork, Moscow was holding the clothing in storage until a customs fee of \$200.00 was paid.

Scheduling had high hopes for the relationship with Kameneva, because she quickly moved to order the release of bales of clothing that had been held up in Odessa. His letter to her a short time ago, Scheduling figured, had led to the release of the clothing to District President Georg Schilling.³⁰ By mid-October, Scheduling had conducted two meetings with Kameneva and had a better indication of what the Soviets required from Luthco in order for it to operate in the country. He noticed that she suffered from headaches and poor eyesight, perhaps a factor in that she had not studied the documents Scheduling had supplied on the NLC's work history. As a mat-

²⁹ Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*, translated and edited by Harold Shukman (New York: Free Press, 1996), 7; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

³⁰ W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, October 5, 1923.

ter of fact, Kameneva would undergo a serious operation by the end of the year. When they were holding their meetings, Scheduling would often urge her to take a break as the pain from her headaches was self-evident. Nevertheless, he got the impression of a person who would be willing to make some compromises in order for the Soviets and Luthco to work together effectively.³¹ Scheduling especially emphasized the need for Luthco to have control of its own funds and the ability to choose the areas where it desired to work, naturally in Lutheran regions since American Lutherans were providing the financial support. These points were essential to Luthco's future work, as the American Lutherans were used to the conditions that existed under ARA. Despite Kameneva's assurance to Scheduling that Luthco would have freedom to operate within Russia, *Posledgol* would renege on the agreement including the promise to cover half of Luthco's transportation costs. Regarding the 43 bales of clothing in Moscow, Scheduling was able to get the storage costs from customs down from \$200.00 to \$82.50, securing a promise that the clothing would be released on October 17. As Scheduling prepared to leave Russia, Kameneva promised a visa should he return to do the relief work in Russia.³²

Therefore by the end of 1923, the relationship between the Lutherans in Russia and America was growing in mutual respect. As they learned to trust each other, the desire to do whatever possible to help the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia survive and prosper under difficult circumstances was of utmost concern to Dr. Morehead. In the depths of the Church's despair back in 1922, Meyer had written to the Americans in a confidential letter: "In these days a word rings out like a rumbling in my ears, so that I can't find any peace; a word, that in the winter of

³¹ W.L. Scheduling to Oscar Mees, December 20, 1923, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³² W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, October 16, 1923 and Olga Kameneva to Oscar Mees, February 26, 1925, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

this year stands out like call from a mountain peak: A dying Church! And yet I believe that I could call out to the brothers in the distance in the name of the many loyal Lutheran Christians: Even though we are as dying, and behold, we live!”³³ By God’s grace, the NLC had rescued an almost three and half century old Church from physical death during the famine. But the spiritual destruction of the Church would not be long in coming if the pastoral shortage was not addressed.

The First All-Russian Lutheran Synodical Convention

Over the past ten years the Lutheran congregations had lived through world war, revolution, civil war and famine. To say that they were impoverished would be an understatement. In a sense, many were barely breathing. A Church that had numbered over 3 ½ million parishioners at the outbreak of World War I now numbered slightly more than 1 million.³⁴ As a further illustration of the perilous state of the Church, counting the superintendents Meyer and Malmgren, there were only 81 pastors serving in the USSR in 1924 compared to the 198 serving in 1914. In the vacant congregations, either dedicated lay readers or imposters took over the administration.³⁵ Therefore, of the 180 pastoral positions available only half of them were filled.

Therefore the pastoral shortage was the biggest problem facing the Church; for example, some areas had not seen a pastor in nine years, perhaps best exemplified by the story of a couple who took a 2½ day train journey to Moscow just to get married by a Lutheran pastor. Lutherans

³³ Theophil Meyer, “Thoughts on the Past, Present and Future of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia,” Aug 11, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁴ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch- Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 472–73. It should be taken into account, though, that over 2 million parishioners had become citizens of new countries, Estonia and Latvia.

³⁵ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 112.

were also going without the sacraments of the Church, mostly in Siberia. As a result of the pastoral shortage, Lutherans were either falling away from the Faith or going over to the Baptists, Methodists and Adventists or whatever church would send missionaries their way. Meyer naturally concluded that the Lutheran Church would disappear if it did not take urgent measures immediately. He had hoped to get visas for pastors from Germany or America to come and serve, but the governmental attitude towards foreigners in the country had only worsened. In response, some Protestant denominations would send their missionaries in as technical workers or businessmen, not as pastors. Even if Meyer could secure visas, though, the lack of language skills and the general difficulties of life in Russia made it unlikely that a foreigner would remain for long.³⁶

Given its current state, the much anticipated event for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in 1924 was the holding of its first convention in the almost 350-year history of the Church. Superintendent Malmgren admitted that the Lutheran Church was already one in spirit, faith and confession, but now that unity would be publicly expressed in an external form and order.³⁷ In order to gather the most influential servants of the Church, the NLC provided the funds for the holding of the convention in the spacious Moscow's Sts. Peter and Paul. Scheduled to take place from June 21–26, Superintendent Meyer planned to follow the agenda in the basic format that the Soviet government had approved in April for the convention.³⁸ But on what should have been an unparalleled happy occasion, when the convention began on Saturday, June 21, tension was already brewing between the Meyer supporters in Moscow and the Leningrad

³⁶ Theophil Meyer to Friends of the Lutheran Church, February 1, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁷ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 112.

³⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, July 21, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Kahle, 526.

advocates for Malmgren.³⁹ Malmgren had legitimately taken offense that Meyer had initially and unilaterally written up the protocol for the convention without any input from himself or the pastors in the Leningrad region. Only when the Temporary Church Administration met in Moscow in January were Malmgren and others able to add their input.⁴⁰ The dispute, though, was really related to Meyer's temperament rather than arrogance. An energetic, impulsive man, he recognized that he would need approval from the government, whose corridors of power were familiar to him since he lived in Moscow. So he went about getting that approval without consulting Malmgren. He probably didn't take into account until afterwards that there might be some hurt feelings and disagreements since he had acted without the consultative body of the Church.⁴¹ Unfortunately the damage had been done. Allies of Malmgren's, like Swedish engineer and layman at St. Katherine's Lutheran in Leningrad (Swedish congregation), John Tuneld, felt that Meyer had grievously overstepped his bounds. He bitterly resented the fact that Meyer alone represented the Church in Eisenach before the LWC the previous summer, although it certainly wasn't his fault that the death of Malmgren's wife had precluded his accompanying Meyer. Tuneld wrote to Archbishop Nathan Söderblom in Sweden that Meyer was trying to set himself up as the natural successor to Bishop Freifeldt with the help of "poorly informed Americans."⁴² Writing to Meyer before the convention, Malmgren chided him, "I'm going to speak to you the same words that Luther spoke to Melanchthon from the Coburg when he continually tried to change and reword the Augustana: 'Philip, it is not your work, but the Church's.'"⁴³ Prayers

³⁹ Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 7473. With Lenin's death in January 1924, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad.

⁴⁰ Official Report of First Ev. Lutheran Synod, June 21–26, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 72–74.

⁴² Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 72.

⁴³ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 74.

would surely be needed to dispel the bad blood that was developing and which might cause acrimony during the proceedings.

In light of the tension, there was no better servant in the Church to begin the convention by leading the devotional service than the highly respected pastor in the Crimea, Ferdinand Hörschelmann. He would play an even greater role in the convention, but for now he expounded on the text “Come Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire.” The following day the 56 delegates (27 pastors and 29 laymen) gathered for the opening divine service as the two general superintendents led the festal procession into the church. The summer weather allowed the church to be festooned with palms, laurels and flowers. After the opening hymn (*Come, Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire*), Superintendent Malmgren gave a short address from the altar. The old tradition of a preparatory sermon before a Communion Service (Beichtrede) was conducted by Pastor Ernst Holzmayr from Nizhniy Novgorod, followed by “*A Mighty Fortress*,” accompanied by organ, trumpets and a 75-member choir. This Lutheran standard would be sung often in the next few days. Superintendent Meyer offered the sermon, preaching on the text from Ps. 118:24–26, “This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” With an eye towards the inclusion of various ethnic groups in the Church, Latvian representative, Pastor Schanzberg, and Pastor Selim Laurikkala of the Finnish-Ingermanland congregations, assisted with the liturgy and prayers.

In the evening, the business of the convention got underway with Superintendent Meyer reading a statement (translated into Russian) thanking the Soviet government for allowing the Lutherans to gather for their first all-church convention in history. After giving the obligatory thanks, Meyer defined the parameters of their gratefulness:

The Synod notes with peculiar joy that freedom of conscience has been proclaimed by the constitution of the Union of Socialistic Soviet Republics and that freedom of

faith is guaranteed by law. . . . This is the first meeting of a Synod since the foundation of Evangelical Lutheran congregations in Russia in the sixteenth century. It is only the separation of the Church from the State, which carries with it the recognition of the equal rights of all confessional groups that has offered the possibility of the convocation of this Synod. The confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church places the obligation upon every member in his relationship as a citizen to respect authority and the existing constitution, to fulfill the decrees of the government, and to discharge all the obligations laid upon citizens, including that of military service. Therefore, the people confessing the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church have always been loyal and always will be.⁴⁴

The resolution highlighting the separation of church and state would have sounded strange to Orthodox believers, given their close association and reliance upon the Czarist state in the past. Russia's Lutherans were willing to take advantage of the newfound freedoms accorded them, although they were very aware that they were riding the proverbial tiger. Still, a Soviet official reading the resolution would have found very little objectionable in its content, given that it allowed Lutherans to serve in the military (something Baptists didn't allow, for example) and defined them as citizens of the Soviet state. The resolution was unanimously adopted at the convention, and there was certainly nothing objectionable in the text from a cursory glance. Rumor had it, though, that Pastor Helmut Hansen of Leningrad had voted against sending the resolution to the government. Hansen would fight his own battles against the state in the future, although it must be admitted that the only source for this charge comes from an article in

⁴⁴ John Morehead, "Report on First Evangelical Lutheran Synod," August 20, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. The Lutheran Church's commitment to serving in the military would be illustrated in the case of Vladimir Romanov. The 17-year-old Romanov left the Orthodox Church in 1924 due to the schism initiated by the Living Church. He joined Jesus Christ Lutheran in Leningrad and then entered the Leningrad seminary. In 1927, however, he was called up for military duty but refused on the grounds of his religious convictions. Either Bishop Malmgren feared that Romanov's decision would complicate the relationship with the authorities or he simply did not accept Romanov's reasoning. In any case, he was expelled from the seminary in 1927. Fortunately for Romanov, the judge only fined him and assigned him to a work detail with the comment, "What do we need a bastard like that in the army for anyway?" In a sad twist of irony, Romanov actually did serve in World War II but perished on the Front in 1943. See Shkarovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss."

Leningradskaya Pravda from May 9, 1928. The article's primary focus in 1928 would accuse Pastor Hanson of gathering minors under 18 for religious instruction, contrary to the law.⁴⁵

After offering thanks to those Lutherans throughout the world who had provided aid to Russian Lutherans during the famine, the first decision for the convention was to decide whether it would affirm the Lutheran confession as stated in the Eisenach Preamble at the 1923 Lutheran World Convention. Superintendent Meyer explained why the church must stand by the Lutheran Confessions, the assembled multitude following his presentation by singing the hymn "By This Foundation Will I Stand" ["Bei diesem Grund will ich bleiben"]. Afterwards, the people in unison confessed the words of Luther's Explanation of the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed. The Eisenach Preamble contained the following: "The Lutheran World Convention confesses the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and infallible norm of all Church teaching and matters and sees in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, in particular the Unaltered *Augsburg Confession* and in the Small Catechism of Luther the genuine reproduction of the Word of God."⁴⁶

In opposition to the preamble was a distinct minority opinion offered by Pastor Woldemar Reichwald, which he penned in his so-called Krasnoyarsk Articles. Fundamentally, Reichwald called for a Lower Church perspective within the Church, highlighted by his "third article." He advocated not being bound to a mid-16th century Lutheran theology and instead offered being more open to a Protestant theology that allowed for a greater focus on the teaching of the Savior

⁴⁵ Historian Olga Litzenberger simply states that Hansen refused to sign the resolution and spoke out against it. Historian Wilhelm Kahle traces the charge to the *Leningradskaya Pravda* article and comes to the conclusion that the accusation against Hansen was unverifiable. See Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 157 and Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 79.

⁴⁶ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 80–81.

than on the infallibility of Scripture. Writing to his sister Anna in Riga, Reichwald opined, “What occurred with the pope in 1870 (Infallibility Clause) is what the Lutheran Church is now doing with Scripture..., as if it would be infallible. ... I will become like ‘Saul under the Prophets there.’”⁴⁷ Despite his reservations, Reichwald was given a forum before the formalities of the convention began and seemed satisfied that he was heard out. Naturally, the convention overwhelmingly backed Meyer and his more traditional stand on the Lutheran Confessions. Nonetheless, Reichwald was proof that there was a faction within the Church that, even if they didn’t agree with him completely, also inclined to the view that Church authority was too centralized.⁴⁸

The most delicate matter of the convention would be choosing a bishop to lead the Church. Pro-Meyer and pro-Malmgren factions naturally existed within the Church, so who would defer to the other was an open question. In retrospect, both remembered giving in to the other in order to secure peace, but it appears that Pastor Hörschelmann was the real peacemaker who helped avoid a contentious fight. According to Pastor Johann Völl, there were long debates over who should serve as bishop. Both sides stuck to their candidates. Then the Solomonic Hörschelmann stepped in. He remarked that in his homeland of Estonia, he had often seen fir trees with two peaks. “Why can’t the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia also not have its two peaks, its two bishops?”⁴⁹ The issue was settled after Hörschelmann’s suggestion, a nod to the influence of the elderly, experienced and wise pastor of the Church.⁵⁰ On the one hand, Hörschelmann might

⁴⁷ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 528–29.

⁴⁸ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*,

⁴⁹ Völl, “Zum Gedenken an Pastor Ferdinand Hörschelmann,”140.

⁵⁰ Völl, “Zum Gedenken an Pastor Ferdinand Hörschelmann,”140. Wilhelm Kahle speculates as to whether the Soviet government influenced the selection in any way. Although there is no proof, it would certainly want to be able to keep an eye on the Church and that would be easier to do if its main office was based in Moscow. See Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 90.

have been inclined to have sympathy with Malmgren as a fellow Estonian-born, Baltic German. (Malmgren was also of Swedish heritage). But on the other hand, Hörschelmann knew Meyer well as the Crimea was under the regional jurisdiction of Moscow. Plus, Meyer had traveled with Dr. Morehead to Hörschelmann during the famine years where he had served on the NLC committee for his region. Hörschelmann's suggestion was truly an answer to prayer. It could hardly be imagined that the Orthodox or Catholic Church would designate two patriarchs or two popes to rule. The decision reached at the convention provided a good example of a spirit that did not place unbridled authority on one man above conciliation in the Church.

Now the delegates set about hammering out the details for sharing power between the two bishops. Although initially the division of duties between Malmgren and Meyer was a little unclear, by the time a follow-up conference in October was held there was a forthright delineation of each bishop's responsibilities. In principle, it was decided that Malmgren would represent the Church in educational matters while Meyer's duties would be focused on the administrative level. In actuality, though, Malmgren would represent the Church before foreign Lutheran churches; he would also be responsible for pastoral education, providing organization and leadership for the seminary that it was now decided would operate in Leningrad; lastly, he would provide oversight for the four Synod councils located in the northern Russian regions. Meyer's duties entailed representing the Church in relationship to the government; he was also responsible for the inner spiritual care of the Church, providing leadership for the district presidents and the activities of the Synod councils (except the four northern districts that belonged to Malmgren's sphere); lastly, he was the President of the High Church Council. Both bishops would conduct their offices in the name and under the instructions of the High Church

Council.⁵¹

The last major order of business concerned the Church constitution, which pit the traditional allies of a strong, centralized church (here Malmgren and Meyer were in accord) against those advocating more congregational authority. The traditionalists most feared “unrestrained parliamentarianism with its elections, intrigues and party quarrels.”⁵² They sought to choose bishops for life (which they successfully achieved for Malmgren and Meyer), desiring quiet and orderliness that centralization of authority would provide. The opposition thought that congregations should be more active participants in the management of church affairs within their districts and at the General Synod level. They also felt that congregational and synodical principles were more conducive to the times in which they lived (as opposed to the old Czarist, traditional ways).⁵³ Most likely in the background of this discussion was the growth of Protestant sects like the Congregationalists in Siberia and the Volga region that often denigrated the Lutheran Church as simply a “bishop’s church.” They were competing for the souls of traditional Lutherans who had not seen pastors for some time. Due to the decline in the number of pastors, some Lutherans were calling for kuesters (teachers of religion who were laymen) to carry out the duties of a pastor in emergency situations. Meyer, for his part, recognized the need for immediate pastoral help in these far flung places and proposed making short-term courses available to those who had had some theological training before the Bolshevik Revolution.⁵⁴

Given the stark nature of opposing views within the Church, the discussions for the constitution would take a few days. But in the end, a spirit of compromise prevailed. Individual con-

⁵¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 90–91.

⁵² John Morehead, “Report on First Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” August 20, 1924.

⁵³ John Morehead, “Report on First Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” August 20, 1924.

⁵⁴ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 403; Theophil Meyer to Friends of the Lutheran Church, February 1, 1924.

gregations would be granted the right to form their own councils. Above them would be Synodical districts with their presidents, and finally the General Synod [of all congregations] with its High Church Council would be the ultimate authority. The High Church Council would consist of the two bishops, a representative of the non-German people groups (Latvians, Finn/Ingrians and Estonians) and two secular Lutherans.⁵⁵ There would be 12 synodical districts of German congregations while 3 separate districts total would be formed for the Latvians, Finn/Ingrians and the Estonians. A 13th district would be formed for the scattered Siberian congregations of German ethnicity. A census in 1926 would record close to 900,000 Lutherans in the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

Despite the spirited sessions at the convention, there were also moments of poignancy and reflection. The memorial service held on Monday evening [June 23] provided just such an occasion. The participants listened to Malmgren invoke the names of the 25 pastors who had died during the years of turmoil, 1917–1924. He read a short biography of each pastor while Pastor Emil von Bonwetsch of Pyatigorsk preached a fitting sermon based upon Revelation 2:10 (“Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life”). The members of St. Peter and Paul, who attended many of the functions over the five days, heard the name of their former pastor and General Superintendent, Paul Willigerode. Willigerode had suffered a nervous breakdown after the traumatic events of the 1917 revolutions (February and October) and sought to emigrate from Russia. He was ultimately imprisoned for his faith in 1919 and may have committed suicide in prison due to his confused state of mind. His was among the more tragic stories of those days, and as the delegates made plans for the future of the Church, such events

⁵⁵ John Morehead, “Report on First Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” August 20, 1924.

⁵⁶ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 98–99.

from the past had to weight heavily upon their minds. Who else might literally fulfill the words of Bonwetsch's sermon? As it turned out, many would.⁵⁷ The first convention had taken great steps to reconstitute the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, so it was fitting that a concluding service thanking God for all of their blessings be held on the final day. Professor Bartholdy of Leningrad, a teacher at the Peterschule, had been elected president of the convention, and now he publicly expressed to the satisfaction of all that a Church Constitution and Church Orders had been agreed upon. The three most senior clergymen, Pastors Hörschelmann, Bonwetsch and Althausen [from Oryol] then presented Superintendents Malmgren and Meyer as bishops elected by the General Synod. Pastor Paul Kuhlberg of Marxstadt [the former Katherinenstadt] delivered the final sermon with Bishop Malmgren giving the closing prayer and Bishop Meyer blessing those gathered with the Aaronic benediction.

Unfortunately the Cheka (now known as the GPU, but still referred to colloquially as the Cheka), marred what should have been a joyful conclusion to the convention. During the closing service, Bishop Meyer was issued a summons to appear the very next day at Lubyanka, the Cheka headquarters located a few blocks from Sts. Peter and Paul. There he was subjected to a two-hour inquisition and finally let go with a warning. So despite being given the freedom to hold the convention, the Lutheran Church was given an unmistakable reminder that Caesar was carefully watching that which belonged to God.⁵⁸ Odessan District President Schilling summed up the situation of the Church presciently in a letter to Scheduling a few months previous: "It is still pretty dark around us, and we beg the American brethren to remember us in their prayers

⁵⁷ John Morehead, "Report on First Evangelical Lutheran Synod," August 20, 1924; Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 35.

⁵⁸ John Morehead, "Report on First Evangelical Lutheran Synod," August 20, 1924; John Morehead to J. Michael Reu, Aug 20, 1924; NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

and in their brotherly hearts, because it is in the hand of God alone to preserve our dear Church.”⁵⁹

With the completion of the Church’s reorganization, an opportunity to register new congregations was provided, as in the case of the first, exclusively Russian-speaking congregation in Leningrad. A pastor named Albert Masing and his son, Johannes, had served in Estonian and Finnish congregations in St. Petersburg/Petrograd for some years already and had conducted separate services in Russian.⁶⁰ There was, however, no self-supporting Russian-speaking congregation until Jesus Christ Lutheran Church was registered with the government on September 14, 1923. The congregation met at a Dutch Reformed Church in the center of the city on the main boulevard, house number 20 on the 25th of October Street.⁶¹ The typical registration process with the state set forth the goals and practices of the congregation, which the parishioners stated as holding worship services, Bible studies, confirmation classes, spiritual music performances, etc. A congregation had to stipulate in its charter that it would not engage in any political activities or commentary in its sermons, conversations or speech. Undergirding the document was the agreement that the congregation would abide by the Decree on the Separation of Church and State (1918), thus acknowledging that wherever it held its activities was in effect government property.

In the beginning a total of fifty-eight people signed on as members of Jesus Christ

⁵⁹ Georg Schilling to W.L. Scheduling, March 18, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. Morehead sent the report of the convention to Dr. J. Michael Reu of the Iowa Synod. He noted that he had to edit the final report because there were Soviet spies in America and he wanted to present the relationship of the Lutheran Church in Russia to the government in the best possible light. Yet he regretted that he could not publicly disseminate the information about the persecution of the Church, including Bishop Meyer’s inquisition at the Cheka headquarters. See John Morehead to J. Michael Reu, Aug 20, 1924.

⁶⁰ The elder Masing had served since 1867 and his son since 1900. Both would emigrate in 1920. See Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 365.

⁶¹ The street is known today by its old Czarist name, Nevsky Prospekt.

Lutheran. Perhaps most surprising is that it called itself an Evangelical Lutheran and Reformed congregation. Nevertheless, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia offered it membership in the Church, which it accepted on October 2. (By then there were 74 members). In reality, though, everyone in the congregation defined himself as Lutheran except one Orthodox member (Dorothea Bender) and three Reformed. In all probability, any concerns the Lutheran Church had about a “mixed theology” were rendered moot as only local Lutheran pastors had agreed to lead the congregation: Helmut Hansen, Arnold Frischfeld, Paul Reichert and Wilhelm Fehrmann. The list of membership for the church council presented a surprising number of ethnic Germans: Alfred Zietnick, Jan Vannag, Friedrich and Dorothea Bender, Viktor Schmidt. As chairman of the church council, Zietnick appeared to be the dominant force in the congregation, authoring many of the descriptions and activities of the congregation. Zietnick, the son of a Prussian engraver/lithographer, was employed as a pharmacist. He had joined the congregation when it was formed in 1923, as did most of the others on the church council. Zietnick reiterated the importance of a Russian-speaking congregation in words that Dr. Morehead could appreciate: Most of the Lutheran congregations in Leningrad held their services in languages that the average citizen couldn't understand anymore (e.g., Latvian, Estonian, Finnish, Swedish, and German). Zietnick himself was a Russian speaker.⁶²

Of course, there was a missional aspect to the congregation's use of Russian, too. Historically an ethnic Russian was automatically considered a member of the Russian Orthodox Church and consequently any attempt at proselytism was considered illegal. But naturally after the Bolshevik Revolution, any complaint registered on this score by the Orthodox Church fell on deaf

⁶² Fond 1001, Opis 8, Delo 52, Lists 1–29, 94, 101, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

ears.⁶³ So now the congregation's use of Russian was not only for those who had lost the ability to converse in their ethnic tongue but also for ethnic Russians who would be inclined to join them. Konstantin Andrievsky, a 46 year-old ethnic Russian lawyer who was the son of an Orthodox priest, was just such a convert. He would become an influential figure within Lutheran circles in the future.⁶⁴ Perhaps because of their unique nature the congregation, at Zietnick's urging, chose the name "Jesus Christ Lutheran Church" over the more traditional Lutheran moniker of St. Paul's.⁶⁵

Back in the United States, Pastor Scheduling was itching to return to Russia, missing the thrill and satisfaction of doing mission work in such a historic time. He even proposed bringing his family over to Russia so that he could serve there as a pastor. While his heart was in the right place, the situation in the country had changed and Dr. Morehead seemed reluctant to bring him back to the field in a full-time capacity. Morehead saw no need for a permanent representative in Russia, recommending at most two visits a year. Perhaps he was responding to the difficulties involving Luthco's registration, as well as the NLC's concerns about investing money in agricultural reconstruction (Scheduling's plan) that he feared might fall into the hands of the Soviet government. In short, Morehead was no longer willing to trust in the good will of the Soviets. Scheduling's complaints that he hadn't been given the proper publicity for his work also seemed to rankle Morehead. Of course, Morehead had been very concerned about publicizing the work in Russia for fear that it would harm the Lutheran Church's relationship to the Soviet government. But he also gently chided Scheduling, reminding him that the work and honor belonged to the Lord

⁶³ Robert Derringer, "Church Report to Lutheran World Convention," August 19, 1927, Lutheran World Convention Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶⁴ P-34994, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁶⁵ Fond 1001, Opis 8, Delo 52, List 10, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

and not those of us who labor in the field. But if the appropriate publicity had not been given to Scheduling for his work, it was ultimately the fault of the Lutheran churches and not the NLC, who had given information concerning Scheduling's service and return to America.⁶⁶

The registration of Luthco seemed to be in trouble as it and the visa application for Oscar Mees were moving very slowly. Morehead had proposed sending Mees to Russia on behalf of the NLC to investigate conditions for future work, but paperwork was holding up his arrival. The motives behind this delay were answered by Bishop Meyer in a letter to Morehead near the end of the year 1924. It now appeared that any Soviet official working with foreigners was being watched so closely that even Meyer had to be careful about close associations with his fellow for-eign Lutherans. Because of these concerns, he didn't feel that he could work closely with Mees nor could Mees travel with him to Siberia. Mees would have to travel separately. Perhaps that is what those unwelcome visits with the Cheka were all about? Either way, Meyer knew that Morehead would understand the necessity of avoiding public criticism of the Soviet government, especially when writing about the oppression of the Lutheran Church. Criticism would only draw attention to Russian Lutherans and make them appear disloyal to the state.⁶⁷

In an irenic yet determined spirit, Morehead continued the exchange of letters with Olga Kameneva. In a November 28 letter to Dr. Morehead, Kameneva requested from the NLC the specific amounts of money to be spent, in which regions it might be spent and what form the relief would take. Morehead answered her on December 12 that the NLC could make no commitments until it sent its representative, Oscar Mees, to scout out the situation in the country. Morehead guessed a sum in the neighborhood of \$100,000.00 was what the NLC would spend, but he

⁶⁶ John Morehead to W.L. Scheduling, January 21, 23, April 16, 1924 and W.L. Scheduling to John Morehead, April 14, 1924, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, December 1924, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

reiterated a desire for freedom of travel to support those of our “blood and faith.” Morehead described their proposed work as “purely philanthropic” and in the spirit of the work that they had previously performed with ARA.⁶⁸ Despite the changed political environment since the days of ARA, everything seemed to be in order and Mees expected to receive his visa soon. Frau Schmieden, Luthco’s clerk in Moscow, expected as much, too. Writing to him on January 27th, Schmieden mentioned that the “Cremlin” [sic.] promised “that there will be no delay in obtaining your visa.”⁶⁹ Therefore Mees received an unpleasant surprise on February 5th when he learned that his visa had been refused.⁷⁰ Schmieden immediately went to the Foreign Commission office to determine what had gone wrong. Her investigation uncovered that a more specific proposal of the amount of money to be spent in Russia was required in order for Mees to get a visa. So advising Mees upon the wording to be used, Schmieden assured him that the delay was not out of the ordinary and that Kameneva would approve his visa soon.⁷¹

But Kameneva’s positive relationship in the past with the NLC did not appear to be enough to counteract the prevailing political winds. Those conditions that previously allowed for a foreigner’s quick entry into Russia were no longer extant. It was as if the Soviet government’s unequal relationship with ARA was something that it wanted to leave in the past. It would no longer be coerced into holding those contentious discussions with foreigners bearing gifts. On February 19, Mees received a tersely worded telegram from Kameneva: “Sorry, your application to enter Russia refused. Kindly send your proposals by letter—Kameneva.”⁷² As Mees was already in

⁶⁸ John Morehead to Olga Kameneva, December 12, 1924, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶⁹ Schmieden to Oscar Mees, January 27, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁰ The decision had actually been made on January 27, the day that Schmieden wrote to him that he would soon receive his visa! See NKVD to Oscar Mees, February 5, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷¹ Schmieden to Mees, Feb 16, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷² Oscar Mees to Olga Kameneva, February 19, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Riga, he immediately answered her the same day, perplexed as to what had gone wrong. The NLC had already gathered \$50,000.00, hearing from their sources that there would be great need in the coming spring. He was hoping that they could reach an agreement with the Soviet government to provide free transportation for the distribution of clothing. The clothing was already being gathered in Hamburg, preparing for shipment to Russia.⁷³

One week later, Kameneva replied—definitively. “Your conditions ... refer to the situation in the Union of SSR such as it existed in the years 1921–1923.”⁷⁴ While they could mutually choose where to work, the former conditions existing under ARA were now radically changed. Where previously the NLC could use its pastors to distribute aid, now the government would choose its own local people to be in charge of the distribution. Where formerly the government paid transportation fees, now Luthco would be required to take on that expense. Similarly, customs duties, excises and cost of living for personnel were no longer covered. Due to those customs and excise fees that the government had seen fit to levy, Kameneva recommended bringing only cash so that Luthco could purchase all items within Russia profitably.⁷⁵ A few days later, a forlorn Schmieden cabled Mees with the bad news: “On proposed conditions—no hope.”⁷⁶ In fact, Schmieden had already read the handwriting on the wall before Kameneva’s February 26 letter to Mees. On February 24th she began to ask for direction as to where to send the furniture and stationery of the office, concluding that Luthco would soon be closed. Likewise, she now requested references for future work, as she had been employed by the NLC

⁷³ Oscar Mees to Olga Kameneva, February 19, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁴ Olga Kameneva to Oscar Mees, February 26, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁵ Olga Kameneva to Oscar Mees, February 26, 1925.

⁷⁶ Schmieden to Oscar Mees, February 28, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

since October 1922.⁷⁷

On the one hand, conditions in the country had changed somewhat favorably towards religion, but on the other hand, the government was simultaneously viewing with increasing paranoia and suspicion the relationships between foreigners and Russians. Perhaps Bishop Meyer's concern about a Soviet bureaucrat's fear of close association with foreigners was behind Kameneva's sudden coldness? But Kameneva was also clear that she had communicated these new conditions to Scheduling before he left, so even his good relationship and intervention with her would probably not have affected the outcome for the better. Disappointed, Mees returned to New York on March 30th after three months of fruitless efforts to enter Russia. Meyer, for his part, was not surprised. Another way to send aid would have to be found. Luthco, in essence, would turn out to be stillborn.⁷⁸

Siberia: A Rescue Mission for the Church and the Problem of Sending Funds

As early as 1923, the traumatic situation of the Lutheran Church in Siberia weighed heavily upon then Superintendent Meyer's heart. He estimated that a Lutheran population of over 100,000 had only two pastors (Pastors Reichwald and Gorne) serving an area the size of North America, and those pastors were far from the population centers where the majority of Lutherans lived. The last eight years of war and revolution had allowed for virtually no contact between the Siberian congregations and the Church's center in Moscow. With the dearth of pastors, beautiful old cathedrals in Omsk, Tomsk, Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Chita and Tobolsk were lying dormant. The dangers affecting Lutheranism were that congregations felt forced to choose preachers from

⁷⁷ Schmieden to Oscar Mees, February 24, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of ELCA.

⁷⁸ John Morehead, "LWC Meeting Notes in Gothenburg," November 15–19, 1925; Olga Kameneva to Oscar Mees, February 26, 1925; Theophil Meyer to Oscar Mees, March 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

within their midst, unfortunately most of whom were theologically uneducated or unprepared to lead a congregation. The threat of proselytism from Baptists and other sects was also driving parishioners away from their historic Lutheran faith. Meyer worried that Lutheranism would soon die out in Siberia if drastic measures were not taken.

Meyer had initially hoped to make a summer visit to Siberia in 1923, but the invitation to Eisenach for the Lutheran World Convention was more pressing at that time. Nonetheless, Siberia still occupied his thoughts, prompting him to consider placing an experienced pastor over the Siberian churches. He proposed Alexander Siegfried, his 48 year-old former colleague at St. Peter and Paul (1911–1921), who was now employed in a secular capacity in Estonia. Siegfried had replaced Paul Willegerode as General Superintendent in Moscow after his tragic death in 1919 and was a strong confessional Lutheran. In 1921, he felt compelled to leave Russia for the benefit of his large family. Unfortunately he couldn't serve in his adopted country as Estonians were not interested in the services of a German pastor. Now that his children were mostly grown, he told Meyer that he could serve for two years in Siberia. There he hoped to train many capable kuesters as pastors. He was fluent in German, Russian and Estonian, making him able to converse with many of the primarily Lutheran ethnic peoples who lived in those regions. He would need funds, though, to support his family back in Estonia. Could the NLC help?⁷⁹

Thanking Morehead for the NLC's support for the All Russian Lutheran Church Convention in Moscow, Meyer now appealed to him in May 1925 to finance a Siberian summer journey. No official of the Church had traveled there since Alexander Fehrmann, who had served as Vice President of the Moscow Consistory (1902–1913), and he had only traveled as far as the western Siberian city of Omsk. Bishop Meyer planned a more extensive journey of two to three

⁷⁹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 23, 1923, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

months, traveling as far as Lake Baikal. His wife Eugenie would accompany him and make house visits to the sick and to the children. He had also gathered three crates of New Testaments and Catechisms from Morehead and others that he hoped to distribute. Accompanying him would be a young pastor, Friedrich Deutschmann, who had recently finished a course for preachers under Bishop Malmgren in Leningrad and done his practical work under Pastor Karl Arthur Hanson in the Crimea. Meyer planned to ordain the recently wed Deutschmann for service in Siberia.⁸⁰ It was an ambitious travel plan for a 60 year-old bishop whose zeal at times was greater than the concern for his own health. Meyer hoped to set out from Moscow on May 29 and initially take a four-day journey through Samara, Ufa and Chelyabinsk, finally arriving in Petropavlovsk (in the utmost northern part of Kazakhstan). From there he would travel to Peterfeld on the 3rd or 4th of June, one of the centers of the German colonies. On the evening of the 5th he planned to arrive in Omsk to celebrate Pentecost, unfortunately without Pastor Siegfried Schultz, who lay in the hospital with a severe case of typhus. Schultz was a 36 year-old pastor who had studied at Yuryev University in Dorpat but was unable to finish due to being drafted for the army. In 1918 he was arrested for espionage and upon his release was commissioned for Omsk where he had begun serving in 1925. Meyer would need all the educated, dedicated pastors that he could find for the work in the vast region of Siberia.⁸¹

From Omsk the next stop would be the Slavgorod District, about 300 miles to the south-east. Being a center of German colonies, he hoped to visit three of the 42 German Lutheran communities. After visiting this region, Meyer foresaw scheduled visits to Pavlodar, Semipala-

⁸⁰ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, May 12, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 343, 349, 384. Deutschmann would go on to serve in Slavgorod [1925–1928] in the Altai region of Siberia after this trip. Alexander Siegfried would never serve in Siberia, immigrating to Germany and dying in Helsinki in 1957. See Litzenberger 349, 357.

⁸¹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, May 11, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 391.

tinsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk on Lake Baikal, and if it was God's will, all the way to Kyakhta on the Mongolian border. Given the time crunch, Meyer further wondered if the NLC might extend some support to the suffering congregations. Meyer figured that it would be less conspicuous for him to bring money than to send it to the Siberian regions through a bank or courier.⁸² In fact, the question of sending money to the Lutherans in Russia had become more complex since ARA's withdrawal in 1923. The NLC had hoped that Oscar Mees could bring in occasional large sums of money, but that plan backfired when his visa was refused. The NLC offer to send money through the Mennonite organization of Alvin Miller was not quite acceptable to Meyer, (1) because it was a non-Lutheran organization, and perhaps more importantly, (2) the Soviets might begin to explore the origin of the funds sent through the Mennonites. So for the moment, the NLC continued to send funds through the German embassy, as the United States had no diplomatic representation in Russia. Nonetheless, Mees worried that sending money through the German embassy might cause some problems for Meyer.⁸³

Meanwhile on March 16th, an opportunity presented itself that Meyer could only see as having been "sent from God." A Lutheran from the Slavgorod District named Andreas Maier suddenly appeared in Moscow. Maier was in Moscow apparently on business for a weaver's cooperative, but also sought out Bishop Meyer as a representative of the forty German Lutheran villages of the Slavgorod District. Maier related the difficult situation surrounding the village churches, where the Baptists and other sects were trying to wean Lutherans away from their churches. Still, the majority of Lutherans were remaining true to their Church and despite the

⁸² Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, May 11, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 391.

⁸³ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 17, 1925 and Oscar Mees to Theophil Meyer, March 4, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

acute financial hardships, beginning to help themselves. Bishop Meyer attributed this self-reliance to the fact that many were originally from the Volga region and had brought the housecraft trade of weaving to Siberia. Since farming the land wasn't working so well for the present, many had returned to the old weaving skills that they had learned in the Volga region. The Volga colonies had been well known for their soft cotton products, which had become popular under the brand name *Sarpinka*. Andreas Maier himself happened to be in Moscow in order to purchase cotton that could be utilized for their weaving looms. After consulting with him, Bishop Meyer crafted a plan to aid the Siberian colonies and their congregations by helping them help themselves. As \$1000.00 of Siberian church aid had just come to him from the NLC the day after he made Andreas Maier's acquaintance, it was clear to the bishop what he must do next. In agreement with a Provisional Committee consisting of Nizhniy Novgorod District President Holzmayer and Church Secretary Arthur Gernsdorff, the bishop decided to give Andreas Maier \$500.00 so that the poorest of the Lutherans could use those funds for the purchase of cotton that would then be manufactured. In this way, the poorest could help themselves and when Maier returned to Moscow in five weeks, he would then submit the receipts and notes of thanks to the NLC from the people assisted. This aid would help tide over the communities until the harvest.⁸⁴

While Bishop Meyer could in this instance hand the money directly to Siberians, there was still the problem of how to receive money from the NLC in the future. The political climate had indeed changed, as Meyer's repeated sessions with the Cheka, or GPU, would illustrate. While Meyer could still receive funds for Siberia or the High Church Council from the German embassy, he could no longer disseminate funds to the various pastors. The GPU was now

⁸⁴ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 17, 1925.

watching him closely and questions would inevitably be raised if he were found to be receiving large sums of money and sending it out to various pastors in Russia. Once again, though, Meyer's creativity came to his aid in the dissemination of funds for pastors. Speaking with a member of his congregation who had knowledge of banking practices, Meyer crafted a new plan. According to the law, every Russian citizen could receive the equivalent of 200 gold rubles (\$100.00) from abroad; for the most part, Russian Jews took advantage of this opportunity. Currently, a local bank handled 40,000 money transfers in the span of one month, so no special notice would be taken if the Lutheran pastors in Russia had money transferred to them through this bank. In fact, this is how humanitarian organizations that formerly worked in Russia now sent their funds.

The plan was as follows: The NLC would send three months worth of support to an individual pastor, not naming his profession as such but simply listing his name and address. The pastor would then receive notice at his affiliated bank of the money transfer, or, if there was no local bank, the money order would be sent through the mail. The NLC could even be named as the sender because up until now the GPU had extended no special oversight of the banks or money orders. Neither was any extra tax placed on the transfer; this information Meyer received directly from his parishioner who was actually an employee at this bank and therefore "in the know." Funds could be sent to "Bank pour le Commerce Exterieur U.R.S.S." in Moscow. Meyer could even receive funds for the Church this way; he only asked Morehead that American Lutherans refrain from publishing his thanks for funds in the newspapers, because it would cause him great danger. After all, the GPU had its own friends in America who would inform it of any publicity.⁸⁵ On September 4 Dr. Morehead began this process, sending \$3950.00 to the Deutsche

⁸⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 17, 1925.

Bank of Berlin through the French bank in Moscow. The bank then sent it on to pastors whose names were on the list with which Bishop Meyer had supplied them. Each of the bishops received \$100.00 for his own assistance.⁸⁶

The Siberian Mission Journey—1925

A few of Bishop Meyer's reports from his Siberian journey remain in the LWC archives, and they give a flavor of the excitement and difficulties of travel and life in Siberian Lutheran congregations in the 1920s. With Dr. Morehead sending over \$3000.00 to finance Meyer's travels, the long-awaited journey began on May 30th after a special service in St. Peter and Paul in Moscow. Pastor Holzmayr from Nizhniy Novgorod would substitute for Meyer while he made the months-long travel to Siberia. Meyer felt spiritually empowered as the Moscow congregation happily accompanied his team to the train station, interceding for them in prayer on this vital mission venture. As they arrived in Chelyabinsk, Meyer noted the comfortable conditions on the train change as hundreds of thousands of Russian farmers overfilled the trains heading east. As a result, Meyer and company had to watch their valuables closely due to the numerous thieves on board.

When the train pulled into Mamulyutka on the morning of June 3rd, they were pleasantly surprised to be met by Alexander Bolger and five parishioners from the congregation in Peterfeld. The friendly parishioners loaded them onto a wagon with excellent horsepower and despite the damp moorlands, traveled the equivalent of about 20 miles (25 versts) to Peterfeld in two hours. As Meyer noted the beauty of this special land positioned between the taiga and steppes, all the youth of the village greeted his team in song upon reaching the outskirts of Peterfeld.

⁸⁶ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, September 4, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Standing up in his wagon, Meyer expressed his joy that his first impression of this village was the joyful reception by the youth. Singing all the way until they entered Peterfeld, the bells of the small, plain prayer house rang out as the parishioners gathered in the courtyard, waving to their guests. A preparatory service was held at 5 p.m. while Pastor Deutschmann examined the youth, for tomorrow there would be a Confirmation service.

The Meyer team was afterward ushered into the clean and spacious home of a parishioner, Mr. Scharf. Bishop Meyer was impressed by the overall cleanliness and orderliness of the village. The next day, guests from 70 miles (100 versts) or more crowded into the prayer house for the Confirmation Service. In a festal procession into the decorated prayer house, the students entered singing with Bishop Meyer leading them. With very few exceptions, most showed themselves well prepared for the morning exam. The communion service lasted for almost four hours while 61 students were confirmed. That was the first of three services on that day, for Deutschmann busied himself with baptisms while Meyer handled the weddings. In fact, Meyer believed that those who had been confirmed or married by kuesters needed to be re-blessed in order for there to be proper order in the church!

The evening began with yet a third service, prefaced by a two-hour report from Meyer on the Lutheran World Convention in Eisenach, the General Church Synod in Moscow [1924] and the new Church Constitution and Orders. The people were starved for information because even after two hours they were disappointed that Meyer couldn't continue giving them more information! In conclusion, a late evening gathering was held at the Scharf home, ending a rather full and unforgettable day. The days' events painted a rather surprising picture of the vibrancy of religious belief in a land that was supposedly hurrying rapidly towards atheism. Peterfeld was evidence that especially in the villages, the communists would have their work cut out for them if

they hoped to radically change Russian society. A few days later, as the Meyer team prepared to leave Peterfeld, the people made the bishop promise to write and stay in touch. They were so taken with Pastor Deutschmann that they wanted him to stay and serve, but Meyer felt that Peterfeld was too small for him. He promised to send one of the first graduates of the seminary that was preparing to open that year. The accompanying crowd of well-wishers was so large and repeatedly called upon the bishop for a sermon that they almost missed their ferryboat.⁸⁷

The travel through Siberia wasn't all garlands and roses, though. Meyer's men were accompanied by plagues of extraordinarily vicious mosquitos, small in size but voluminous in the omnipresent swarms that would attack travelers even in the evening. The surprising summer heat of Siberia was also a revelation to the Meyer company, but come the evening there would generally be a such a cooling off period that one would need some kind of wrap around his shoulders. Still, Bishop Meyer found the river travel to be most interesting, especially since one could expect a regular diet of fresh fish in large portions. Not all places greeted them with the joy of the Peterfelders, however; in Semipalatinsk, they searched in vain for any kind of Lutheran community among the Germans in residence. Remembering the biblical injunction and realizing his time was limited, Meyer decided to "shake the dust from his feet" and move on to Slavgorod and other villages.

Days later as they traveled on towards Barnaul, the Meyer team passed by a small salt lake, pine forests (Muscovites with tuberculosis rested here) and sand dunes, finally reaching a village where the steppes began—Hannowka. Some of the villagers had gone over to the Baptists, but most had remained true to the Lutheran Confessions. Meyer ascertained that all of the villagers

⁸⁷ John Morehead, November 15–19, 1925, "LWC Meeting Notes in Gothenburg" and Theophil Meyer, June 8, 1925, "Siberian Journal," LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

were originally from Bessarabia (eastern Romania), having arrived there after living for a time in the North Caucasus region. Other neighboring villages were populated with Volga German Lutherans. Perhaps the most remarkable occurrence in Hannowka was reminiscing with people whom Meyer had baptized, confirmed and married 30 years ago from the early days of his pastoral ministry, which had actually been spent in Bessarabia!

Meyer's overall impression of the trip was favorable, especially as he reflected upon the spiritual hunger among the Lutherans in Siberia. If they had no cathedral, they built prayer houses; at times, as for example in the village of Dönhof, the people lavishly decorated a gigantic barn that served as a church. The believers would barely allow him time to rest, continually plying him with requests for services and conversations. He also visited Latvians and Estonians like those in Krasnoyarsk, conducting services in Russian wherever possible. While he enjoyed performing the spiritual duties that he carried out on this trip, Meyer was also taken with the natural beauty of Siberia. He marveled at the majesty of the Yenisei River after a long 425-kilometer journey. One day at the conclusion of an all-day church festival in the village of Orlovskoye, Meyer and his company watched the sun set from the summit of a mountain. Looking to the north and seeing the steppes laid out, and then glancing to the south and viewing the mountains, Meyer confessed that this was an hour in his life that he would never forget. On the whole, the Lutherans of Siberia had impressed him as robust people, but a flock desperately in need of shepherds. His trip had roused him to do something about it, so that there would be a future for the Lutheran Church in Siberia.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Theophil Meyer to Ernst Holzmeyer, July 1925 and Theophil Meyer to Tilly Meyer, July 21, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

A Lutheran Seminary is Born in the USSR

Perhaps the most pressing issue of the Lutheran Church, even before Bishop Meyer's journey to Siberia, was finding a means to replenish the congregations lacking pastors. Due to death and emigration, at least half of the congregations needed pastors.⁸⁹ Without help, they would turn to other Protestant denominations or fill the vacancy with someone unqualified in their own midst, or simply fall away from faith. As long ago as 1922, Meyer had begun to broach the topic of a seminary with Dr. Morehead.⁹⁰ Bishop Arthur Malmgren had likewise been concerned with the lack of pastors. Through the Petrograd Church Office, he operated what became known as a *Schnellkurs*, an accelerated seminary course due to the pastoral shortages. Having begun in the Fall of 1922, its graduates took their final exams in Fall 1924. After an appeal by a Swedish engineer working in Petrograd, John Tuneld, support arrived via the Lutheran Church of Sweden and Archbishop Nathan Söderblom. Initially Meyer was somewhat skeptical of this *Schnellkurs*, seeing it only as an emergency measure. But after his journey to Siberia, he would gain a greater appreciation for the qualifications of the *Schnellkurs*' students. 1925 graduate, Friedrich Deutschmann, would ably accompany him on that journey.

Another graduate was a 34 year-old schoolteacher, Emil Pfeiffer, who had studied along with his brother, Arthur.⁹¹ Emil Pfeiffer was a good example of the kind of student who would seek the pastoral ministry in this challenging time for the Lutheran Church. A father of four young children, he gave up a teaching position where he specialized in interacting with troubled teens. Even though he knew at the time he entered the ministry that it could be dangerous to him

⁸⁹ John Morehead, November 15–19, 1925, "LWC Meeting Notes in Gothenburg."

⁹⁰ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, November 13, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of ELCA.

⁹¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 146–48.

and his family, he and a large number of others nevertheless heeded the call. Bishop Malmgren must have known that there were many more Emil Pfeiffer's desiring to serve in the Church.⁹²

Meyer's plans for a seminary began to crystalize in 1924 with Moscow assumed to be the appropriate location. Morehead expressed skepticism as to whether the Soviet government would actually allow a Lutheran seminary to open, but the times were now different since the advent of the "Religious NEP."⁹³ Since the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia at its June 1924 convention subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions as laid out by the LWC Conference in Eisenach, as the executive director of the LWC and NLC Morehead saw no reason why they could not financially support the proposed seminary. According to the decision reached by the Lutheran Church Conference in June, Bishop Malmgren was chosen to head the seminary with its location slated instead for Leningrad. Leningrad was more appropriate as a site than Moscow because the local conditions were more favorable. A potential roster of professors lived in the city and St. Anne's Lutheran Church could provide sufficient schoolrooms as well as an adjoining building where dorm space could be found at a reasonable rate.⁹⁴

With potential funding in place, Malmgren went to the Soviet authorities and on April 15, 1925, received permission to open a "Bible School" [Kurs, in German] in Leningrad that Fall.⁹⁵ Morehead was a little skeptical of the proposed title for the seminary and asked Malmgren to clarify the reasons for registering the seminary as a "Bible school." Since the terms "theological" and "seminary" were not acceptable to Soviet authorities, Morehead naturally wanted to know

⁹² Edith Müthel to Matthew Heise, October 2013; Edith Müthel, *An Gottes Hand: Ein deutsch-russische Lebensgeschichte* (Leipzig: Verlag des Gustav-Adolf-Werks e.V., 2013), 16, 19.

⁹³ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, March 24, 1924, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁴ John Morehead to Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat, November 26, 1924, Theophil Meyer to Theodore Benze, July 21, 1924 and Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, May 5, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of ELCA.

⁹⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

how that might affect teaching. Was the title “Bible school” “merely the adaptation of the name to the psychology of the country,” or would it “make it impossible to give adequate scientific training for the ministry?”⁹⁶ Malmgren answered that it was against their wishes to use the term “Bible school,” but the word “theological” was not accepted since they lived in a land where God was not recognized. As for the name “seminary”, it, too, was rejected because it reminded the government of the pre-revolutionary institution that the Lutheran Church operated in Dorpat.⁹⁷

In fact, the Russian Orthodox, Baptist and Evangelical Christians were only allowed to open “Bible schools” as well. For some reason, “Bible school” was the phrase the Soviets deemed acceptable. Nonetheless, Malmgren assured Morehead that the Bible school would operate like any university in the Western world, teaching all the subjects that a theological faculty would offer.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the neighboring building where the students would be housed had adjoining rooms. The rooms were now vacant, the building itself having formerly belonged to the Church until it was nationalized in 1918. Unfortunately, the rooms were in such a state of disrepair that the housing administration of the city couldn’t pay for repairs. Repairs would cost 21,500 rubles, approximately a little over \$10,000.00!⁹⁹

Displaying his negotiating skill, Malmgren worked out an agreement with the government so that the Lutheran Church would pay for only half of the repairs (\$5000.00) immediately and in return be allowed to occupy their rooms rent-free for three years. He admitted that it might seem quite high as a one time payment, but in reality it wasn’t. If Malmgren would pay the

⁹⁶ John Morehead to Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat, May 12, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 17 and June 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

current rate of rent in Leningrad for the next three years, he would expend \$6500.00 and that only if the rental rates didn't increase (which they inevitably would). Due to the housing shortage, Malmgren advised Morehead that this was a most beneficial arrangement, all the more so as the agreement would insure that rent would not be raised for the next few years. As an example of Soviet duplicity, when a worker rented space he could expect to pay 20 kopecks per quadratic meter. A pastor would pay 1 ruble, 50 kopecks or more.¹⁰⁰ When Morehead wondered as to whether it might be more cost-efficient simply to purchase a building, Malmgren reminded him of the complicated circumstances under which he was operating. The Soviet government owned all property! The Church had no rights and only used its property at the government's good pleasure. The Soviets could easily take any building back, no matter the fact that one had purchased the property outright. In order to expedite funding, Malmgren suggested it would be best to send the funds through the German Consulate in Leningrad by way of the General Consul Herr Schliep.¹⁰¹

As rector of the Bible school, Malmgren assembled a very capable staff. The Dean of Students (Studentenleiter) would be Friedrich Wacker, who had served as a pastor in the Volga region village of Norka. Otto Wentzel, a graduate of the theological department in Leipzig, would hold the position of Studieninspektor (Student Overseer). Professor Brock would teach the Classical languages while local pastors, Alexander Juergenson, Paul Reichert, Helmut Hansen and Arnold Frischfeld, would teach the remaining subjects.¹⁰² Frischfeld was remembered by

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰¹ John Morehead to Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat, May 12, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 17 and June 17, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 17, 1925 and Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat to John Morehead, May 5, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

student, Johannes Lel, as being exceptionally literate. When he had to teach either Greek or Hebrew, he read it as fluently as his own native German. Lel recollected that he only had a small sheet of paper with some notes on it. His memory was exceptional.¹⁰³ In fact, it appears that the level of instruction was quite high, as future student Bruno Toryassan would remember Hebrew verses to the end of his life in 2009!¹⁰⁴ General instruction for the courses would be given in German, but the other ethnic groups represented in the Bible school (Estonian, Latvian, Finnish/Ingrian) would be allowed to do practical work in their native tongue. The plans were to form a first-year class of 30 students who would range in age from 18 to 35. The course of study was planned to last three years.¹⁰⁵

There was one matter that troubled Morehead as he sought to raise support for the Bible school, and it concerned a problem that had been encountered by Bishop Meyer in Siberia and the Volga. Congregationalists were often engaging in “sheep-stealing,” enticing Lutherans away from their Church. The problem surfaced likewise in the American Midwest, where a large number of Russian-Germans had settled. *Die Weltpost*, a Lincoln, Nebraska-based secular newspaper, described life back in the Volga region, so the NLC kept tabs on the conversations generated by its articles. Recently, Morehead had become aware that the proposed seminary dean, Friedrich Wacker, had letters of his published in *Die Weltpost*. Morehead’s concern was that Wacker seemed to be appealing for seminary support through Jacob Volz, a well-known Congregationalist active in the Volga region. Firstly, Morehead was concerned with public information about the seminary plans because he knew that the Soviet authorities could easily

¹⁰³ Johannes Lel, “Как Нас Уничтожали, Но не Уничтожили” [“How They Were Trying to Destroy Us, but Didn’t Succeed”], *Наша Церковь* [*Our Church*] (September 2001), 15.

¹⁰⁴ “Будьте Богом хранимы...” [May God Preserve You...], unpublished article by Tanya Ryumina, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 17, 1925 and Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat to John Morehead, May 5, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

gain access to that information. It was no secret that Bolshevik agents were actively engaged in the United States. Secondly, Morehead raised funds among firmly convinced Lutherans and knew that they would not countenance a unionist or mixed seminary in Russia. The NLC also had always been concerned with those duplicating efforts at fundraising in America, although there was a certain arrogance on its part, too, that all aid must go through it alone. In reality, though, Morehead found it simpler and more transparent to operate through church channels rather than individuals whose motives might be suspect. (Morehead did acknowledge, though, that he believed Volz to be a good man). For these reasons, there was also some enmity towards the Iowa and Missouri Synods for attempting to work outside the structure of the NLC.¹⁰⁶

When Bishop Malmgren was made aware of Wacker's actions, he was surprised and disappointed. After quizzing Wacker on his actions, he was relieved, though. It seems Wacker had relatives from the Missouri Synod with whom he often corresponded. They were generally interested in the Volga region where he served since they were originally from that region themselves. Apparently some of his letters had been passed along to *Die Weltpost* without his knowledge. It was no doubt a surprising revelation to the Russian-Germans in the Soviet Union that there was such a level of interest in America about their lives. Wacker reassured Malmgren, who in turn assured Morehead that Wacker would not solicit funds from Congregationalists. The irony, of course, was that Morehead, of the United Lutheran Church, was defending the construction of a purely Lutheran seminary in Russia, something with which Missouri Synod Lutherans would also be in sympathy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, May 12, 1925. LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Oscar Mees to W.L. Scheduling, October 18, 1922 and Lauritz Larsen to John Morehead, October 24, 1919, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 17, 1925 and John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, July 7, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Finally, on September 15 the hard work came to fruition as the seminary opened its doors with an inaugural service at St. Anne's. (Note bene: I will use the designation "seminary" from now on, as the Bible school in actuality operated as a seminary and was perceived as such in the eyes of the Lutherans in Russia and America). Bishop Malmgren had received the \$5000.00 from Dr. Morehead and so the housing was now in order for the students to begin their studies. The first-year class registered 24 students out of a total of 60 applicants, ultimately numbering 18 students as six had to decline for family reasons or military service. The students came from various regions throughout the country: The Crimea, Kherson [Ukraine], the Caucasus and other southern regions, not to mention the Leningrad region. Although 14 students were of German ethnicity, there were also three Latvians and one Russian studying. Malmgren described them as "...full of zeal and desire to equip and educate themselves so that they could give a good witness for their Savior and be servants in His vineyards."¹⁰⁸

What did a normal day look like at the seminary? Well, the day began with devotions at 8:30 a.m., followed by a small breakfast usually consisting of coffee and butter bread (Butterbrot). The daily lectures would then begin at 9:15 and last until 2 p.m., with a 15-minute interval between classes. A two-course lunch would follow at 2:30 p.m. (a three-course meal on Sundays and holidays) and then the students would have free time from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., where many would go for a walk. After the break, study time commenced with a light dinner (Abendbrot) taking place at 7:30 p.m., followed by evening devotions. Music lovers had access to the piano until 11 p.m. and all lights were expected to be out and students in bed by midnight.

The subjects taught were what you might expect from a normal seminary in Europe at that time. Alongside the necessary but more difficult subjects of Greek and Hebrew, students began

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Malmgren to Morehead, September 7, 1925, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

with Introduction to Theology and Introduction to the Old Testament. Related to the language classes were exegetical lectures on Genesis and the Gospel of Matthew. As a reflection of those times, Albert Schweitzer's *The Life of Jesus* was offered, as were practical subjects like Homiletics and Catechetics. For history courses, A General History of Religion, History of the Ancient and Medieval Church and the History of Dogmatics were the subjects covered. The biggest problem for the seminarians was the lack of textbooks. For example, the materials for *The Life of Jesus* and Introduction to the Old Testament consisted of one teacher's copy for all of the students. For the Hebrew textbooks, three or four students had to share a copy. The seminary would certainly need more books in the future, but at least a beginning had now been made.¹⁰⁹

No one at that time knew how long the seminary would be able to operate freely, but in the middle of the 1920s it certainly appeared as though the Lutheran Church just might be able to survive the restrictions of the Communist regime. While it was a time of rapid change in the country, it was also a time of hope for Lutherans. Edith Müthel's description of her father's ordination paints a picture of a Church that was still full of spirit despite all of the hardships of the past eight years. Emil Pfeiffer's ordination took place at St. Anne's in Leningrad on a bright, sunny June day in 1925. Müthel has remembered all of her long life the garlands of flowers, the smell of roses permeating the packed church where not one space was vacant, the pealing of the organ, the blending of the rich voices in the choir, the sun beaming through the stained glass windows. She and others could have been forgiven for wondering: surely the Lord would never let such a Church die?¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Friedrich Wacker, "Church Calendar 1927," LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁰ Müthel, *An Gottes Hand*, 19.

The Status of the Lutheran Church in the Middle of the 1920s–1926: Good News and Bad News

As the congregation of Sts. Peter and Paul in Moscow prepared to celebrate its 300th anniversary and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia its 350th in 1926, Bishop Meyer in a secret report described for foreign Lutherans the status of his own congregation and the Lutheran Church at large in the Soviet Union. Likening the Church to the broken tabernacle of David which the prophet Amos saw in his vision of the Kingdom of Judea, Meyer pondered how long the Lutheran Church could survive given the oppressive conditions surrounding it. At the beginning of World War I, the congregation had numbered 20,000 parishioners, with 300 baptisms, 225 confirmations, 200 marriages and 350 burials each year. This enormous church held space for 2500 people while its three gymnasiums plus other lower level schools numbered over 1500 students. There were three pastors serving the congregation with one part-time pastor. In the words of Bishop Meyer, though, this congregation was not only badly damaged but “completely ruined.” The nationalization of the property led to the church losing about 3 million rubles, or the equivalent of 1.5 million dollars of property and funds! Now only 1/3 of its former parishioners remained as many had left for the Baltic States. By 1926 it was reduced to 100 baptisms, 75 confirmations, 80 weddings and 85 deaths a year. Only one pastor served the congregation, and at times he even forced to fill in at St. Michaels.

Yet despite all of the obstacles put in front of the Lutheran Church as a whole over the past few years, the perseverance of the Church and its parishioners was remarkable. For example, in the past the Church had relied upon its property and funds to undergird a variety of charitable institutions and its pastors. Now that the communist state had taken that all away from them, there was of course a reduction in income and the number of parishioners attending church. And yet despite the decline of St. Peter and Paul to about one third of its previous level, parishioners

actually tithed more money now than they had previously. People seemed to recognize that they had quite a treasure in their church and seemed to value it even more than in the past. Many city congregations had even added Saturday evening services, and in the case of St. Peter and Paul in Moscow, they were very well attended. Looking over the circumstances of the Lutheran Church in the Volga region, Meyer saw reason for cautious optimism. Attendance was up and pastors were ministering to larger crowds than they had in the recent years of war and famine. The 63-year-old Volga District President, Nathaniel Heptner, was kept busy on Sundays and throughout the week, holding services in villages and cities throughout the Volga region. One congregation regularly numbered 500 to 1000 attendees but could also reach numbers in excess of 1500! Pastor Heptner actually wore a pedometer during one communion service, calculating that he walked 12 kilometers in the altar space even though he was just giving communion! During the week of Pentecost in 1926, he traversed the Volga River villages, confirming more than 1500 girls and boys.¹¹¹

Heptner's restoration to the pastoral ministry was nothing short of a miracle. He had been charged with political crimes for distributing food for the NLC and was sentenced to prison for a term of five years and four months. His initial response was to reject any accusation of guilt, but due to poor health he apparently broke down and confessed his guilt. It is more than likely that he simply confessed that he was not opposed to the Soviet regime (as most Lutheran pastors would) and was then subsequently freed under the terms of a July 10, 1924 amnesty law passed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Republic of the Volga Germans. The government acted as if it was showing mercy to a man who could have died in prison, but also admitted that his death might cause agitation against the government among the Volga German Lutherans. Bishop

¹¹¹ Theophil Meyer, "Church Report: 1926," LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Meyer obviously played a role in Heptner's liberation, too, as he interceded with none other than the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Kalinin. Whatever the reasons for his release, a revitalized Heptner was doing the work of a much younger man. His family's zeal to serve the Church at any cost would be illustrated in the Fall when his son, Bernhard, decided to enter the seminary in Leningrad.¹¹²

Heptner's situation was not the only good news that the Church received about those imprisoned for their faith. Morehead had never given up on his efforts to free Kurt Muss, believing that he had been arrested on account of unselfishly carrying out the food distribution for the NLC in southern Russia. He addressed a specific letter to Meyer on March 25, 1924, recalling, "He undertook his mission for me when I was ill with the full approval of the American Relief Administration and his papers were countersigned by the representative of the Soviet government. He made reports to this office, just as others made them. His reports have never been published in America and will not be published. His imprisonment seems to us to have been a great injustice."¹¹³ Morehead asked Meyer if there was anything specific that could be done for Muss. Perhaps they could find a lawyer? The NLC would pay for him. Or perhaps it might be best to contact Dr. Fritzjof Nansen, who had easier access to the Kremlin? Morehead prayed that God would keep him safe, and looked to Meyer for any information that could be had on the fate of Kurt Muss.¹¹⁴ Now word came down to Morehead in August 1924 that Kurt Muss had been freed from prison after 1-½ years. Unlike the liberation of Pastor Heptner, Meyer informed him that in this case he had exerted no influence. Meyer's response would make sense to Morehead for he

¹¹² Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 116–17, 328, 344; Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 21, 1924, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹³ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, March 25, 1924, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁴ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, March 25, 1924.

always believed that Muss' freedom in this instance was God's answer to the continued intercessory prayers of those who had not forgotten him or his sacrifice for the people of the church. After Muss' surprising liberation, he was sentenced to exile in the Yaroslavky region without the right to live in either Moscow or Leningrad.¹¹⁵

While in the Yaroslavsky region, Muss made the acquaintance of a famous Russian scientist, Nikolai Morozov, who took a liking to the inquisitive young man and would continue corresponding with him and his family for many years. Due to Morozov's intercession, in June 1926 Muss was allowed to return to Leningrad where he immediately took the exams necessary to be received into the ministry of the Lutheran Church. On September 16th he began serving his vicarage at St. Peter's under the guidance of his old classmate at Yuryev University, Helmut Hansen. But his Russian-speaking congregation had never forgotten him, praying and waiting for him to be released from his Solovetsky Island prison cell. And so like Peter unexpectedly walking out of his jail cell due to the Lord's intervention, Kurt Muss returned to freedom and would take up the pastoral duties at Jesus Christ Lutheran Church in Leningrad the following year.¹¹⁶

Over in the Crimean District, the news of a revival in church life spread to the Central Office of the Church in Moscow. District President Ferdinand Hörschelmann was being kept constantly on the go by the religious demands of Lutheran parishioners. The vigorous 70-year-old joked that he was riding a virtual merry-go-round that past spring and summer, having just finished one round of pastoral visits only to immediately embark upon another throughout the Crimean districts. Further proof that age was no obstacle to a dedicated servant of God, 65-year-

¹¹⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 21, 1924 and John Morehead to Robert Withington, February 8, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁶ Shkarovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss;" Muss-Tumm Family Letter Collection; Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 5, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

old Northern Caucasus District President Emil Bonwetsch's travels extended all the way down to Baku on the Caspian Sea, covering an estimated journey that would exceed a trip from Europe to America! Bishop Meyer was especially pleased that Siberia was beginning to get the pastors that he had promised. Four new pastors had been sent, consisting of two Germans, one Latvian and one Estonian. One German pastor was his erstwhile travel companion from the previous year, Friedrich Deutschmann. Deutschmann now ministered from Slavgorod to 70 preaching stations while the other German pastor, Siegfried Schultz, covered 90 preaching stations from his base in Omsk. In addition, four pastors traveled to Siberia in June to assist the ministry to the scattered congregations in Siberia. Arthur Kluck, a veteran of the ARA distribution via the NLC, Arthur Hanson from the Crimea, Alexander Migla, a Latvian, and the Bishop to the Estonians in Russia, Oskar Palsa, all participated in the summer journey. Bishop Meyer had to be pleased that others shared his concern for the future of the Lutheran Church in Siberia.¹¹⁷

Suffice it to say, the Lutheran Church was far from dead in these regions where pastors worked tirelessly with little pay to meet the spiritual needs of their people. Church choirs and even musical groups were forming again within the congregations after falling into disuse during the famine years. In general, the people were responding favorably to the uniting of the Church through the General Synod held in Moscow [1924]. Meyer confessed that it had "strengthened anew the church's self-conscience and deepened the love for the Lutheran church."¹¹⁸ Even more important was the realization that the youth of the Church seemed to be enthusiastic during catechetical instruction and were attending services in greater numbers.

The state of the Lutheran Church in 1926 could not only be described by the revival of

¹¹⁷ *Unsere Kirche, October–November 1927*, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 22, 1926, and John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 29, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

congregations throughout the country, it could also be seen in the restoration of institutions like the seminary. In September the seminary began its second year of studies, having added six more students than it anticipated for the first-year class. Combined with the now second-year students there were 34 students total, a strong move forward in establishing a vibrant seminary. Bishop Malmgren would need to find more accommodations for the students, because they would not have enough room in their current student dorms. With regard to costs, the Lutheran Church had been able to run the seminary in its first year (1925–26) for basically \$10,000.00 with the local Russian Lutheran congregations raising an additional \$2650.00. Of course, so much of the congregational support would depend upon the result of the farmers' harvest every year. Nonetheless, the seminary was operating efficiently and Malmgren and Dean Wacker were providing Morehead with the financial information necessary so that he could know how much money to raise among American and European Lutherans.¹¹⁹ All in all, Bishop Meyer discerned "...a process of clarification and sorting out" taking place in the congregations. "Those that still retain their Christian faith are today probably more conscientious and deeper Christians than the average church members during former years. ... We notice this especially in the younger generation."¹²⁰ Meyer noted that the Church was most robust in the Volga settlements, where the old "German rustic nature" would not give up its old traditions despite the changing culture of the Soviet Union. There young and old held together in strong Lutheran communities, rarely if ever renouncing the Faith in light of the persecution of religious believers.¹²¹

And yet, the picture was not entirely rosy. There was confusion among some believers

¹¹⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 22, 1926, and Friedrich Wacker to John Morehead, December 28, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 29, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 29, 1926. Bishop Meyer estimated more than half of the Lutherans in the USSR lived in the Volga region, approximately 520,000.

stemming from active proselytism on the part of Protestant “free preachers” as well as certain cultic groups in the villages. The free preachers were working in tandem with Congregationalists from America, who tended to financially support their “sheep-stealing” endeavors among the traditional Volga Lutheran communities. However, if the local Lutheran pastors exhibited a strong presence, these Protestant groups rarely made inroads among the population. At times, religious revivals took place through the influence of certain Pietistic groups. Meyer, for his part, was not entirely opposed to the phenomenon of religious revivals. If a revival was tied to the Lutheran Church, as they appeared to be in the Ukraine and the Crimea, it could actually refresh and invigorate the Church. Far more threatening to him were the extreme religious groups that would appear from time to time in the Volga communities. For example, during the stressful civil war and famine years [1920–1922] in the Volga region, chiliastic teachings led to excesses and only died down after reasonable living conditions returned. But recently on the Wiesenseite (wheat field, or right side) side of the Volga, a local lay preacher had begun preaching that Christ’s return was imminent. In order that they not be found sleeping when Christ came, the ecstatic gatherings of this group were punctuated by a “mad-like dancing,” prompting the nickname *Tanzbrudern* (Dancing Brothers). Related to this strange behavior was the teaching that as “Jonathan’s friend,” every man receives a female mate. It is not certain whether this reference was to the biblical Jonathan or the preacher himself, but either way, it was troubling. There were additional groups like the *Abendlichter* [Evening Lights] who naturally gathered in the evenings, as well as the Irvingite cult in Volhynia (western Ukraine). Thankfully these religious excesses were making little headway among the Lutheran populations in the Soviet Union.¹²²

¹²² Theophil Meyer, “General Report of the Church: 1926,” LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

In Meyer's estimation, although the Church faced dangers such as these within the Volga communities and other regions, the recent unification of Lutheran congregations in the Soviet Union held out hope for a future of strong, confessional Lutheranism. The marginal Christianity of the past was being winnowed out of the Church and a more firm commitment to the old faith was being restored. While he did not want to minimize the persecution of the Church, Meyer also felt that it was not facing "destruction or abolition." His hope was that the older generation would preserve its Lutheran heritage for the younger generation, whose day he believed he wouldn't see but would come when the Lord "...will in time re-erect the fallen church."¹²³ While he contemplated the existence of the Church in the future, Bishop Meyer experienced the daily struggles of a churchman in an atheist state that would temper the optimism of any normal person. When the state nationalized church property in 1918, St. Peter and Paul lost the exclusive right to exclusively retain the right to the pastor's home on the church grounds. Previously, the ten-room, two-floor home housed three pastors. But now Bishop Meyer and his family of four had access only to the lower floor. Meyer and his wife occupied one room [18 quadratic meters], his son the second room [35 q. m.-which also served as the only kitchen and living room], his daughter the third room [15 ½ q. m.], the church organist the fourth room [15 ½ q. m. and also the church office] and the church groundskeeper and his wife the fifth room [14 ½ q. m.]. With communization of housing, 14 or 15 people now lived on the upper floor, employees of a local factory.

As a member of the clergy, in essence, a "non-person," Meyer had to pay the exorbitant monthly rate of 300 rubles [app. \$150.00] to rent his family's rooms. These costs did not include heating, lighting or water. Try as it might, the congregation could only raise about 30% of the

¹²³ Theophil Meyer, "General Report of the Church: 1926," LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

costs associated with the expenses of the parsonage. Meyer was not accustomed to living in a home with “strange people,” lending weight to the speculation that his not entirely welcome neighbors were anything but church people. But the reality of life in the Soviet Union included the recognition that all property now belonged to the state. By March 1926, the Communal Housing Administration of Moscow would conclude its contract with the local factory, thus allowing the workers to set up their own cooperative and take ownership of the home. Meyer was certain that he and the other church workers would either be forced to pay even higher rates or would be kicked out of the home. After all, as a member of the clergy and a non-person, he was singled out by good Soviet citizens as one of the “former people.”¹²⁴

To further complicate the situation, Mr. Raudkepp, the church organist, had died in 1925, and now in order to keep his room the congregation was obliged to pay 35 rubles a month [app. \$17.50]. The High Church Council was now working in his room as well as housing the church archive there. In addition, due to additional work and responsibilities as bishop, Meyer proposed calling another pastor to serve at Sts. Peter and Paul. But how would they pay him or find an apartment for him? The housing shortage had reached catastrophic levels in Moscow with an average of 50,000 people a month moving into the city. Always thinking ahead, Meyer proposed the possibility of constructing living quarters within the church building itself. More than likely, High Church Council member Paul Althausen, who was a lawyer in Moscow and a member of St. Michael’s Lutheran, advised him as to what was permissible under Soviet law. The sacristy could be reconstructed into a passable apartment with three bedrooms, and a kitchen, living room

¹²⁴ This phrase, *Biivshe lyudi*, which was used in derogatory fashion for those who were considered representative of the old Czarist regime. The fact that the Lutheran Church actually stood in no close relationship with the state was beside the point. It and its pastors were symbolic of the old manner of life and were supposed to die out in atheist Russia. See Theophil Meyer, "Confidential Church Report: 1925," LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

and working room could be constructed in the cellar. Meyer estimated that the cost of this reconstruction would be about \$7500.00, for which they would naturally need assistance from the Americans. Next to the chapel was a stone house where the second pastor could be housed, although currently it was uninhabitable. The congregation also could have a second floor built so that the new organist, the deaconess [Tilly Meyer], the church groundskeeper and the High Church Council would have their own rooms. Meyer thought that it would be easier to get government approval for the reconstruction of this building rather than continue to pay unreasonable rental rates. They would also be able to use these apartments rent-free for many years according to the current law, although naturally any plan concerning housing could only be assumed to be temporary in the Soviet Union.¹²⁵

As complicated as the housing situation was for Bishop Meyer and other pastors, a far more shocking event occurred later that summer (August 27) in Siberia that would have a chilling effect on any pastor serving a congregation in the Soviet Union. A recently commissioned pastor, Siegfried Schultz, had only just completed a sermon in the Siberian town of Tara, 300 versts north of Omsk, when a radical Estonian Communist by the name of Puusepp accosted him openly on the street. Puusepp shot Pastor Schultz three times in the back in broad daylight (12 noon), killing him on the spot. At his trial, Puusepp declared that he hated priests with a passion and that this pastor in particular had disturbed his anti-religious propaganda.¹²⁶ Aside from the personal tragedy involved, because Schultz had a five-year old son and his wife was expecting their second child at Christmas, the Church had lost an energetic, able servant. Schultz spoke three languages fluently and had been covering 90 widely scattered preaching

¹²⁵ Theophil Meyer, "Confidential Church Report: 1925."

¹²⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 20, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 114.

stations from his base in Omsk. Germans, Russians, Latvians and Estonians, had been coming to him in large numbers. As a result, many who had been living basically pagan lives were returning to the Lutheran Church and were being confirmed and married in church ceremonies. Schultz was beginning to organize the congregations, so his sudden loss was a great tragedy for the Church.

Bishop Malmgren felt keenly the loss of Pastor Schultz since he had ordained him five years ago. Dr. Morehead was likewise deeply saddened because the LWC had commissioned Schultz for Siberian mission trips and saw his pastoral service as only the beginning of a restoration of the Lutheran witness in Siberia. Now his widow was left destitute, not only being pregnant with a young child at home, but also because the congregation was two months behind on the pastor's salary. Malmgren appealed to Morehead, "Who can help us here?"¹²⁷ Naturally, Morehead immediately agreed with Malmgren's request to establish a fund not only for the widow Schultz but also for other church employees who were in dire straits.¹²⁸ That assistance would be needed for the widow of yet another veteran of the Siberian missions, because after his mission journey that summer the 63 year-old Bishop to the Estonians in Russia, Oskar Palsa, passed away on October 29. Known for his strong constitution, he continued to serve under difficult conditions that summer in the Minusinsk region of Siberia despite being very sick. As soon as he returned home, his energy having been sapped, he slowly sank away after being bedridden for two months. Palsa's death was a severe blow to the Estonian contingent of the

¹²⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 20, 1926; *Unsere Kirche, October–November 1927*, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²⁸ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 3, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. Mrs. Schultz would be relocated to Dresden where she would receive some regular assistance. As late as 1935, Morehead was requesting funds to help her and her two children. See John Morehead to LWC, February 27, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Lutheran Church in Russia, who had lost Bishop Gruenberg only three years before.¹²⁹

In his report to Lutherans in Russia on the state of the Church in Siberia in 1926, Bishop Meyer prefaced his comments with a quotation from Revelation 3:11: “I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”¹³⁰ The Christian church was becoming increasingly threatened throughout the world, he warned. Earnest Christians needed to recognize that they were living in the Last Days, the time of the great falling away from Christianity. In a sermon at the October celebration of Sts. Peter and Paul’s 300th anniversary, Marxstadt’s pastor Arthur Kluck echoed similar themes. Encouraging his parishioners to stand by the Christ of the apostles and martyrs in these challenging times, Kluck rhetorically asked the congregation, “Do you also want to leave this [faith]? No, no, no! We will stand with the apostles... Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”¹³¹ All Meyer, Kluck or any other Lutheran pastor would have to do is observe the religious situation in the Soviet Union and apocalyptic images would immediately present themselves.

In fact, even before his work with the NLC via ARA, in 1918 Pastor Arthur Kluck had come upon the radar screen of the Communists at the Congress of the Volga. As a participant in the congress, Kluck objected to a plan by the local commissar, David Schultz, to create a Lutheran Church of the German Colonies independent from the historic Church headed by Bishop Freifeldt. (This was the same plan that Pastor Streck wrote about to Pastor Ernst of the NLC). His wife, Bertha, was made of similar mettle. After the Bolshevik Revolution and in defiance of the law, she continued to arrange Bible lessons for children. Arrested on January 6,

¹²⁹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 573. Seminary professor Albert Juergenson would replace Palsa as bishop until his own death in 1929.

¹³⁰ *Unsere Kirche, October–November 1927*.

¹³¹ *Unsere Kirche, October–November 1927*.

1920, after arguing publicly with Schultz about the Communist plan to undermine the Church, Arthur Kluck was imprisoned in the Volga River city that was then named Yekaterinstadt (soon to be renamed Marxstadt). In response his congregation in Frank gathered 610 signatures, providing evidence of his innocence. Several other villages rallied to his defense as well, and apparently this played a role in his liberation from prison in March 1920. But since the Communists controlled public property, they got the last laugh, evicting him and his family from the parsonage. As if by divine fiat if not irony, in 1924 Kluck accepted the call to become pastor of the large Lutheran congregation in Marxstadt.¹³²

Kluck's words at St. Peter and Paul summed up the situation as it existed in Siberia as well. A beginning had been made in efforts to restore the Church, but those gains among Luther-ans in Siberia had to be sustained by the Church. Morehead's thoughts on this matter reflected a sober outlook, admitting to Malmgren upon learning of Palsa's and Schultz's deaths, "In the battle we are waging ... we must expect casualties and losses."¹³³ But Morehead could never remain pessimistic for long. In a more optimistic vein, he continued, "But He that is with us is greater than those who are against us."¹³⁴ It was a call for encouragement to those who, despite the positive gains made in 1926, knew that there were devils loose in the land and they would stop at nothing less than the annihilation of Christianity.

Despite the trials challenging the Church in Siberia, Meyer had to be impressed by the spirit of his pastors. When asked at a Moscow conference of pastors in October, who might take the place of Pastor Schultz, more pastors put up their hands than could possibly be sent for the

¹³² Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 359; Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

¹³³ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 571; John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 3, 1926.

¹³⁴ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 3, 1926.

planned summer mission visits of Siberia in 1927. Furthermore, when Dean Wacker announced the death of Schultz to the seminarians, four students immediately expressed their desire to be sent to Siberia upon completion of their studies. Such responses encouraged Bishop Meyer that Schultz's position in Omsk would not remain vacant for long.¹³⁵ Despite the difficulties of operating in an officially atheist land, the state of the Lutheran Church was better than it ever had been since the Bolshevik Revolution. But that didn't mean that the dark shadows of persecution were not visible and that further trouble didn't lie ahead. What had to be encouraging to Bishops Meyer and Malmgren, though, was the determined spirit of their pastors and seminarians. They were ready for the approaching spiritual battle. And it would come.

1927–1928: A Journal, Ethnic Reconciliation, the First Graduates, and Another Synod

As 1927 dawned, the noose was tightening around Bishop Meyer in Moscow. One of the promises of the Soviet regime was to favor the working class over the “former people,” resulting in lower rental payments for housing. For the moment, St. Peter and Paul paid a reasonable price of \$1500.00 a year for the five rooms that the Meyer's and church workers occupied in their former parsonage. They had initially been given this preferential price since they had lived there so long and because the house was not in the best condition.¹³⁶ The State Communal Housing Administration factory had been charging rent to a factory whose workers were living in the other rooms, but now the government decided to give the property to a local school administration. The former Lutheran girls' gymnasium that was next door to the parsonage and church had already been converted to a Soviet school and Meyer was convinced that the school administration

¹³⁵ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 577.

¹³⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 11, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. The house as of 2017 is still occupied by Russia's current incarnation of the OGPU, the FSB.

would soon take over his rooms as well. So the proposed plan to build upon the land also would not make sense because the school administration ultimately would own anything built on “their land.” Seeking ways to avoid trouble with the authorities, Meyer and the High Church Council concluded that purchasing a home on the border of the city was the best answer to his dilemma. There one could rent a home for \$1500.00 a year as opposed to the \$3500.00 rate that was the going price in the center of the city where St. Peter and Paul was located. The idea was to get a large home that could house both the bishop’s family and the High Church Council offices. Reminding Morehead that Moscow had changed dramatically from the time he last visited in 1922, Meyer indicated that with the new bus and tram lines, one could travel to the center of the city from its borders in 30 minutes.¹³⁷

While he was speculating upon all the possibilities, including the rental of a two story house on the edge of the city for \$10,000.00 (for ten years) and figuring that \$1000.00 rent a year was better than the \$1500.00 currently paid for the bishop’s rooms, the latest proposed plan suddenly ground to a halt.¹³⁸ The school administration now demanded Bishop Meyer’s rooms by the first of May. Meyer was ordered for the first time to appear in a Soviet court on May 13 as the accused who would have to defend his right to his longtime residence! In response, the bishop decided on principle to dig in. He would not leave his rooms after all. He reasoned that if he left the rooms, his successor at St. Peter and Paul would never be able to effectively carry out the ministry without the apartment next to the church. Working with the government, as he lamented to Morehead, required “unbelievable elasticity.” Furthermore, Meyer concluded that he could not carry out his duties as bishop properly and serve simultaneously as the pastor of

¹³⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 11, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁸ Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat to Morehead, March 27, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Russia's largest Lutheran congregation. Recognizing the burdens placed upon him, the congregation agreed to call another pastor. Unfortunately, the called pastor could not leave his congregation for another year and the St. Peter and Paul congregation didn't want a different pastor. So Meyer was forced to remain in these uncomfortable living conditions with the added pressure from the school administration to vacate the home he had lived in since 1911. He simply could not leave his people without a spiritual shepherd in these perilous times, even if his health would suffer as a result.¹³⁹

The money for the apartment, though, was already on its way to Moscow through Deutsche Bank in Berlin. One consistent problem with communication between the West and the USSR was trying to do so outside the prying eyes of the Soviet censors; thus, as letters were posted quickly, they often crisscrossed one another. Meyer was aware that his had just occurred as he again rethought renting a home on the edge of Moscow. What's more, he realized that Morehead had given of his own personal funds for this goal to have a separate house for the High Church Council and the bishop. "I can't thank you enough," he said, as he also expressed his thanks to the Americans for their concern.¹⁴⁰ The High Church Council was well aware that Morehead was the driving force behind all of the projects that were keeping the Church moving forward: (1) the seminary; (2) the proposed kuester courses; (3) the Siberian mission trips; (4) church repairs; (5)

¹³⁹ Theophil Meyer to Morehead, May 12, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 369. The called pastor was none other than Arthur Kluck. In a letter to Morehead on February 17, 1925, Meyer described him thus: "Pastor Kluck is without a doubt the most able of the younger pastors. He is not the kind of man that catches your attention [shines] at first glance, but he is a devout believer, a good Lutheran pastor, an excellent speaker, very amiable in personal communication, moreover energetic and consistently and thoroughly reliable." Meyer's defense of Kluck was all the more courageous given that he had been condemned to one year's probation [1925] by the government for storing forbidden religious literature (e.g., Bibles, hymnals). Kluck replaced Meyer at St. Peter and Paul for two months in 1926, but ultimately decided that he should remain in Marxstadt. See Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 17, 1925; Bertha Kluck to John Morehead, June 30, 1934, and Kluck Family Documents.

¹⁴⁰ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, May 13, 1927 and Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, May 12, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

regular pastoral support; and (6) the proposed church office. In gratitude they assured Morehead, “We will not tire in the battle that has been ordained for us to rescue the dear Lutheran Church in this land.”¹⁴¹

As they sought to raise funds for the church office in Moscow, Meyer continually worried about what the congregations might think when they learned that such a sum was to be spent, even though it was important for the whole Church. He knew that his people were suffering and possessed so little. It would have to be a topic for discussion at the General Synod in 1928, for which he was already preparing. Part of the problem was that the Lutheran congregations historically did not have to pay for their pastors. Even though the Lutheran Church suffered persecution under the czars, as official “servants of the state,” pastors were paid employees of the state. So although the Lutheran Church in the Soviet era had more freedom in its affairs, the congregations still were not accustomed to gathering funds for the preservation of their Church. Nevertheless, through Bishop Meyer’s influence, they were slowly but surely learning how to support the Church. Meyer expressed hope that they might even gather \$1500.00 for the church office in Moscow that year as well as contribute \$2500.00 for the seminary in Leningrad. Given the economic and political conditions in the Soviet Union, it is evident that the Lutheran parishioners were doing what they could to keep their Church alive. But intimidation from anti-religious activists also existed, as well as the government itself, who at times would forbid locals from gathering funds for the Church.¹⁴²

With pressure encompassing him on all sides, Bishop Meyer took advantage of his dacha (summer cottage) in Golizyno, a good one hour and ten minute ride from Moscow. There in the

¹⁴¹ Lutherisches Oberkirchenrat to John Morehead, March 18, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴² Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 19, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

peace and comfort of this forested area he could plan for the coming General Synod and retreat from the old parsonage that had now become, in his words, “a living hell.” Meyer would come into the city on Saturdays and Sundays in order to conduct worship services, but he was already seeking an adjutant to assist him for one year. (Pastor Herbert Guenther served in Warenburg on the Volga and could afford to leave for a year due to the sufficient numbers of pastors in that region). During the week, Nizhniy Novgorod District President Holzmayr would represent church interests in Moscow, along with Pastor Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., who would provide temporary assistance beginning June 1st.¹⁴³ Besides preparing for the upcoming synod, Meyer also had taken whatever free time he had in the past year to write a book about his mission experiences in Siberia entitled: *To Siberia (Nach Siberien)*. Meyer hoped that Morehead could find a translator to get the book published in English and publicize the great needs of the Lutheran Church in Siberia.¹⁴⁴

Burdened by all of his efforts to keep up a busy work schedule, Bishop Meyer suffered a serious physical breakdown that forced him to his bed that summer. He admitted to suffering from depression, a natural response given the attention that the Soviet state had accorded him. Fortunately for Meyer, his neighbor in Goliznyo was the famous Dr. Kramer, known for his service to Vladimir Lenin a few years previous. Combined with the advice of his longtime doctor, Dr. Cronenthal, Meyer’s prognosis was favorable although it was recommended that he remain in Goliznyo and convalesce for two months. His work would also be curtailed due to the problem he had with his eyes. He was having trouble reading with even the sharpest of eyeglasses, forcing

¹⁴³ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, May 12 and August 4, 1927; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 348. Pastor Hörschelmann’s youngest son, Ernst, had become the organist at Sts. Peter and Paul in 1926. See “Прервание Мелодие [“Interrupted Melody”]” in *Neues Leben*, Number 21, 2001.

¹⁴⁴ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, September 1, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

his wife to read to him. His son Traugott, who couldn't enter a Soviet university due to being the son of a pastor, would also provide care for him in Golizyno. On August 4, Meyer attempted to return to activity by simultaneously writing to Dr. Carl Paul, Bishop Ludwig Ihmels in Leipzig and John Morehead in America. Apologizing for copying them all on this one letter, he reluctantly confessed that he could no longer carry on the work of bishop and pastor due to his health. He struggled with the additional concern as to how he would support his family since the congregation had covered utilities and room and board for the Meyer's. (He did not receive a salary from the congregation). His daughter Elisabeth was a great help since she was working at two Moscow universities after receiving her Ph.D. in Germanic languages and literature in 1924 at the University of Leipzig. She provided much of the family's financial support although she was at the moment in Germany for academic purposes.¹⁴⁵

Due to the worsening economic situation in the Soviet Union, despite the liberalized economic policies promoted by the NEP program, parishioners were giving less and less. Dedicated High Church Council members like Paul Althausen and Arthur Gernsdorff were receiving only small compensation for their work, yet they soldiered on for the good of the Church. Althausen was working on the Church Calendar, a publication that would finally see the light of day along with the first Church journal known as *Unsere Kirche* [*Our Church*]. *Unsere Kirche* had been in the works for some time now but due to the obstruction of Soviet censors had yet to be published. Meyer announced that after six months delay, the first three issues were being submitted for what appeared to be a final, cursory review of the censors. Initially the first two issues were rejected in their entirety, but with the help of good friends the Lutherans were able to redact the

¹⁴⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, Carl Paul and Ludwig Ihmels, August 4, 1927 and Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 18, 1927, August 21, 1924 and John Morehead to C.C. Hein, May 1, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

issues to the satisfaction of Soviet censors. Now Meyer and the Church were awaiting the first issue's publication, a journal that would provide information about the Church to Lutherans throughout the Soviet Union. Meyer was certainly ready for this good news, remarking somewhat incisively that it was "a special day of joy in a dark time." Concluding his letter to his good friends in Germany and America, Meyer joked, "I have done more than enough for today. My wife and son, my loyal co-workers have gone on strike."¹⁴⁶

Morehead was overjoyed with the news that *Unsere Kirche* would soon appear in print. Looking ahead to engaging Meyer and Malmgren more directly in conversation about the issues at hand, as the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the LWC, he invited them both to a meeting in October to be held in Budapest. Given the stark reality of censorship in the Soviet Union, they could never be as open with each other as they could talking face to face in a free country. Meyer's visit to Dresden the previous year had allowed them the opportunity to discuss issues in depth that could otherwise only be broached in a veiled manner through their exchange of letters. Dr. Carl Paul of the Leipzig Mission Society had facilitated the correspondence between Morehead and Malmgren, most likely passing their letters to German diplomats traveling to Russia and back. With Paul's death in the autumn of 1927, a Leipzig banker named Paul Bischoff would take over the duties of arranging couriers.¹⁴⁷ However, with their usual route uncertain in the period immediately after Dr. Paul's death, Malmgren had wanted to get the receipts for seminary gifts to Morehead on time. To do that he actually sent them directly in a letter to Morehead in New York. Still, he worried until being reassured that Morehead had received the letter intact: "It is an uneasy feeling to know that our exchange of letters is liable to

¹⁴⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, Carl Paul and Ludwig Ihmels, August 4, 1927.

¹⁴⁷ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 9, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

the certain inspection and control of unfriendly eyes. And it is liberating now to know that these lines harmlessly and without suspicion have come into your hands.”¹⁴⁸ Their apprehensions were not unfounded. The Soviets were likely wary of those potential conversations between the two, having refused Malmgren a visa the previous year and rejecting this invitation as well. As he invited Meyer to the Budapest conference, urging him to accept only if his health was better, Morehead expressed his concern about the bishop’s extraordinary work schedule: “May I speak to you as a brother a word of caution? Never again dare you commit yourself . . . to undertake so much work as in the past nor to work with such ceaseless and energetic intensity.”¹⁴⁹ Morehead understood him all too well. He also suffered from the same commitment to overwork leading to the brink of exhaustion.

Meanwhile, the summer trips to Siberia continued as sectarian Protestants threatened the existence of a doctrinally sound Lutheranism. In response, the LWC agreed to provide \$300.00 apiece for five preachers: Arthur Kluck, Woldemar Juergens and Friedrich Merz, who would serve the German speakers; Alexander Migla would preach to the the Latvians, but as of yet, there was no one for the Finns or Estonians. Kluck was already a veteran of the Siberian summers and was respected by Bishop Meyer as one who handled “everything in an exemplary manner,” especially as he was eminently suited to address those of a Congregationalist bent. District President Holzmayr, although of an advanced age (60), was scheduled to travel to areas of his large district that has rarely seen visits: Simbirsk, Ufa, Zlatoust, Vladimir and Nizhniy Novgorod. He would need \$200.00 to visit the many Germans and those of Estonian background

¹⁴⁸ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 28, 1927, Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, July 27, 1926 and October 12, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁹ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, September 1, 1927, John Morehead to High Church Council, April 6, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

in this region, both of whose languages he knew well. Before his sickness made such a proposed visit impossible, Bishop Meyer had been planning ambitious visits to the Transcaucasus region and to the separate Lutheran communities in Georgia and central Asia. His proposed itinerary gives one a scope of the vast territories that the Lutherans covered in the Soviet Union. The Lutherans in Georgia numbered approximately 20,000 and had never belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia. Nevertheless they had a doctrinal kinship to the Russians and had been considering joining them, but such conversations required a church official of the importance of Bishop Meyer. The group from central Asia had congregations in the most unlikely of places like the Muslim Tashkent, Samarkand, Merv, Kokand and Bukhara. Surprisingly enough, though, a Pastor Juergenson had already served in Tashkent for the past 35 years! With thousands of believers in central Asia and all of the other places to visit, Meyer had hoped for a 2½ month journey. It would be a journey he would have to put off for yet another year until his health returned.¹⁵⁰

While Bishop Meyer had been resting that summer, High Church Council member and lawyer Paul Althausen was carrying on a correspondence with Dr. Morehead, happily noting that permission had been received to import a large number of Luther's Small Catechisms along with Bible history books. Even better news was that the books were not only in German but also Latvian and Estonian, words dear to Morehead's heart as he continually pressed the Lutherans in Russia not to ignore the minority language groups within their Church. In total there were 5000 of each of the books in German, 1000 of each in Estonian and 500 of each in Latvian.¹⁵¹ Since

¹⁵⁰ High Church Council to John Morehead, March 18, 1927, Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, April 8, 1927 and John Morehead to High Church Council, April 6, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵¹ Paul Althausen to John Morehead, August 5, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

April of 1926, Morehead had been advocating for the printing of Bibles, catechisms and other Christian literature. The door for this mission opportunity had been blocked, but Morehead was trusting "...that in God's own way and time the way may be opened."¹⁵² This permission appeared to offer a clear sign that possibilities existed to do ministry in the Soviet Union despite occasional obstruction from the authorities. Maybe God's time for the church had now come? The LWC would pay for the \$1200.00 transport fee of the German books from Leipzig while the Latvian and Estonian Lutherans would take care of transport from their respective countries.¹⁵³

The import of Christian literature in various languages was a positive development for unity, because those ethnic groups within the Lutheran Church contained within themselves the seeds for irreparable dissension. As Bishops Malmgren and Meyer attempted to unite the factions within their Church post-revolution, they were acutely aware of the need to show that their Church was not simply an enclave of German nationalists. Getting permission to import religious literature in many languages was a beginning in illustrating that point. To continue on the path of reconciliation, though, the seminary would need to graduate more than ethnic German pastors. One of the biggest hindrances to this goal was that the level of general education for the other ethnic groups was lower than that of the Germans. Furthermore, the professors and the majority of students were ethnic Germans, making it imperative that the language of instruction be German.

In his report to the LWC given in Dresden in 1926, Bishop Meyer sounded exasperated as he tried to balance academic standards and the need to admit more non-Germans to the seminary. Currently there was one Finnish-speaking student (the Ingrian, Paavo Haimi) and two others who

¹⁵² John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, April 1, 1926, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵³ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, November 30, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

would eventually serve Latvian language parishes. The lack of Estonians was related to the fact that they generally were not conversant in German.¹⁵⁴ The potential existed for a further distancing of Germans from other ethnic groups in the Church since pastors who had been educated at Yuryev University in Dorpat were getting older. Bishops Meyer, Malmgren, and the late Freifeldt and Palsa were all educated at Yuryev and were able to converse in German, Estonian, and in certain cases, Latvian. Now that Latvia and Estonia were separate countries, though, their ethnic brethren in Russia were cut off from them and the Leningrad Seminary was the only means for theological education for those residing in the Soviet Union. In order to rectify this unequal representation in the Lutheran Church, Bishop Malmgren appealed to Dr. Morehead to provide financial support for a plan to teach prospective students from among Latvians, Estonians and Finns/Ingrians. Malmgren foresaw preparatory classes of general education for these students, but he strongly affirmed that these classes were not to be considered seminary education. The seminary trained pastors; these students, whom he hoped would then apply to the seminary, were not yet prepared for classes that included such academic subjects as Hebrew and Greek. So they would need preparation if they were to succeed in the seminary. The government had given its oral approval, but naturally Malmgren needed to wait for the more formal and essential bureaucratic approval. By the spring, Malmgren had assembled ten Finns/Ingrians and Estonians for just such a preparatory course.¹⁵⁵

Morehead foresaw no problems with the plan and acknowledged that he was in “full agreement,” although the money was not yet in hand for such a project. The NLC would without

¹⁵⁴ “High Church Council Report: 1926–1927,” August 19, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 5 and March 13, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

doubt come through as it had so often in the past, but Morehead was inclined to pressure the European Lutherans so that the support of the Lutheran Church in Russia would not be so one-sided.¹⁵⁶ Because of his desire that the support of Russian Lutheranism be a joint effort with Europeans, Morehead always took special pleasure when informing Malmgren that support for the seminary had come from Lutherans outside of Germany or America: for example, the Poles, the Czechs, the Hungarians or the Yugoslavs.¹⁵⁷

In keeping with the desire to create the appropriate conditions so that the Lutheran Church might be available to all language groups, Bishop Malmgren ordained Kurt Muss on March 27, 1928 as the pastor of Jesus Christ Lutheran Church in Leningrad. Muss would become the first Lutheran pastor in the Soviet Union who ministered full-time to an exclusively Russian-speaking congregation.¹⁵⁸ Morehead was emotionally overcome by the news. “It is impossible for me to express the joy which is mine on learning from your letter that Kurt Muss has been released from prison and that he will be ordained to the ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. I have suffered much sorrow and regret on account of the punishment he has had to endure in connection with his service of the National Lutheran Council as my representative.”¹⁵⁹ Lauding them for the “ progressive spirit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in these new times,” Morehead hoped the Lutherans of Russia would replicate the American practice of gravitating towards using the native language of their country. Just as American Lutherans were moving from German or Scandinavian languages to English, the Lutherans in Russia would

¹⁵⁶ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, April 6, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵⁷ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, May 9, July 2, September 20 and December 23, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵⁸ Kurt Muss to John Morehead, Fall 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵⁹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, March 3, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

eventually need to prepare candidates for the pastoral ministry in Russian. Kurt Muss' service would be a positive step forward and the Church couldn't have chosen a more suitable candidate.¹⁶⁰

Muss would have to address the issue that his congregation had been relegated to Sunday and Wednesday evening services. There were two reasons for this: (1) the church building was used in the mornings by the congregation that allowed them use of the building; (2) the pastors who had been serving Jesus Christ Lutheran had their own services in the morning (Pastors Paul Reichert, Arnold Frischfeld, Oktav Simon and Helmut Hansen). Nonetheless, the congregation was growing steadily although it was difficult to get younger people to go to a service in the later afternoons or for the elderly to go to a service that ended when it was dark. On February 8, 1928, Jesus Christ Lutheran was forced to move from the Dutch Reformed Church on Nevsky Prospect (in the center of the city) a little further up the road to St. Peter's. The move was precipitated by the Dutch Reformed church being given over to a puppet theater. When Kurt Muss was ordained on March 27, the congregation had moved yet again to a larger room at the Finnish Lutheran St. Mary's, just around the block from St. Peter's. Soon the two services were gathering 500 persons as well as beginning a children's service in which 100 regularly attended. Muss began youth Bible studies and attempted to upgrade and expand the old hymnal from 106 to 230 hymns, some newly translated. In the fall of 1928, Muss contacted his old comrade from the days of ARA, Dr. Morehead, to see if he could provide some aid so that the congregation could move into its own building. While the use of the Finnish church had been an improvement, the children's service at times had to be cancelled due to special services scheduled by St. Mary's. Moreover, there was no meeting hall in the Finnish Church for confirmation classes, either, something that Muss

¹⁶⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, March 3, 1927.

understood as an essential element for any congregation.

In response to the problem of gathering youth and the elderly in the evenings, Muss now looked to reconstruct an old German Reformed Church building where the congregation could meet exclusively. The German Reformed congregation had shrunk so that they could no longer pay for upkeep of its building, and thus were looking to rent space from the Baptists. Muss stressed that his congregation could pay for the care of the church, but the building was now in such a state of disrepair that they needed about \$2500.00 for reconstruction. The indefatigable Muss saw God's hand in all that was going on. Even while informing Morehead that the state had just proclaimed the uselessness of the clergy by charging higher and higher rent rates, Muss had hope. He noted that there were three apartments within the church and that would take care of the housing situation for the pastor and his staff. At a church meeting, the parishioners announced that any money they received would only be temporary with the goal of paying it back. Working through Malmgren, they were appealing to Morehead for help.¹⁶¹

Morehead eagerly informed Malmgren that he was always open to those engaged in missionary activity and of course, he couldn't easily resist any appeal that Muss made because of his great sacrifice for the NLC during the famine years. Passing along his greetings to Muss, Morehead hoped that the congregation could gather the money or loan necessary for temporary use of the building. That would give the LWC time to supply a considerable amount of the cost needed.¹⁶² Since its registration as a congregation in 1923, the congregation's receipts had increased. In fact, church council chairman, Alfred Zietnick, urged the people, though they were poor, to give more to the pastors. Whereas previously the visiting pastor would receive three ru-

¹⁶¹ Kurt Muss to John Morehead, Fall 1928.

¹⁶² John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 11, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

bles per sermon, that number had increased to nine rubles per sermon by 1926. As a congregation especially formed for Russian language speakers, obviously the parishioners took special interest in supporting their congregation. Zietnick was a strong leader, encouraging his fellow worshipers to follow the example of the first Christian congregations so that it could remove its defects and grow as a normal congregation. Given the circumstances in which they were living, Zietnick's reference to the Early church would often be cited in the coming years as persecution from the state mounted.¹⁶³

The Third Seminary Year-First Class Graduates-June 1928

The third seminary year (1927–1928) opened with a total of 33 students. While Dr. Morehead was genuinely disappointed that a new class did not matriculate, Malmgren calculated that the seminary would need an additional \$7000.00 as there were simply not enough dorm rooms for the prospective students. At any rate, another classroom would still need to be procured for the current students. The lack of living space combined with the animosity of communists would make these requests even more problematic. It is impossible to underestimate the malevolence of communists directed towards Christian believers in those days. For example, Malmgren had wanted to make use of the local gymnasium as he noted that his students lacked physical exercise after sitting for long periods of time. Ironically the local Soviet school, which formerly was St. Anne's own Lutheran school, refused to allow the students to use their old gym!¹⁶⁴

Dr. Morehead was not the only one concerned with getting as many students as possible

¹⁶³ Fond 1001, Opis 8, Delo 52, Lists 15, 53, 91, 104, 129 and 181, Central Government Archives of St.Petersburg.

¹⁶⁴ Arthur Malmgren, "Report on the Lutheran Seminary in Leningrad: 1927–1928," Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 5, 1927 and John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 2, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

and as quickly as possible into the Lutheran parishes. Bishop Malmgren had already compromised upon his desire for a four-year theological education, reasoning that with the shortage of pastors the Church would be forced to offer only three years of study to its first few classes. As a result, only the incoming class of 1928 would be offered a four-year study program. Meanwhile the students' schedule had remained the same except for evenings, where Malmgren felt the need, due to the younger students' Soviet schooling, to add lectures on literature and history. In the school year of 1927–1928, he decided that the seminary would add lectures on art history and church music as well. Furthermore, acceding to the instructors' and the students' wishes, Latin would also be added as a subject.

Obviously practical pastoral education, especially in preaching, was a goal that Malmgren valued. Seeking to expand the preaching opportunities for students, he required them to pass a speaking and contents' critique on their sermon. If a student was successful, he could move beyond preaching at the local St. Anne's Church in Leningrad and be allowed to preach at a suburban German Lutheran congregation. With regard to financial matters, the costs for the school year were expected to be 30,000 rubles, or \$15,000.00. The parishioners of the Lutheran Church were well aware of the importance of the seminary, but economic conditions were making it more and more difficult to expect reliable support from them. Due to the scanty harvest, Malmgren expected no more than 6000 rubles in parishioners' donations for the school year. Therefore he wrote to Morehead requesting a budget of \$12,000.000, and Morehead happily accepted his request.¹⁶⁵

When the school year came to an end, the Leningrad Lutheran seminary had the occasion

¹⁶⁵ Arthur Malmgren, "Report on the Lutheran Seminary in Leningrad: 1927–1928," Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 12, 1927 and John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 9, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

to celebrate its first legitimate milestone since beginning operations in 1925. Supporters had eagerly anticipated the day when the first class would enter into the pastoral ministry. That day finally arrived on June 14, 1928, as the first 14 graduates [of 16] successfully completed their theological education. The following students were among the graduates: Johann (Jan) Migla, Wilhelm Lohrer, Johannes Schlundt, Heinrich Behrendts, David Kaufmann, Woldemar Ruger, Georg Rendar, Theodor Fehler, Jakob Scharf, Konstantin Rusch, Paul Hamberg, Christian Sept, Friedrich Bratz and Ernst Boese. A student named Lazhis Bluhm would take his exams later in September and be sent to the Latvian-German congregation in Mogilev in what is now modern day Belarus. Gotthold Sterle would, due to illness, only be able to finish his course work in 1929. After that he would assist Helmut Hansen at St. Peter’s in Leningrad until he was placed under arrest at Christmas in 1929.

Morehead had assumed that six students would be sent to Siberia, but when the final calls were made virtually no one went to Siberia as there were vacancies in areas considered more strategic. Only Wilhelm Lohrer was sent to Siberia, temporarily serving in Omsk under Pastor Friedrich Merz, who had been one of the summer circuit preachers in Siberia. Five students would be called to the Volga region: Boese, Kaufmann, Scharf, Rusch and Schlundt. Fehler and Sept would go to the Transcaucasian Lutheran Church, which would subsequently be united to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in the fall. The others were called to specific areas and people groups: Migla would serve at the Latvian Synod president’s behest; Rendar would go to Volhynia; Hamberg to the Crimea; Bratz to Yekaterinoslav in Ukraine and Ruger to St. Michael’s in Moscow. At age 36, Heinrich Behrendts, the son-in-law of Bishop Malmgren, was older than most students, having started what might be described as a “second career” after working as a lawyer. He was slated to take some final courses in the university whereupon he

would replace Professor Otto Wentzel as the lecturer in Hebrew around Christmastime.¹⁶⁶

The Church had also baptized a total of 50,000 in the year of 1927, a good sign of church growth, and with the addition of 14 new pastors, one might think that this would be a cause for celebration.¹⁶⁷ Of course the news of the new pastors was received with pleasure by Morehead, but then Meyer informed him that nine pastors would be retiring and could he possibly provide some assistance to them in retirement? Morehead rarely if ever displayed frustration with the Lutheran pastors in his letters, but his reply betrayed an exasperation that was unusual for him. “I must confess to some considerable sense of distress that so large a number as nine aged or elderly pastors have under consideration the immediate retirement from the active work of the ministry. ... Must these nine brethren ... all retire from the work of the ministry when pastors are so much needed? Are they all feeble or in poor health?”¹⁶⁸ Morehead went on to commiserate that while he understood normal physical limitations when one reached an advanced age, these were extraordinary times for the Lutheran church in Russia. Could these elderly pastors not fill a need in vacant congregations? He had spoken to American congregations about the self-sacrificing spirit of these pastors in Russia. How could he now defend this request?¹⁶⁹ Perhaps combined with the fact that a new class had not been formed the previous fall [1927], Morehead worried that vacant congregations would not be filled quickly enough to make a difference to a Church that was facing continual pressure from communists and the growing atheist movement.

¹⁶⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 15, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Санкт-Петербургский мартиролог духовенства и мирян: Евангелическо- лютеранская Церковь [St. Petersburg Martyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church], December 14, 2004; Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 391.

¹⁶⁷ *Osteuropa*, 1928.

¹⁶⁸ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, December 11, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁶⁹ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, December 11, 1928.

Of course dorm space was very tight, as Malmgren had already informed him.¹⁷⁰ Still, Bishop Meyer must not have been overly pleased with Morehead's somewhat testy letter, because in his reply he elaborated on the difficulties of doing the work of the church in the Soviet Union. Under his own set of pressures, though, the request for retirement funds for elderly pastors seems to have been forgotten.¹⁷¹

As a matter of fact, the reality of everyday life in the church was becoming more and more difficult. The so-called "Religious NEP," despite the relative freedom it offered, had never offered a problem-free atmosphere for the church. One wonders what Morehead, the bishops and the graduates would have thought had they known that every single one of the class of 1928 would be arrested in the future, or that one would escape across the Polish border (Rendar) while another would leave the pastoral ministry within a few years (Scharf). All but three would eventually be shot.¹⁷² So although they certainly would have had no illusions as to the potential danger that lay ahead, on graduation day in 1928, they celebrated. A few months after their graduation, Theodor Fehler and Konstantin Rusch would become the first to be arrested. Sustained persecution would be waiting just around the corner.¹⁷³

The Changing of the Guard at St. Peter and Paul in Moscow

On November 15, 1927, Bishop Meyer officially stepped down as pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul. The younger Hirschelmann, Ferdinand, Jr., would fill the pulpit temporarily until Rev-

¹⁷⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 2, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷¹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 9, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷² Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 333, 334, 337, 342, 357, 363, 373, 380–82, 384, 388, 389. Johannes Schlundt would actually immigrate to West Germany in 1973 and die in 1993 at the age of 93, having lived to see the revival of the Lutheran Church in post-Communist Russia. See Litzenberger, 389.

¹⁷³ Fehler and Rusch would be freed through the intervention of the High Church Council by New Year's 1929. See Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 9, 1929.

erend Alexander Streck, who had accepted the call to serve at St. Peter and Paul, would be able to relocate from Astrakhan. Streck would migrate north from the Caspian Sea region and begin work at Easter in 1928. Despite gradually worsening economic conditions, the parishioners found the means to provide Meyer with a 100 ruble a month pension [approximately \$50.00]. Not to be outdone, the ladies of the church separately gathered 720 rubles [approximately \$360.00] so that Meyer could take a summer visit to a resort in Germany for his health. Meyer was touched and even requested that Dr. Morehead personally thank them, providing encouragement from a respected figure abroad who had done so much for their Church.¹⁷⁴

While preparations were being made for Meyer's successor, his housing situation was rapidly moving towards a resolution. A house had been finally found for the bishop and the High Church Council in the fall of 1927. The offer was for seven years rent at the price of \$7750.00. With \$9000.00 in the bank from funds previously sent by Morehead for housing, it appeared that the funds were on hand for the Meyer's move. To be able to purchase the requisite furniture for the church office and to cover moving costs, an additional \$1000.00 would be necessary.¹⁷⁵ With the Meyer's moving out of the parsonage, four rooms yet remained. As a state employee at the university, Elisabeth Meyer would be able keep one room since she was given reduced rental rates. The remaining three rooms would be handed over to Streck for his wife and two daughters. Church deaconess Tilly Meyer and Pastor Streck would then have office space in the basement of the church, which would be reconstructed for that purpose. The funds would come from the parishioners themselves, albeit at great sacrifice as the future would prove.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 21, March 30 and February 3, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 14, 1927 and John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, May 13, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

On February 14, the Meyer's moved into their new home in Moscow. Of primary importance for the bishop was the ability to work and rest in peace and quiet unimpeded by neighbors from the former communal house. Meyer's relief was evidence of the harried and cramped living conditions with which many Russians had to adjust due to the introduction of communal living arrangements throughout the Soviet Union. Meyer blessed the house with the words of Solomon upon dedicating the temple from 1 Kings 8:25 [sic. 29]—"That Your eyes might be open night and day toward this house." Offering prayers of thanks to God, Meyer especially remembered Morehead and those who had provided the funding for the house.

Upon being happily sequestered into his new two-story home and office, Meyer now received the unwelcome news that the school administration had raised the rent for his former rooms to \$330.00 a month!! (It had been \$1500.00 a year). The long-suffering congregation submitted a formal protest and had hopes of winning, but the move by the school administration was ominous, nonetheless. Despite these threats, Meyer believed that Streck was actually arriving at a propitious time. The congregation had become more conscious of its duties during the struggles of the past few years (e.g., Meyer's sickness; his departure; choosing a new pastor; the apartment problems; the fight for its existence). Hardened from their battles, they were determined to support Pastor Streck.¹⁷⁷

The General Synod of 1928

In September of 1928, the Lutheran Church prepared to hold its second synod in the Soviet Union. This would allow the pastors and bishops the opportunity to discuss troubling issues like the publication of the journal *Unsere Kirche*, because to put it bluntly, things weren't going well.

¹⁷⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 2, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Although the journal had been subject to continual interference from the Soviet bureaucracy since its inception, the Church hadn't expected that it would have to literally fight for the content of every issue. As an example, on February 3, 1928, Dr. Morehead was still awaiting the Christmas 1927 issue, which the censors had not yet allowed to be published.¹⁷⁸ Bishop Meyer tried to put an optimistic spin on the situation, writing to Morehead, "With the publication of the church journal we are running into great difficulties, which we thought would be the case in the beginning."¹⁷⁹ Translating from the German to Russian took a long time, but afterwards the censor would frequently strike out a large portion of the text. The resulting delay would often mean that the next issue would not come out for weeks or months. The Christmas 1927 issue finally appeared in February 1928, but that pushed the publication of 1928's first issue back towards the end of April. Under such conditions, Meyer mused, not entirely unseriously, perhaps it might be better to print the journal in Kharkov, not Moscow?¹⁸⁰ In fact, only three issues of *Unsere Kirche* would make it out of the censor's department in 1928.¹⁸¹

On September 2, forty-three delegates and eighteen guests filed into St. Peter and Paul for the opening service, perhaps with a little more trepidation than the outpouring of joy that had greeted the first Synod in the Lutheran Church's history four years earlier. As the High Church Council reported on its activities for the last four years, it was evident that there had been great gains made in the face of constant pressure from the authorities. But no doubt most were aware of Joseph Stalin's successful accumulation of political power that would result in the

¹⁷⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1928.

¹⁷⁹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 30, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸⁰ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 30, 1928.

¹⁸¹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, November 23, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

introduction of his first Five-Year Plan beginning in October. The good news, though, was that while the communists were busy fighting each other the past four years for influence in the Party, the resulting political vacuum had allowed the Church opportunities to restore itself after the initial brutal years of Bolshevik rule.¹⁸²

High Church Council representative Robert Derringer wrote to Dr. Morehead describing the success of the Synod. Derringer lauded the harmony on display as many nationalities were in attendance and had their own leaders officially designated by the Church at large: Alfred Juergenson became the official bishop of the Estonians while Selim Laurikkala of the Finns/Ingrians and Mikhail Lapping of the Latvians were recognized as *probst* for their respective peoples, having rejected the title of “bishop.” (The title *probst* would be akin to director or president). One of the highlights on the agenda of the Synod was the status of the Transcaucasian Lutheran Church that had operated separately from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia since its inception 118 years ago. It had taken a “wait-and-see” approach during the General Synod in 1924, but afterwards requested to join the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia. 28 congregations from the Transcaucasian region voted to become members but only if they would be allowed to retain their internal structure. With this request granted, the Synod recognized Pastor Emil Reusch of Annenfeld as the representative for the new district of Transcaucasia.¹⁸³

The history of the origins of Lutheranism in the Transcaucasian region was an extraordinary tale. The Church initially consisted of Germans from Württemberg who were Lutheran Pie-

¹⁸² Report on the General Synod 1928 to John Morehead, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: Norton, 1990), 69–70, 94.

¹⁸³ Robert Derringer to John Morehead, September 11, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Report on the General Synod 1928 to John Morehead; Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 381. The Transcaucasian region included cities in the northern Caucasus as well as the modern day countries of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

tists. They had become disillusioned with the state church in Germany and its penchant for control, desiring freedom of worship and a piece of land to farm. They were also not necessarily enamored of the state church's formality, especially as reflected in the liturgy. As a result, many of these Lutherans decided to leave what they called this "House of Babel." But to where?¹⁸⁴ The answer would be tied to an End Times' theology that added up the mathematical calculations and predictions of an early 18th century preacher, Johann Bengel. Quite simply, many of Württemberg's Lutherans came to the conclusion that the world was going to end in 1836. As an illustration of their seriousness, Johann Christian Friedrich Burk, a great grandson of Bengel's, compiled a time table in 1831 determining which of the prophecies of Revelation had been fulfilled and which still awaited their fulfillment. Even prior to Burk's calculations, these had been confusing times in Europe. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, German Pietists had described Napoleon as the Antichrist of Revelation 13, the beast rising out of the sea. Many of these Württemberg Lutherans now sought a place of hiding, identifying the woman from Rev. 12:14 as representative of the true community of Christ fleeing a coming Antichrist, one who would be even more terrible than Napoleon. They hoped to find a secluded, mountainous region where God would preserve a holy people for the Last Days. The basis of their interpretation was Jesus' words in Matt. 24:16: "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

These Lutherans came to the conclusion that the proper place for their community to settle should be somewhere in the vicinity of Mount Ararat (in modern day eastern Turkey).¹⁸⁵ Into this history now stepped a devout Evangelical Christian who happened to be a German baroness, Juliana von Krüdener. In the summer of 1815, von Krüdener managed to arrange several

¹⁸⁴ Peter Haigis and Gert Hummel, *Schwäbische Spuren im Kaukasus: Auswanderergeschichten* (Metzingen, Germany: Verlag Ernst Franz, 2002), 10–11.

¹⁸⁵ Haigis and Hummel, *Schwäbische Spuren im Kaukasus: Auswanderergeschichten*, 101–23.

meetings with the Russian czar Alexander I. Alexander was at that time the most admired man in the world, having just led Allied troops to victory over the despised Napoleon. Europe now breathed a sigh of relief after Alexander's troops took Paris and brought peace to the continent. The meetings between the czar and baroness proved propitious for the plans of the Württemberg Lutherans. At this time in Russian history, Alexander I was intrigued by the growing Evangelical movement in Europe and Russia, and his interest was reflected in the founding of the Russian Bible Society in 1813. The Lutherans found a kindred soul in the czar whose mother, Maria Feodorovna, was a native of Württemberg.

Alexander's occasional piety and openness to Evangelical Christianity had begun when he started reading the Bible in earnest and found great comfort in it during the traumatic days of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. Juliana von Krüdener convinced him to sponsor the immigration of the Württemberg Lutherans to Russian territory. As the journey began in 1817 and the first ships floated down the Danube River, flags fluttered in the wind with the words spelled out in gold—"Czar Alexander: Called by God as the Defender of the Faith." Hundreds of German families made the decision to go to this "mountainous place" in the Russian Empire, which just happened to be on the historic territory of Georgia.¹⁸⁶ Von Krüdener herself, like visionaries before her, never made it to the Promised Land. She died on the journey, reaching as far as Odessa in the Ukraine. However, scores of families arrived in late 1817 and early 1818 and established six communities in what is now modern day Georgia and Azerbaijan.¹⁸⁷ It was the congregations that were established by these immigrants who now decided to join the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia.

¹⁸⁶ Haigis and Hummel, *Schwäbische Spuren im Kaukasus: Auswanderergeschichten*, 127–53; 169–70.

¹⁸⁷ Haigis and Hummel, *Schwäbische Spuren im Kaukasus: Auswanderergeschichten*, 153, 244.

Another and yet seemingly marginal question addressed by the Synod concerned the “Brustkreuz” (chest cross). The Brustkreuz controversy gave Lutheran opponents of a high church structure ample ammunition. Opponents pictured it as the epitome of a formal, traditional Lutheranism that often sacrificed diversity in worship and speech for a liturgical, conservative expression. Despite the more pressing issues weighing upon the Church, the Synod still took elaborate pains to designate just who would have the right to wear this special cross. In the end, it concluded that a pastor would need to have served for fifteen years in order to wear the Brustkreuz. A special commission even designated the form and look of the cross to be worn. On more pressing issues pertaining to worship, though, sufficient time was found for discussion. Since Russian Germans were often aware of what was happening among Lutheran congregations in Germany, news filtered out that the state church was about to print a new hymnbook. Some of the delegates thought it an advantageous moment to adopt this new German hymnbook, but Leningrad pastor Helmut Hansen informed them that their Church still had over 3000 St. Petersburg hymnbooks from before the war. Emphasizing to the delegates its utility, Hansen wisely convinced the Synod to reprint these hymnbooks rather than print anew a hymnbook that, in reality, would not be easy to import in large numbers to the Soviet Union in 1928.

Other items for discussion resulted in some surprising decisions for a relatively conservative Lutheran church body. With regard to weddings, it was agreed that where one spouse was Lutheran and the other a Muslim or Jew, or even of no faith, it was permissible for the pastor to marry them! This action, though, would be dependent upon whether the non-Christian parent was willing to allow the child to be raised Lutheran. Given the reality of divorce after the communists liberalized the laws on marriage in 1918, the Synod decided that as long as the marriage was a civil ceremony one had to wait at least one year after the divorce in order to be re-

married by the pastor.¹⁸⁸ More than likely this was to illustrate the folly of the so-called Soviet “postcard divorce,” where one spouse could at any time inform the registration office of his or her desire to dissolve the marriage. The divorce would be signed immediately, the other spouse then being informed by postcard!¹⁸⁹

Despite these somewhat liberal concessions to the reality of an increasingly secularized society, the Synod refused to accept Pastor Deutschmann’s request to allow non-ordained persons to conduct emergency wedding and baptisms. Since Deutschmann served in Slavgorod, his proposal was a reflection of the reality of pastoral life in the vast expanse of Siberia. The Synod relented somewhat, permitting baptisms only if the District church council approved. In a related matter, Pastor Gustav Birth’s (Kharkov, Ukraine) call for giving laymen the right to offer communion in emergency situations was also rejected. Driving many of these issues was certainly the frustration of how to provide pastoral care for far-flung congregations as well as those that were collapsing due to the pastoral shortage. One potential answer to the shortages was to train kuesters for ordination. Kuesters historically played a prominent role in the Russian-German communities, working as teachers of general education who also taught religion. Knowledgeable of the Bible, kuesters frequently taught Confirmation classes or conducted Bible classes to assist the overworked pastors. The Synod confirmed that the kuesters could be utilized to help alleviate the dearth of pastors, hoping that at least a small number might be eligible to serve in about four years’ time after their supplementary education was concluded. Bishop Meyer added that he would more clearly delineate the role and duties of the kuesters in the near

¹⁸⁸ Kurt Muss to John Morehead, "Report on General Synod 1928 to Morehead, September 2–5, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸⁹ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 27–28.

future.¹⁹⁰

Another vital issue for discussion at the Synod concerned the proper age of the student for Confirmation. Confirmation had proved to be one of the thorniest and most uncertain issues confronting the church throughout the 1920s. Since the law was not always equally applied throughout the country, it was difficult to determine the correct interpretation of the law. Officially, the government had decreed on June 13, 1921, that it was forbidden to give religious instruction to organized groups of boys or girls below the age of 18.¹⁹¹ Since the Lutheran Church had generally believed that a child could be confirmed from the age of 15 and up, a conflict with the stated law was inevitable. The late Bishop Freifeldt had generally operated within the parameters of the law, yet the fact that his 15 year-old daughter Magdalena was confirmed shortly before his death in 1923 would lead to the conclusion that 15 year-olds were indeed confirmed in the Lutheran Church.¹⁹²

Many years later after he immigrated to West Germany, delegate to the Synod in 1928 and pastor in the Ukraine, Johann Völl, reflected upon the confirmation controversy. Völl and his congregation had concluded that confirmation lessons provided the religious instruction that would make the difference between children who could consciously express their Christian faith as opposed to those who might possess a more cultural view of their faith. With governmental pressure to raise a generation of atheists pressing upon them, Völl and his congregation in Grunau (Ukraine) sought a way to instruct the children. As Völl put it, "It [the confirmation instruction] should make the young people spiritually independent, so that they would stand on

¹⁹⁰ Kurt Muss to John Morehead, "Report on General Synod 1928 to Morehead, September 2–5, 1928 and Robert Derringer Report to LWC, August 19, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁹¹ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 27.

¹⁹² Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 384.

the foundation that remains immovable when the earth and heavens shake.”¹⁹³ That belief had taken on greater meaning in 1923 when the communist authorities in his region officially forbade Völl from instructing children under 18. Two days before he was to confirm a new group of students, the local Communist Party official called him to their headquarters for a five-hour cross-examination. “Confirmation itself is a cultural matter,” the party official informed him, “we can’t prohibit it, because the foreign countries will be watching what we do.”¹⁹⁴ However, from now on Völl could no longer officially give confirmation instruction to those under 18; and yet, he was still permitted to teach younger children, but only in groups of three.

Völl was stuck in a quandary because he would usually confirm 200 students a year under the age of 18. How could he continue to instruct so many students in small groups of three? The year that this rule came into effect, 1924, the desired goals of the Communists had its effect. Völl confirmed no one. And yet despite the prevailing ethos in society, the parents wanted their children confirmed. In 1925, Völl came up with a new idea. He would prepare his students for confirmation via Catechism sermons. Children’s services were not allowed by law, but the children could come to regular church services with their parents or related adults. Völl offered three Catechism services during the week, although he always believed that the parents got more from these sermons than the children.

Despite the restrictions placed upon him, Völl was relatively pleased with the results. One child, an orphan who could neither read nor write, was once asked by one of the atheist-oriented League of the Godless spies what the pastor was teaching him. He replied, “That we should

¹⁹³ Johann Völl, “Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz,” in *Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1958* (Stuttgart: Die Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1958), 105.

¹⁹⁴ Johann Völl, “Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz,” 106.

come to Jesus.”¹⁹⁵ Even though the orphan couldn’t say much more about his instruction, Völl knew that the child had understood the gist of his teaching. On Confirmation Day in 1925, 444 students along with their relatives packed into the village church! Due to the absence of a confirmation class in 1924, Völl now had the equivalent of two classes to confirm. The students and their families occupied all of the places so that even the communist spies couldn’t get into the church. Angered, they took to the newspapers to accuse Völl of agitation, wondering aloud how long he would be allowed to get away with actions like these?¹⁹⁶

Still, Völl was not satisfied with the Catechism sermons, so the next year he gathered the confirmands in the government approved small groups. From Easter until Pentecost, he instructed the students from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., and sometimes, even longer. He found this a far more satisfying option as he could hear from their own lips what each of the students understood. He also urged the parents to follow Luther’s understanding of the role of a parent in teaching his child the faith. He asked them to familiarize their children with the Small Catechism, explaining Luther’s idea that “all proper Christian education has its beginning, middle and end in the family.”¹⁹⁷ The parents gave his plan their blessing, and so Völl would continue this practice for confirmation until his arrest in 1930.

Völl was convinced that even if his students forgot the lessons, the Word of God would remain in their hearts and bear fruit at the proper time. This would be a theme echoed by pastors like Kurt Muss and Helmut Hansen who pushed the boundaries of what was or was not permissible in the realm of religious matters in Soviet Russia. Years later when he was living in West Germany, Völl would hear from many grateful students who had retained those

¹⁹⁵ Johann Völl, “Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz,” 106.

¹⁹⁶ Johann Völl, “Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz,” 106.

¹⁹⁷ Johann Völl, “Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz,” 107.

confirmation lessons all of their lives. But even in the short term, the parents were also satisfied because they and Völl noticed that those children who were confirmed at an earlier age generally did not join the Communist youth organizations. In contrast, those congregations that waited until 18 to confirm their children frequently saw more of them join the Communist youth group, the *Komsomol*.¹⁹⁸

Given the importance of confirmation, the General Synod decided that some clarification about confirmation instruction should be agreed upon. Was the proper age for Confirmation instruction 15 years old or 18 years and above? A petition would be sent by the Church to the government in order to ascertain the rules for confirming members. With the conclusion of the General Synod, participants on the whole proclaimed it a success since it clarified issues and provided pastors a forum to discuss questions of great import for the Church.¹⁹⁹ No one knew it at the time, but this would be the high point of the Church for many decades to come—and the last synod.

The delegates were not ignorant of the atheist movement's growing power and the efforts of the GPU to support it. While the delegates were gathering, they shared their concerns of spies in the midst of their congregations who reported to the GPU. It was difficult to determine who the spies were as parishioners would be threatened with a bullet if they even discussed with anyone that they had been compromised by the GPU. Völl did have some parishioners who honestly told him that the GPU had forced them to get information on him, so they decided together what questions they should ask him. Völl was impressed that his parishioners trusted him more than they feared the dreaded GPU! The GPU's goal apparently was to wear out the

¹⁹⁸ Johann Völl, "Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz," 107.

¹⁹⁹ Kurt Muss to John Morehead, "Report on General Synod 1928 to Morehead, September 2–5, 1928."

pastors with continual questioning while creating a climate of doubt among their own threatened parishioners.²⁰⁰ While conversing with his fellow pastors at the General Synod in 1928, Völl couldn't shake the odd sensation that he was practically the only one who hadn't yet been called in for an interrogation with the GPU.²⁰¹ The pressure upon bishops Malmgren and Meyer was enormous, and it would only grow exponentially in the coming years. At least Meyer was able to avoid an interrogation with the secret police after this Synod, unlike in 1924. He and his wife took advantage of the kind gift offered by their parishioners and went to a Kurort in Bad Oeyenhausen in Westphalia for a well-deserved rest.²⁰² They would need it, because all of these actions by the Communist authorities were beginning to create an atmosphere of dread among the Lutherans in Russia. A hard persecution was coming and it was coming right soon.

“They Would not See His Face Again”: A Final Mission Festival in the Volga

In the late summer of 1928, plans were made to hold a large Church festival in the village of Warenburg on the Wiesenseite of the Volga River. The festival, scheduled from August 24-30, was to be led by the elderly itinerant preacher, Heinrich Peter Ehlers. Ehlers was the most renowned of the traveling evangelists belonging to a Pietistic movement known as “The Brothers.” Believers and Lutheran pastors in the region had respected Ehlers because, unlike those inclined to Congregationalism, he worked with rather than against the interests of the Lutheran Church. Sensing that the times were changing and that Christians were on a collision course with atheism, which would prove to be an accurate assessment in 1928 given the introduction of Stalin's Five Year Plan, Ehlers sent out handwritten invitations for the festival to people from the

²⁰⁰ Johann Völl, “Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz,” 112.

²⁰¹ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 128.

²⁰² Robert Derringer to John Morehead, September 11, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Black Sea region, the Caucasus and as far away as Siberia.²⁰³ Such a gathering would most certainly not have received state sanction, but in 1928 it was still possible to push the parameters of state limits on religious expression in the provinces. In the years to come, most Lutherans would describe this memorable festival as a demarcation between the golden years of relative spiritual freedom and the deadly persecution that would follow.

So as the summer drew to a close, thousands of German believers set out from these distant region to, make the pilgrimage to the Volga. Traveling primarily by horse and wagon, they made the long trek realizing it might be Brother Ehlers' last exhortation to the people to hold fast to the faith of their forefathers. Following the old traditions from their Bible and Mission festivals, the Volga Germans offered up their farmyards to brothers and sisters in the Faith. Given the summer weather, the gates were opened wide to friend and stranger alike so that they could overnight in the courtyards of locals. In fact, those who did not know anyone were given the best places to stay. All gathered to celebrate their faith and pray to God for His presence during the coming days that most now recognized would seriously threaten their way of life.

Describing the plans to house and care for thousands, Johannes Schleuning quoted Scripture from Christ's feeding of the 5000, remarking, "all ate and were filled."²⁰⁴ Pastor Johannes Grasmück of Brunntal opened the festival by leading the participants in a worship service at the large Lutheran cathedral in Warenburg. Despite the size of the cathedral, due to the multitudes not all could fit inside.²⁰⁵ Grasmück was a pastor who had been receiving regular

²⁰³ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 116, 118–19.

²⁰⁴ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 119.

²⁰⁵ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 120. The author can attest to the large size of the cathedral, having visited Privalnoye (Warenburg's Russian name) in 2001. The church was still standing in an abandoned field, its roof long since shorn off by local Communists. See Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 104.

support from the NLC (and now via the LWC) for some years now. At first he had been unaware of just who was supporting him, wondering in a letter to the German language California Post (Fresno) why an anonymous donor would give his family gifts of \$40.00. Dr. Morehead assumed that the High Church Council had already explained to the Lutheran pastors who was supporting them and why. After hearing about Grasmück's letter, Morehead took the opportunity to inform him and other pastors like Woldemar Reichwald that the money was a gift from American Lutherans to enable them to remain at their posts during these difficult times.²⁰⁶

Now this Lutheran pastor who had remained at his post due to NLC support, mounted the pulpit. Using as his text 2 Chron. 20:15b, he preached, "Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's." What must his listeners have thought? Confronted by modern day Moabites and Ammonites in the form of atheists and communists, this present-day Jahaziel, Pastor Grasmück, was described by Johannes Schleuning as giving a "...powerful wake-up call in the face of the threatening campaign of annihilation against the Church of Christ." He implored the believers to "remain firm and unshakeable in the eternal foundation of God's Word, as it has been made manifest to us in Christ and has been renewed through Martin Luther."²⁰⁷ Those present believed that "*A Mighty Fortress*" had never been sung, even during the Reformation, with more gusto. As the four thousand voices inside the church sang, "Take they our life; Goods, fame, child and wife; Let these all be gone; They yet have nothing won; The kingdom ours remaineth," surely Luther's words never rang more true. Some present had already experienced these losses in the initial phase of Stalin's collectivization. Oth-

²⁰⁶ John Morehead to Johannes Grasmück, June 8, 1936 and John Morehead to Woldemar Reichwald, February 10, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁰⁷ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 120.

ers foresaw that they, too, would soon lose all that they treasured.²⁰⁸

The daily events for the festival followed a detailed program: 5 a.m.-Morning Prayer; 9 a.m.- Divine Service; 2 to 5 p.m.- Prayer time; in the evenings, Bible study. Brother Ehlers had organized the entire festival, sensing that it would be his last chance to address the people and earnestly desiring to prepare them for the deadly persecution he feared was coming upon the land. In his last devotion, Ehlers used as his text Acts 20:17–38. Especially poignant were the words of Paul from verses 36–38 that took on new meaning given the day and the times: “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.”²⁰⁹ Of course, these words not only reflected upon the fact that many would not see Brother Ehlers again. In reality, they would not see each other again.

Schleuning wondered aloud about those who would immigrate to Germany after Stalin’s collectivization program surged into full force the following year. Would they remember this festival down through the years as the last gasp of a dying Lutheran faith and tradition in the Volga region?²¹⁰ Pastor Grasmück himself would in a few years walk his own lonely path to martyrdom. The following year he would be arrested and sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor in the gulag camps of the far north. The last eyewitness report confirmed that he was seen wrapped in rags, requesting some old clothes. His wife and two daughters had been expelled from Brunntal, condemned to a life of begging. The pastor was never heard from again. The Lutherans in Russia were now to be subjected to the brute force of Stalinist cadres. There would

²⁰⁸ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 120.

²⁰⁹ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 120–21.

²¹⁰ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 121–22.

be no Religious NEP. Behind their hardened leader, they would show no sympathy for these relics of a bygone era who had to disappear if the Soviet state was to move forward boldly into an atheistic future. The way of life that the Lutherans of Russia had known for centuries was about to change—forever.²¹¹

²¹¹ Schleuning, 156.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VELIKI PERELOM (GREAT TURNING POINT) OF 1929:

Death Knell for the Lutheran Church?

1929 would prove to be a fateful year for the Lutheran Church in Russia. Up until that year the Lutheran Church had survived most of the turbulent changes in the country reasonably well, especially since the early years of Soviet rule would have led an astute observer to think that the church would soon be extinguished. The emigration of large numbers of pastors followed by a devastating famine, along with persecution of religion in general did not bode well for the church in the initial years after the revolution. And yet it survived, because despite these problems the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia was no longer limited by the Russian Orthodox-dominated Czarist state. General synods for the Lutheran Church had never been allowed in Russia in the past, but when the Soviet state proclaimed freedom of religion and atheism, new possibilities opened up. The Lutheran Church held two general synods in 1924 and 1928, and this despite the fact that pastors were categorized with the so-called “former people” of the old Czarist regime.

Not only that, when borders changed after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and Estonia became an independent country, Russia had lost its only Lutheran seminary which had for years been located in Dorpat. This new geographical reality turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it forced the church to request permission from the Soviet state to establish its own seminary. In 1925, the Lutheran Church of Russia officially opened the doors to a seminary on the grounds of St. Anne’s Lutheran Church in Leningrad. So naturally, most Lutherans could be forgiven for assuming that they would be able to weather any changes and continue to hold on to

the church of their forefathers, a church that dated back to the 16th century.¹

But the year 1929 was the turning point. Historians can now recognize that the relative freedom which the church had experienced would very shortly be curtailed by the dictates of the state. Specific decrees directed against religious freedom would be enacted, as opposed to the arbitrary actions of individual atheists and die-hard communists. Reading the letters of Bishops Malmgren and Meyer to Dr. John Morehead in America, one can discern a tone that betrays a distinct change from guarded optimism to growing pessimism. While both bishops would fight for the church's survival to the bitter end, it was clear that they were coming to the conclusion that the inevitable triumph of the state over the church was only a matter of time.

Meanwhile, in the political realm Joseph Stalin had solidified his power base by 1929, first by allying with Nikolai Bukharin, the so-called Rightist Bolshevik. Together they were able to purge the Leftist Bolsheviks from the Party. As Leftist Bolsheviks, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev and Leon Trotsky had advocated a more aggressive campaign of industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. Stalin used the articulate Bukharin to great effect, defending Lenin's NEP as a reasonable policy for the time being on the road to socialism.²

Once their victory was secure, however, Stalin did an about face in 1927 and began implementing forced grain requisitions in the countryside, much to Bukharin's chagrin. Bukharin felt that Stalin was going too far in alienating the middle peasant, but he, too, would lose out in a power struggle to Stalin. His protests increasingly unheeded before the party faithful, Bukharin and his allies would lose the argument with Stalin and ultimately be stripped of their positions of

¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 78, 106, 144, 153.

² J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932–1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 36–37, 39.

authority by 1930.³

With his challengers to power out of the way, Stalin now embarked upon an ambitious plan to dramatically transform the country. 1929 would become known as the year of the Veliky Perelom, the Great Turning Point.⁴ Others would refer to it as the Stalin Revolution.⁵ Stalin used his power to begin a program to rapidly collectivize agriculture and industrialize the economy so that Russia would be dramatically changed from an outdated, manually labor-driven society into a full-fledged industrialized, economic superpower. The first of Stalin's Five Year plans began implementation in October 1928, with its formal adoption taking place in the spring of 1929.⁶

The arguments of historians as to whether this was a revolution from above or below would ultimately become a moot point for those Lutherans who lived through this new "cultural revolution." Historian Robert Tucker described industrialization and collectivization only as "focal processes," pointing out that in the arena of culture Russian society underwent a massive upheaval, affecting the entire social structure, *church life included* (emphasis mine).⁷ Indeed, even Emelian Yaroslavsky, head of the League of the Militant Godless, would announce his own Anti-religious Five Year Plan in late 1928.⁸

Stalin recognized that the Church was too often associated with images of Russia's Czarist past and that in order to truly change the mindset of Soviet citizens and build socialism, religion had to be eradicated. Russian Lutheran Bishop Arthur Malmgren, associating Stalin with a

³ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 41.

⁴ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 91–92. Stalin would even write an article for *Pravda*, dated November 7, 1929, where he would officially label 1929: "The Year of the Great Turn."

⁵ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 42.

⁶ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 94.

⁷ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 93.

⁸ Gabel, *And God Created Lenin*, 323.

Leftist Bolshevik point of view, referred to 1929 as the “year of crisis.” In his view Stalin set forth a new goal: “Above all, he proclaimed religion to be a superstition that had to be overcome and uprooted, and the church smashed and destroyed as a patron and defender of superstition. And this, in the shortest period of time possible, in the process of the first Five Year Plan.”⁹

Closing Lutheranism’s Oldest Church: St. Michael’s in Moscow

In retrospect, the signs of danger for the Lutheran church were already on the horizon before the onset of the first Five Year Plan. With the month-to-month problems due to government obstruction weighing upon him, Malmgren in 1927 had written, “The thunderclouds are coming together on our horizon and in the distance we hear the rumbling.”¹⁰ The rumbling of those thunderclouds and the coming catastrophe for the church came closer in 1928 with the closing of St. Michael’s Lutheran in Moscow. St. Michael’s was the oldest Lutheran congregation in Russia, its origins dating back to 1576 when Czar Ivan the Terrible allowed the first Lutheran church building to be erected in Moscow. [The name itself appears to have come later in honor of Czar Mikhail Romanov, officially being established in the 1630s].¹¹ In 1926, a service of celebration was held at St. Michael’s in honor not only of the 350-year anniversary of the congregation, but of the Lutheran Church in Russia itself.¹² Since St. Michael’s had long been held to be the symbol of Lutheranism in Russia, when a special commission (November 1927) called for its closing and the transfer of its building over to the Central Aerodynamics Institute (CAI), Moscow’s Lutherans were rightfully alarmed.

The official reason given for the transfer of the church to CAI was that its security person-

⁹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 376.

¹⁰ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 80–81.

¹¹ Dönninghaus, *Die Deutschen in der Moskauer Gesellschaft*, 140–41.

¹² Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 104.

nel could not check all of the parishioners coming to church on Sundays. Since the church was on the territory of CAI, it was feared that these valuable laboratories could be subjected to sabotage or espionage! CAI was involved in the military defense of the Soviet Union, so in reality St. Michael's pleas had little chance of success. As a result, the church was "liquidated" on January 14, 1928 by a secret order of the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet, signed by the head of the Moscow regional police force, a Mr. Yakovlev.¹³ Moscow Bishop Theophil Meyer broke the bad news to Lutheran World Convention director, Dr. John Morehead, in a letter dated February 3, 1928. Meyer told Morehead that Moscow's Lutherans would continue to fight to the end for the building, but realistically he considered it a losing cause. It must be remembered that the property where the church had long stood was no longer its own since the Decree on the Separation of Church from State in 1918. Two years previous to the order to close St. Michael's, CAI had begun to build a factory on church territory until it decided at last to take over the church building itself.¹⁴ (Current Pastor of Moscow's St. Peter and Paul in Moscow, Dmitry Lotov, recalls that his grandfather worked in the aerodynamics factory and could still make out the basic outlines of the church building).¹⁵

Meyer remained true to his principles of fighting for the rights of the Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union. He wrote to the Communist Party about the historic meaning attached to St. Michael's for Lutherans throughout the centuries. In addition, hundreds of letters of protest came in from parishioners pleading the cause of their building.¹⁶ In fact, more than 800 signatures were

¹³ Olga Kurilo, *Лютеране в России: XVI–XX [Lutherans in Russia: 16th–20th c.]* (Sterling Heights, MI.: Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2002), 146–47.

¹⁴ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵ Dmitry Lotov to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

¹⁶ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 227.

given on a protest sent to the government from parishioners not only of St. Michael's but also St. Peter and Paul and the High Church Council.¹⁷ In the end, though, Pyotr Smidovich, the chairman of the VTsIK, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, decided in favor of CAI. The congregation of St. Michael's was allowed to move to the former Reformed Church's building in central Moscow, sharing the church with Evangelical Christians and Baptists until the congregation was finally shut down in 1936.¹⁸

Over in Leningrad, a harbinger of the troubled times to come was illustrated by the report of a citizen antagonistic towards religion. In 1926, this unnamed witness reported to the OGPU (now the more frequently used name for the GPU) on Pastor Helmut Hansen of St. Peter's Lutheran in Leningrad. Troubled by his gatherings of young people for religious purposes and clearly a little too well informed, this person wrote, "Pastor Hansen gathers boys and girls in his apartment every Wednesday at 7 p.m. where they sing spiritual songs. He even has a teacher who teaches them and he pays her as if in a school. Is this really allowed?? And his wife gives singing lessons there and at 1 p.m. on Sundays they have a children's gathering where they sing songs and teach Christianity under the guise of a church service. And then every Monday and Thursday at 5 p.m. in the church building they teach the children. Does the *dvatsatka* of the church know about this and allow them to do it? Or do they not know?"¹⁹ This accusation would in fact accurately describe a violation of the law concerning religious activities with children, but it was a law that was rarely enforced. That would soon change in 1929.

¹⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 30, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 227.

¹⁹ Maxim Ivanov, *Лютеранский Квартал в Петербурге [The Lutheran Quarter in Petersburg]* (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Yevropeiskiy Dom, 2004), 39.

Pressure Applied to Leningrad's Lutheran Institutions

The pressure was turned up in 1928 as opposition to Pastor Hansen's activities was aired in a public forum. In an article entitled "Coffee Evenings" from May 9, 1928, *Leningradskaya Pravda* spoke ominously of a conspiracy forming at St. Peter's Lutheran on the 25th of October Prospect [historically and now currently known as Nevsky Prospect], the main street in the center of town. Pastor Hansen and his colleague Kurt Muss, pastor of the only Russian-speaking Lutheran congregation in Leningrad, were college classmates who were now accused of creating anti-Soviet cadres. An extensive quotation of this article gives a flavor of the bitter criticism now being leveled against activist Lutheran pastors in Leningrad:

In the center of the city, a revolution is being hatched next to the Marxist seminary... in an ancient church, paint peeling off its walls, just like 400 years ago. Gloomy mysterious services, sermons howled out by Helmut Hansen, the bellicose preacher and wily philosopher. He quotes Luther, Calvin, Nietzsche, Confucius, and about God, even Marx. He calls for war, preaches openly anti-Semitic sermons and counterrevolution. This is what this good pastor inculcates in the children. His counter-revolutionary worked is joined by the young Pastor Muss. This notable subject [note bene-not "citizen"!] was sent to a labor camp for three years for espionage, having sent intelligence data to England. ... Pastor Hansen has still not gone underground [with his activities] in order to 'preach and fight'. He lives rent free in his own apartment in the house of the Finnish Consulate ... where they hold religious services ... and gather all who are offended by Soviet power ... Allow us to refer these shrewd preachers to the prosecutor's office, so that they can defend us from the counterrevolutionary hissing sounds coming out of the bilious mouth of Pastor H. Hansen.²⁰

²⁰ P-87890, Volume 1, List 605, FSB Archives of St Petersburg Region; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 227. Kurt Muss is often accused of spying for Great Britain, but in reality his contact was with Dr. Morehead of the National Lutheran Council in America. He distributed aid in 1922 for the American Lutherans in the Rostov and the Don River region in southern Russia and sent a report upon his activities, as Morehead required. This report was used as an excuse for the charge of espionage, albeit a report to an American not an Englishman. Naturally, the report contained only information about distribution of aid to suffering Lutherans, but Muss was critical of the Soviet government, claiming that it was to blame for the famine. Morehead was convinced that this was the reason for Muss' arrest. See John Morehead to Robert Withington, February 8, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

We know from the interrogations held by the OGPU after his arrest that the article alerted Hansen and his wife Erna to the inherent danger of carrying out activities associated with normal church life. Erna, in a December 21, 1929 interrogation in prison by the OGPU, admitted that the article in *Leningradskaya Pravda* had alarmed her and her husband. She confessed to passing lists of the confirmands, notebooks, and biblical texts for children and the programs of musical church concerts over to Sunday school teacher Elisabeth (Elsa) Freifeldt, daughter of the late Bishop Conrad Freifeldt.²¹ In her own interrogation, Freifeldt confirmed that Erna Hansen, fearing a search of their apartment, handed her the aforementioned papers sometime in 1929, most likely earlier in the year.²²

Helmut Hansen, however, when interrogated by the OGPU on the next day, December 22, mentioned that his wife had handed over these papers to Ilsa Wassermann, Margo Jurgens and Elsa Freifeldt after the printing of the article in *Leningradskaya Pravda*. When he learned of his wife's actions, he demanded that she get the papers back, but apparently his wife didn't carry out his request immediately.²³ Erna would get the papers back in October 1929, and then only because Elsa Freifeldt had gotten into an argument with their neighbors, Ivan and Boris Anichkov. The brothers, no doubt aware of the pastoral activities taking place in their building, had threatened to bring the law down on them. Perhaps fearing for Elsa more than herself and her family, Erna took the papers back. But in November 1929, shortly before the mass arrests of parishioners of St. Peter's and Jesus Christ Lutheran Church, she handed them back again to Elsa. (Elsa would burn the so-called compromising materials on Wednesday morning, December

²¹ P-87890, Volume 1, List 113–114, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²² P-87890, Volume 1, List 235–236, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²³ P-87890, Volume 1, List 23, 119, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

19, after the arrest of the Hansens on the 17th. According to OGPU files, she would mock them for their inability to get ahold of the documents).²⁴ The OGPU would eventually represent all of these actions in sinister form, as if Hansen was engaged in conspiracy and in a panic, expecting imminent arrest, had these papers hidden by parishioners.²⁵

Right next door to St. Peter's stood the Peterschule, established in 1712 and long admired as a model school in Russia with famous graduates such as the composer Modest Mussorgsky.²⁶ The church and school had naturally operated in conjunction for centuries, and so despite the Bolshevik Revolution, those ties remained to some extent. For example, Peterschule schoolteacher and member of St. Peter's *dvatsatka*, Alexander Wolfius, had, according to church member Evgeny Hoffman, allowed Hansen's youth groups special privileges. They were allowed use of the school gymnasium for games, even if the youth were not actually students of School Number 41.²⁷

The relationship could legitimately be questioned because since 1918, the Peterschule had been transformed into Soviet School Number 41 in accordance with the law separating church schools from the state. Previously, the Peterschule had escaped most of the Sovietizing tendencies that had been brought to bear in Russian schools. While the teaching of religion and biblical languages had been forbidden after 1918 and co-educational classes had been introduced, most of the teachers had remained on staff, including the principal Erich Kleinenberg and his assistant,

²⁴ P-87890, Volume 1, List 236, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; P-87890, Volume 2, List 612, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 612, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁶ Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers," 196; "Petrischule" ["Peterschule"], *Wikipedia.ru*, last modified December 25, 2013.

²⁷ P-87890, Volume 2, List 619, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Wolfius.²⁸ They were probably able to influence the students with their Christian faith, although they had to be wary.

But the Peterschule now employed other teachers who had no ties to the Lutheran Church. In May of 1928, a social sciences' teacher by the name of Mrs. Weinstveig, an immigrant from Germany and a member of the Communist Party, decided to publicize the fact that members of the senior class of students had been confirmed at St. Peter's Lutheran, located right next to the school. A younger student named N.P. Ulyanov afterwards remembered that the older students themselves hadn't taken special notice of their Confirmation. Obviously, though, enemies of religion had. Weinstveig's accusation was apparently taken as a signal to act because some aggressive communists soon formed a commission to investigate the school and accusations were lodged against it in the local newspapers.²⁹

Despite all of this commotion, nothing was found to be criminal or irregular in the school except the fact that the students habitually addressed some teachers as Frau and Herr!! Nevertheless, Kleinenberg and Wolfius were dismissed along with a large percentage of the teachers, all having in common that they were pre-Communist graduates of the Peterschule. Such people were no longer fit to move the school in the direction that the communists desired. Some teachers like biology teacher, Alfred Forsman, took advantage of the relative liberality regarding

²⁸ Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers," 197–99, 201. Wolfius was a particularly well-respected teacher, having taught from 1903– 1928 at the Peterschule. In 1920 he led the noted British science fiction writer H.G. Wells on a tour of the school and it made a favorable impression upon him. Wells wrote of the Peterschule in his book *Russia in the Shadows* (1921) and spoke of how the Russian school system was not completely broken, this after having been given a Potemkin-style tour of a school in Petrograd that had not impressed him in the least. Wells admired the Peterschule's geometry and geography classes, remarking on the teaching and the materials that were available to the students. In addition, apparently Peterschule's students were not aware of Wells as a writer, convincing him that he was in a normal school. This was an indication that the students were genuinely unaware of Wells' status as a writer in contrast to the previous school where they had obviously been coached to speak of him as the most famous writer in English literature! See H.G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921), 119–21.

²⁹ Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers," 202.

emigration laws and immigrated to Finland. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Enlightenment, had openly debated Wolfius at the Peterschule back in 1925 on the topic of the existence of Christ, and not very effectively from one account. Now he publicly proclaimed that a Christian teacher was a contradiction in the Soviet state and measures should be taken to replace them with atheist teachers.³⁰ Whereas previously the teaching in schools had not allowed mention of God or religion, in May 1929 at the Congress of Soviets Anatoly Lunacharsky announced that the government would institute measures to more actively promote atheist education. Textbooks would be changed to focus upon religion's incompatibility with science, a materialistic outlook would be promoted, and excursions to anti-religious museums planned.³¹

At Peterschule, though, the changes had already begun in 1928. The new directors were hardline communists who immediately imposed their regime upon the school, stating that they would lead the charge against "the enemy spirit of the former times." The new principal, M. C. Yeletsky, was noted as a particularly cruel character, while the director of academic affairs was none other than Leon Trotsky's first wife, Alexandra Bronshtein. His fall from power and exile from the Soviet Union would not bode well for her, either, as she would perish eventually during Stalin's Great Purge [1938]. Assisting Yeletsky in establishing the new order in the school was the steward, Ilya Pechatnikov. A former Chekist, Pechatnikov seems to have been quite a character, noted for his long bangs and habit of carrying a revolver in his pants' pocket. With these partisans of the communist *Zeitgeist* in charge, it was now abundantly clear that the old days where St. Peter's Lutheran Church was closely associated with the Peterschule were gone for good.³² Schools in Stalin's Soviet Union were to be venues only for atheist propaganda.

³⁰ Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers," 199, 202–4.

³¹ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 43–44.

³² Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers," 227.

Winter 1928–1929

With the dawning of the New Year, 1929, the battle for the exercise of religious freedom in the Soviet Union began in earnest. On January 24, 1929, Stalinist ally and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party, Lazar Kaganovich, signed a decree “On the Measures for Strengthening Antireligious Work.” When the decree was sent out to local party committees in February, the party cadres were urged to identify religious organizations as the “only legally counterrevolutionary force” acting in society. The directive admonished communists to speed up the antireligious struggle against the clergy and opponents of socialism.³³

In that same month, the Secretariat of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee formed a separate commission to insert changes into the Constitution of the USSR. The new wording allowed for “freedom of religious confession and anti-religious propaganda,” a change from the constitution that had been accepted in 1918 which had called for “freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda.” Initially the committee had actually agreed upon language acquiescing to freedom of “religious convictions,” but ultimately found that language a little too broad and open to interpretation in favor of religious believers. The phrase “religious confession” would soon be interpreted to include only the activities taking place within the church building. When pastors like Kurt Muss would cite the rights of a citizen to believe and act upon his faith, these new provisions in the Constitution would already contradict their interpretation of the law as anachronistic.³⁴

While the Soviet state was turning up the heat on Christians, Dr. John Morehead of the Lu-

³³ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 230.

³⁴ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 242; Mikhail Shkarovky and Nadezhda Cherepenina, *История Евангелическо-Лютеранской Церкви на Северо-Западе России, 1917–1945 [The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northwest Russia, 1917–1945]* (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Dmitry Bulanin, 2004), 133.

theran World Convention was planning for the year 1929. With heartfelt and typical American optimism, he encouraged Bishops Meyer and Malmgren to increase their outreach opportunities among the many peoples and religious groups within Russia. Bishop Meyer regretfully answered him, “We live and work here in Russia under such extraordinary circumstances that it is hard for a foreigner to understand what is possible and what is not possible.”³⁵ Morehead, in his ardent desire to reach the lost with the Gospel, had been asking for information on the possibilities of doing outreach among Muslims, Buddhists and atheists in Russia. Meyer’s response was that the communist authorities would immediately be alerted to anyone trying to do mission outreach, so it would be best to concentrate on the inner life of the church for the time being until “the Lord opens up a door.”³⁶

Likewise in his correspondence with Morehead, Bishop Malmgren regretted that twelve years after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian Lutherans had not taken further steps to support themselves and become weaned off foreign aid. The shame and embarrassment came through in his letter even as he acknowledged that persecution had grown stronger and the pressure greater upon the parishioners, as well as the seminary. Steadily increasing taxes, a practice the communists would use to great effect in the future, made it more difficult to run the church.³⁷ In economic matters, ration cards for bread were distributed to ordinary citizens but not to pastors or seminary students. They could only get bread after citizens had purchased their fill and that at double the price. In an attempt to get around these restrictions, the seminary bought flour

³⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 9, and John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, February 15, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 9, and John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, February 15, 1929.

³⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 9, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

and baked its own bread in order to save money.³⁸

Despite these obstacles, Morehead urged the bishops to do what they could to attend the Lutheran World Convention to be held in Copenhagen in June. He knew that no one could so clearly explain the situation of the Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union better than the bishops. In the Lutheran World Convention held in Eisenach in 1923, Bishop Meyer had done just that, impressing all who heard his eloquent pleas for assistance to the Russian Lutheran Church.³⁹ But 1929 was no longer 1923, when a Lutheran bishop could travel without too much hindrance to a religious conference. The proponents of an aggressive atheism were in power now and they were not inclined to make matters easy for any church. In reality, there was no longer any discussion about taking a tactical step back while attacking the forces of religion in the country. Stalin was, on the contrary, in full attack mode.

Responding to Morehead's January letters (5th and 16th), Malmgren on February 15 said that he would do everything in his power to get the visa permit for Denmark and the LWC in Copenhagen for June. But the increasing pressure of anti-religious propaganda would probably make it more difficult for anyone to get a visa for a visit that concerned religious matters.⁴⁰ Morehead, for his part, was not entirely unaware of the current conditions in the Soviet Union. He responded to Malmgren on March 15, "We have heard from many sources that conditions are more unfavorable than usual at the present time for religion and the Church in Russia." Sympathizing with the bishop, Morehead continued, "May God grant grace, a strong faith, and an unflinching courage to all His people in Russia and we pray that in His own time and way He

³⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 15 and March 24, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 109–11.

⁴⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 15, 1929.

may deliver them from all their difficulties and restore unto the Church of our Fathers in Russia freedom, growth and prosperity in the great work of witnessing to the Gospel of Christ and developing the cause of true religion among the people.”⁴¹

Spring/Summer 1929

But while American and Russian Lutherans were busy exploring the increasingly restricted realm of what was possible for the church in the Soviet Union, a crushing blow to religious freedom came to all Christian believers on April 8. The new law entitled “Concerning Religious Associations” would be enforced so strictly that it would basically determine the parameters of the relationship between church and state up until the closure of the Lutheran Church in 1939 (and actually among all churches until 1990!).⁴² Its importance can be attested by the fact that the officials for the NLC and LWC obtained a translation of the law for their archives. When they read the translation of that law, any hopes that they could expand missions and church work among Russian Lutherans must have been dealt a severe shock).⁴³

The new law was aimed at practices that Lutherans and other Christians were pursuing with the goal to strengthen and grow Christian communities. Undergirding the new law was the reminder from the 1918 Law on Separation of Church from State that the church still did not own its property but that it was granted the use of that property by the state. All activities and meetings in the church would now have to be approved and the secretary’s notes sent to the local

⁴¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, March 15, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴² Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 233; One of the primary calls of the religious dissidents during Mikhail Gorbachev’s *Glasnost* period of the late 1980s was for the repeal of the 1929 Law on Religious Associations, a testament to its endurance and harmful impact upon Christian communities for decades in Russia. See Koenraad de Wolf, *Dissident for Life: Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), Kindle, Location 3815, 3861.

⁴³ “Translation of Law on Religious Associations in USSR 1929,” LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Soviet authorities, by whose permission the church building was being used. Regarding the specific contents of the law, the most devastating of the 68 paragraphs in the new law was paragraph

17. It stipulated the following:

Religious associations may not (a) create mutual credit societies, co-operatives or commercial undertakings, or in general use the property at their disposal for other than religious purposes; (b) give material assistance to their members; (c) organize for children, young people and women special prayer or other meetings, or, generally, meetings, groups, circles or departments for biblical or literary study, sewing, working or the teaching of religion, &c., or organize excursions, children's play-grounds, public libraries or reading rooms, or organize sanatoria and medical assistance. Only books necessary for the purposes of the cult may be kept in the buildings and premises used for worship.⁴⁴

The regulation that the church building could only be used for services and not for teaching would reduce the church to the status of what the Soviet authorities officially deemed a "cult." In other words, by basically outlawing Sunday school, Catechism classes, youth gatherings and Bible classes for all groups, the state was now saying that the church could not carry out the normal functions that would allow it to educate its members. Of course, the state's actions were intentionally designed so that the church would not be able to inculcate the faith in a new generation of believers. Bishop Malmgren recognized this danger immediately, calling Paragraph 17 the worst of the regulations: "This paragraph's goal is to enfeeble the entire life of the worshipping community and allow only church services."⁴⁵

In fact, that was indeed the goal of the Soviets because at the Congress of Soviets on May 22, the July 1918 Constitution was amended to reflect the new law on religious associations. Whereas the old constitution had stipulated the equal right of citizens to "*religious and anti-*

⁴⁴ "Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars Respecting Religious Associations: April 8, 1929," Department of State Records-Decimal File 1930-1939, 361.6121, RG 59, National Archives II.

⁴⁵ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 275.

religious propaganda”, the new amendment allowed only “freedom of religion and *anti-religious propaganda*.” (Emphasis mine). Those interpreting the new laws observed that a Christian believer could no longer answer in response to public attacks upon his faith.⁴⁶ With the increasing stridency of the so-called Godless (Bezbozhnik) movement, the faithful believers were now severely hampered in their efforts to defend the faith.

Although technically the teaching of Christianity to children had already been forbidden in 1918, the law had not been strictly enforced. Throughout the 1920s in the countryside, for example, religious life carried on as it had for many centuries with only minor interference, depending of course, upon the zealotry of local Communist Party officials. Now, the law specifically stated that Confirmation instruction could not be given to anyone under 18 years of age, nullifying the former allowance to confirm those who had reached 15 years of age.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in 1928 at the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, it had been reported that the government was restricting the time frame for Confirmation teaching to two weeks! Now with the addition of this new law, regular Confirmation instruction would be virtually impossible and depend upon the willingness of the pastor to flout the law.⁴⁸ Naturally, this could be more easily accomplished in the countryside where traditional Lutheran villagers would defend the pastor and the local Party officials would have less respect. But in a crowded city with the ever-expanding practice of spying on one’s neighbor, the risk would be much greater. Pastors Helmut Hansen and Kurt Muss would begin to take that risk in the Fall of 1929, looking for their own loopholes in the law in order to teach children the Christian faith.

Paragraph 17 would also restrict the right of congregations to assist their fellow members

⁴⁶ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 41–42.

⁴⁷ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 81.

⁴⁸ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 278.

financially. Charity for parishioners had been a common practice in the past for the Lutheran Church as evidenced by its own established institutions, hospitals and poor houses, for example. Despite the fact that those institutions were outlawed and taken over by the state in 1918, Lutheran churches still found the means to help their own elderly and poor. For instance, Helmut Hansen had arranged for musical concerts at St. Peter's and sold tickets by lottery in order to use the proceeds for the benefit of the poorer members of the congregation. In conjunction with Paragraph 17, though, Paragraph 54 allowed the church to take free-will offerings within its building or outside it but only for the upkeep of the church, the clergy and administrative bodies. Elena Muss tried to explain to the OGPU that the concerts were held in order to pay off the heavy tax burden imposed upon the church, too, but unfortunately charity to parishioners would no longer fall under those conditions. In addition, Paragraph 12 elaborated on Paragraph 54 by clarifying that these free-will offerings could not be "organized", which of course was the only way that the concerts for the benefit of the church's tax burden or the poor could be held in the first place.⁴⁹

In Paragraph 11, a short reference to the forbidding of publishing or printing religious materials would now provide further legal obstacles to the publication of the church journal *Unsere Kirche*. When Bishop Meyer announced the publication of this new church journal in August 1927, hopes were still high that the Lutheran Church would be able to carve out a sphere of influence, however restricted, within the USSR. Now Paragraph 11 promised to dash that optimism, affecting not only the Lutheran but also Baptist and Evangelical journals as well.⁵⁰ Steadily and surely, though, the Soviet authorities had already been emasculating the journal through

⁴⁹ "Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars Respecting Religious Associations: April 8, 1929;" P-87890, Volume 3, List 34, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁵⁰ "Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars Respecting Religious Associations: April 8, 1929;" Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 4, 1927, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

ensorship to such an extent that every appearance of the publication only came about after a contentious struggle. Sometimes they would forbid an article outright while at other times they would mercilessly strike out portions of an article. Even if the author would try to write carefully and agree to change the text as the censor required, his article would frequently be rejected in the end. Due to these constant obstructions, Malmgren wrote to the *Gustav Adolf Verein*'s Fritz Rentdorff in August: "We can no longer continue."⁵¹ The August issue would be the last. The Soviets had achieved their goal through relentless pressure and chicanery without having to expend political capital by banning *Unsere Kirche* outright.⁵² The Lutherans were not being singled out, though, as Baptist and Evangelical journals were also banned in 1929.⁵³ And what was the official reason given by the Soviets for the banning of religious journals? A lack of paper.⁵⁴

The pressure upon the Lutheran Church would only get worse towards the end of the summer. Finnish and Estonian Lutherans had been able to get Christian books across the border with the approval of the government, albeit with a charge of 500 rubles added to their account! But by late summer, the Latvians were stuck with 10,000 hymnbooks that they couldn't send into Soviet Russia. At first they had been given the go-ahead by the government, but in an abrupt reversal the Soviet authorities now refused to allow the hymnbooks to cross the border. Furthermore, the Lutheran Church had requested the right to publish a simple wall calendar minus biblical texts but with the festival days of the Church year indicated. That, too, was refused. Bishop Malmgren

⁵¹ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 90–91.

⁵² Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 90–91.

⁵³ Louis Sussdorff, Jr. to Henry Stimson, January 15, 1930, 861.404/283, RG 59, National Archives II.

⁵⁴ Johann Völl, "Bilder aus der Geschichte einer Kirche unter dem Kreuz," 111.

succinctly summed matters up: “The anti-religious direction is sharper than before.”⁵⁵ In light of these subsequent actions by the government, it seems that Paragraph 11 was more than mere words on paper. It was taken very seriously. Those Christian tracts that Dr. Morehead had hoped to send to Russia back in 1928 could and would not legally see the light of day.⁵⁶

Paragraph 19 also deserves further comment. The implications of this paragraph would hinder the future mission work of the church, something dear to Morehead’s heart. Paragraph 19 had restricted the activities of pastors and teachers to the church building or the places where the members resided. With this law in effect, the mission trips that Bishop Meyer had taken in the past to Siberia would now be outside the confines of the law, although he would test these provisions of the law with a summer mission trip in 1929. With the dearth of pastors in distant regions like Siberia or the Volga, those pastors serving in the vicinity had been committed to traveling to surrounding villages in order to serve vacant Lutheran congregations. This, too, was now outlawed.⁵⁷ The Communist state was simply closing every loophole in the law that had allowed religious life to flourish. Bishop Malmgren bluntly explained the new law this way: “... it was a declaration of a relentless struggle, where possible, up to and including extinction” [of the church].⁵⁸

The German consulate in Leningrad, through whom Dr. Morehead as chairman of the LWC had been sending money and with whom Bishop Malmgren was in constant conversation,

⁵⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 12, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁶ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, March 8, 1928, and Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 5, 1928, Archives of ELCA. In 1928 Morehead had offered to ship biblical tracts to Russia for use in evangelization. Both Meyer and Malmgren dissuaded him from doing this, explaining that as anti-religious propaganda flourished, tolerance towards religious literature of any kind was increasingly limited.

⁵⁷ Louis Sussdorff, Jr. to Henry Stimson, January 15, 1930; Kahle, 276.

⁵⁸ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 234.

also had a gloomy take on the new law. They noticed that the antireligious propaganda in the press, on the streets, and in the schools and factories, was increasing in its stridency.⁵⁹ The journal of the League of the Godless, *Bezbozhnik*, called for doing away with Easter since it was an expression of Christian anti-Semitism, blaming the Jews for the crucifixion of Christ. In contrast, they said, the international movement of communism was struggling to unify all working peoples by emphasizing their common humanity irrespective of nationality.⁶⁰ As if to emphasize their new aggressiveness in the struggle against religion, the League of the Godless would morph into the League of the Militant Godless in June 1929 at its convention.⁶¹

Interestingly enough, though, while good communists were out on streets celebrating May Day (May 1) and participating in parades, about 8–12 Lutheran youth were being led on tours by the Hansen's. Active youth of St. Peter's, the Kossetti sisters Tamara and Benita, for example, were among those who took part.⁶² It was a holiday where everyone had the day off in order to celebrate the Communist state, but rather than having their youth participate in May Day parades, the Hansen's shrewdly used the free day as an opportunity to take the youth on an excursion. Magdalina Freifeldt, although not certain whether it was at a March celebration or on the 1st of May, remembers the number of youth participating with the Hansen's as ranging between ten to fifteen. Hansen took them 30 kilometers outside the city to Pavlovsk, the palace

⁵⁹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 234.

⁶⁰ *Bezbozhnik [Godless]* 8, (April 1929).

⁶¹ *Bezbozhnik* 12, (June 1929).

⁶² Marina Mikhailova, "Семейная Фотография [Family Photograph], in Дорога Вместе [The Road Together], No.1, 2009. The girls' unique last name was due to the fact that their father, Valentin, was an Italian. A lover of music, he was an acquaintance of the famed composer, Peter Tchaikovsky. Valentin served as a civil servant in the Tsarist government but died while the girls were very young. Their mother, Emilia, was of Finnish ethnicity [family name Tukka] and remarried a Russian-German, Paul Neiman. The family attended St. Peter's together.

of Emperor Paul I. Freifeldt however, did not view the excursion as a “counter-demonstration,” as the OGPU would later assert. It was simply a chance to get outside the city on a free day and enjoy the fresh air.⁶³ Those Lutherans, who due to school or work responsibilities had to participate in the parades naturally did so, although Helmut Hansen was quoted as saying that these Communist parades were simply “marches with red rags.”⁶⁴ In fact, Sunday school teacher Ilsa Wasserman remembers Hansen saying after a May 1st of November 7th rally that “people gallivant about with red rags instead of praying.”⁶⁵ These excursions on Communist holidays would later be presented in menacing terms by the OGPU when they interrogated Erna Hansen.⁶⁶

Easter was celebrated that year on May 5th, and the anti-Easter demonstrations were greater than in previous years and the pressure upon the congregations to compromise with the spirit of the times even stronger.⁶⁷ The state would now add yet a further burden upon congregations by requiring re-registration with the current practice of working through the *dvatsatka*.⁶⁸ However, the new agreements would only be “temporary” whereas previously they had been “in perpetuity.”⁶⁹ Since the congregations would need to register more frequently, the power of the state over the life of the congregation would increase as a result.

At Jesus Christ Lutheran Church, Pastor Kurt Muss’ orations in church fell upon the ears of the secret police as the battle against religion grew in strength and tenacity. Muss believed that one could still be a good citizen and a Christian, a view that was becoming increasingly

⁶³ P-87890, Volume 2, List 496, 532, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁶⁴ P-87890, Volume 2, List 532, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁶⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 614, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁶⁶ P-87890, Volume 2, List 506, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁶⁷ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 234.

⁶⁸ Translation of Law on Religious Associations in USSR 1929.”

⁶⁹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 234.

untenable in a society intent upon throwing out the gods of the past. Confirmation had been basically allowed in the past since local officials did little to discourage it. But with the new law coming into effect, training children in the “way they should go” would be unacceptable. The May confirmation at Jesus Christ Lutheran Church in Leningrad would be the last one allowed there.⁷⁰ Perhaps sensing the pressure upon Christians to conform to society’s new norms, Muss laid down the gauntlet against atheism on Confirmation Day at St. Peter’s Lutheran church in the center of Leningrad, where his Russian-speaking congregation now met. On May 6th, according to 18-year-old parishioner, Dagmara Schreiber, Pastor Kurt Muss preached boldly. His words clearly had an impact upon her, as she would recall them word for word after her arrest. Muss began:

Today is a day of joy. You have long waited for this day. We know that the Almighty created this day. If He hadn’t defended and blessed us, would we have even seen this day? There are people today captivated by new ideals, thought up by professors in their offices, rejecting everything from the past. They say that we are confused, but could they not be the ones who are mistaken? Because if the scientists themselves are mistaken, who’s right? In earlier times scientific people proved that God exists. How can we know but that perhaps the time will come when these new ideals, falling like manna from the offices of professors, will make us smile [ironically]? Maybe they will be seen as mistaken?

Warming up to his theme, Muss went on to remind his listeners:

I have long explained to you the goal of life. I familiarized you with the person of Christ. When Pilate stood before the uncontrolled, bloodthirsty mobs and said, “What will be done with Christ?” they shouted out in response, “Crucify Him!” As with Pilate in his time, you, too, now stand in his place. Pilate began with small steps but the more he moved in his mistaken direction, he eventually allowed others to crucify Christ. But how will you respond to Him? Don’t forget that you are responsible before Christ for this answer! They will persecute you for His name just as they persecuted Him, because they did not know of that coming miraculous day when every Christian will have the occasion to rejoice. Still, in the meantime there will be gloomy days. We are now just a few people remaining. Just as with the ten lepers

⁷⁰ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 278.

only one of them returned, we once who were numerous have now seen that many have left us.⁷¹

Noting that their opponents labeled them as “dreamers”, Muss called for the confirmands to remain firm. “Today as you children return to your normal lives, will you find any support for your faith? Will you be able to be sailors on the stormy seas?” Not content to simply call his confirmands to a firmness of faith against the atheism of the day, Muss rallied them to an active faith: “Tonight there will be an organ concert for support of the church. If we don’t take advantage of the possibility we have to support our church, will we then simply remain silent and give it back [to the state]? Our generation will then ask: Where were you, Christians, when you gave back your church?”⁷²

In the same month that Muss was preaching boldly and outspokenly to his parishioners, Soviet Minister of Culture, Anatoly Lunacharsky, was declaring to a session of the All-Russian Soviets that the “building up of the culture must accompany a battle against the churches and religions in any of their forms.”⁷³ Despite his public challenge to the confirmands to stand for Christ against the powers of the age, Muss still remained free for the time being. The Soviets were not yet prepared to attack all pastors and churches openly, as a letter from Bishop Malmgren to Fritz Rentdorff indicated. Malmgren noted in his letter to Rentdorff on July 2 that the April 8 Law had not come into force just yet. But in the next few weeks, he expected it would become binding.⁷⁴ He further acknowledged that while the Church would naturally continue to fulfill its calling, it was obvious that the work would become more difficult and even dangerous.

⁷¹ P-87890, Volume 3, List 562–563, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁷² P-87890, Volume 3, List 562–563, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁷³ Kurilo, *Lutherans in Russia*, 20.

⁷⁴ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 274–75.

“We are dealing with an opponent who has openly expressed his desire to annihilate us and he will not back off from using any means in order to carry out that goal.”⁷⁵ In the autumn, the attacks against Christians would heat up considerably.

But first, many Lutherans in Leningrad had a chance to enjoy yet one more summer of freedom. That summer, in defiance of the new law on religious associations, Muss along with Helmut Hansen continued activities as they had in the past with children from their congregations. They would rent a dacha (summer home) and offer summer camp activities in the Baltic resort of Strelna. Hansen had served as a pastor there before being called to St. Peter’s, and so must have had contacts who knew about summer homes available for the children and their teachers. The children’s’ parents would pay 5–10 rubles a month for this opportunity, while those who were poorer were allowed to attend for free.⁷⁶ The parents must have taken care of some of the cost while Hansen no doubt gathered other funds for the camp from here and there. (For example, he acknowledged getting five rubles from Pastor Arnold Frischfeld the previous year for the summer camp).⁷⁷

At times Pastor Muss and his sister Luisa would help out at the camp, but German-born, 61 year-old Amalia Meyer was the primary caretaker for the children. She had been a member of St. Peter’s when Pastor Hansen took the call to serve there in 1924, and when she fell on hard financial times in 1926 he took her into his apartment as the nanny for his three children. So in the summertime it was natural for her to then serve as the caretaker for the camp children. In gratitude, Hansen allowed her two grandchildren to attend the camp for free. Her respect for the

⁷⁵ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 82.

⁷⁶ P-87890, Volume 2, List 619, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁷⁷ P-87890, Volume 2, List 549, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

pastoral spirit of Helmut Hansen was aptly displayed when she was arrested the following year and interrogated by the OGPU.⁷⁸

The camp itself was not just an unorganized time of relaxation for the children after a busy school year, though. Educational opportunities were provided for the children. Those who attended were usually students whose parents couldn't take them to their own dachas or those who needed special help with academics. Elsa Freifeldt joined seminary students Otto Tumm, Conrad Gerling and Peter Mikhailov in providing German and Russian language classes, as well as arithmetic. It seems the children did not have religion classes per se but each day would end with the singing of hymns and prayer. Photographs preserved by the Muss family confirm the accounts given by Tumm and Mikhailov to the OGPU that there were about 20 children attending, ranging in ages from seven to sixteen. In the photos the children seem happy and carefree. Given their poverty, they obviously treasured the opportunity to spend a good portion of their summer at one of the Baltics' nicer resort areas. As far as we know, because of increasing restrictions by the state, this would be the last camp held in Strelna by the Lutheran Church.⁷⁹

Erna Hansen, when interrogated by the OGPU after her arrest later that year, would emphasize her husband's concerns about the moral upbringing of the children. We now know that there were serious concerns about the steep decline in moral values even among communists. The prudishness of the early Bolsheviks gave way to a new cultural phenomenon by the end of the decade, so that what we might call "family values" was now seen by youth as

⁷⁸ P-87890, Volume 2, List 489, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁷⁹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 620, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; P-87890, Volume 3, List 40, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Muss-Tumm Family Photo Collection.

outdated and bourgeois.⁸⁰ In a twist of irony, the communist attack upon traditional Christian morality backfired when youth began to adopt Western popular culture, best exemplified by the foxtrot and jazz music. No less than cultural heavyweights like famed novelist Maxim Gorky and Commissar of Public Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, led the assault on jazz. On April 18, 1928, Gorky published an article in *Pravda* entitled “Music of the Gross.”⁸¹ Ironically sounding much like an American Southern Baptist of the 1920s, Gorky decried the uninhibited sexuality unleashed by jazz rhythms.⁸² At the First All-Russian Musical Conference held in Leningrad in 1929, Lunacharsky echoed Gorky, expressing the need to counter this capitulation to bourgeois capitalism. He called for an attack upon decadent jazz and the foxtrot and in their place advocated a form of expression that preferred collectivism to individualism.⁸³

Despite the pleas of these prominent figures of Soviet culture, due to the dearth of apartments for newly married couples, many youth were inclined to forgo marriage as “a bourgeois holdover.” Instead, they gravitated towards a lifestyle of drinking, partying and sex without the benefit of marriage.⁸⁴ Influential Communist Alexandra Kollontai approved, expressing the materialistic ideal of “free love” this way: “We have intercourse for the same reason that we drink a glass of water, to slake our thirst.”⁸⁵ Even in the countryside, young girls started using powder and rouge and the old folk dances were replaced by the tango and foxtrot. Prostitution, venereal

⁸⁰ Vladimir Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin: Politics, Culture and Society, 1921–1929* (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005) Kindle, 217.

⁸¹ Frederick S. Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union 1917–1991*, 2nd ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 89, 92.

⁸² Starr, *Red and Hot*, 89–90.

⁸³ Frederick S. Starr, *Red and Hot*, 93.

⁸⁴ Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin*, 117.

⁸⁵ Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin*, 120.

disease and hooliganism followed forthwith. But these actions were not merely the typical, time-honored teenage rebellion against parents. Sons began to refuse to wear crosses for their parents and disrespect towards the church was growing.⁸⁶ The fact that abortion had been legal since 1920 could only contribute to further cultural decline and irresponsibility in matters pertaining to sexual behavior.⁸⁷

Near the end of 1926, a notorious rape case in Leningrad had become publicized throughout the Soviet Union. Known as the Chubarov Alley rape case, 27 young men were accused of raping a young woman. The incident led to a public discussion of morality in general, and as it occurred in Leningrad it stands to reason that Pastor Hansen was aware of the cultural climate in which his young parishioners were being raised.⁸⁸ No doubt pastors like Hansen were concerned that young parishioners could too easily be led astray and despite the threat from the new law on religious association to the youth, he could not refrain from preaching to them a different lifestyle. His wife Erna admitted that her husband's sermons would touch upon the immorality of the times, including the increasing number of young people disavowing marriage. His heart was drawn to the children and wives who had been literally "thrown away." The summer camps allowed him the opportunity to spend time with the children and cultivate within them a Christian spirit, a spirit contrary to the times in which they lived.⁸⁹

At the end of the summer in August, 33 year-old Kurt Muss married 21 year-old Elena

⁸⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), Kindle, 36; Lynne Viola, "The Peasant's Nightmare: Visions of Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside," *The Journal of Modern History* 62, No. 4 (December 1990), 753.

⁸⁷ Abortion numbers declined precipitously after the imposition of a ban in 1936. See "Abortii v Rossii" ["Abortion in Russia"], Wikipedia.ru, last modified December 24, 2013.

⁸⁸ Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin*, 120.

⁸⁹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 316, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Cherneshyeva at St. Peter's. Elena had joined Kurt earlier in the summer to help out at the summer camp.⁹⁰ But while Hansen and Muss were enjoying what would be their last summer of freedom, the forces of atheism were advancing. In June of 1929 the League of the Militant Godless proclaimed that it was time to conduct class war against "the last bastion of reaction hindering the building of socialism."⁹¹ This call to the barricades by atheists was having an effect in the organs of government. Both Bishops Meyer and Malmgren were refused visas to travel to the LWC conference in Copenhagen that summer. Nevertheless, Bishop Meyer did not allow this refusal to deter him from his work and took a missionary journey into the south of Russia. However, even though the people yearned for worship services, the local authorities did not allow him the right to conduct services in some of the colonies. Undeterred, in keeping with his character, he took advantage of whatever opportunities were granted to him in central Asia, including holding a worship service in the Lutheran church in Tashkent.⁹²

Fall 1929

As if the new law passed on April 8 was not enough of a warning to Christians that their activities would now be severely curtailed, the government declared its intention to change the times and seasons as well. A decree issued on September 24 introduced a new five-day work-week. The typical worker would work five days and then get one day of rest. Then he would go back to work the following day and repeat the process of four days of work, one day of rest. In all of this change, the normal weekdays and months were still observed. But naturally, the tradi-

⁹⁰ P-87890, Volume 3, List 136, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 276.

⁹² Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 276.

tional Sunday worship services were seriously affected since the workdays of factory workers were staggered so that not everyone had the same rest day. The effect upon church attendance in general was catastrophic, not to mention the effect upon other church holidays throughout the calendar year.⁹³ Pastors were forced to offer church services on Sunday evenings, not only because most workers would be at their place of employment during the daytime, but due to the stigma now being attached to church going in general. (It would be less noticeable to attend church in the evenings when it was dark).⁹⁴

The authorities' actions made clear their serious commitment to wean Russians from observing time and the days of the year according to the old church calendars. Even the names of the days were changed from day one to day five, with the goal being to do away with religious-oriented names like Sunday (Voskreseniye in Russian, meaning resurrection) and Saturday (Subbota in Russian, meaning Sabbath).⁹⁵ The end result was that only the festive Soviet holidays (e.g., May Day, Anniversary of the October Revolution) would be general rest days for all of the workers.⁹⁶ That this was an intentional act of the government could be gleaned from the newspapers, like Moscow *Pravda's* August 27 issue, which called this law the most powerful blow ever dealt by the Bolsheviks at "religious obscurantism."⁹⁷

Naturally, Lutheran parishioners were alarmed at this development. In his response, though, Pastor Kurt Muss realized that this was a defining moment of truth for the church. Muss

⁹³ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 40; Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 93; Efraim Briem, Translated by Edzard Schaper, *Kommunismus und Religion in der Sowjetunion: Ein Ideenkampf* (Basel, Switzerland: Verlag Friedrich Reinhardt AG, 1948), 326.

⁹⁴ German von Schmidt to LWC, October 31, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 25, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁵ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 93.

⁹⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 25, 1930.

⁹⁷ Louis Sussdorff, Jr. to Henry Stimson, January 15, 1930.

declared that the canceling of religious holidays was actually God's punishment since too many parishioners had not taken the Lord's Day seriously. This was God's plan to wake up His church because it did not consist of dead but living stones. So "the Lord was creating within the hearts of the people, temples, as we Christians actually await the day when there will no longer be churches, as the Apostle John wrote."⁹⁸ (Muss was most likely referring to Rev. 21:22: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb"). The church should, therefore, not be caught up in the minutiae of "passing days" but understand time as being held in God's hands. With such a perspective, Christians could look forward to a bright future while others would set their own limitations to time, focusing on "five years", for example (a clear swipe at the Five Year Plan). The one who believed in a living God who acts from century to century could look joyfully to the future because God would achieve His objectives with humankind in His own time. To those who doubted God's omnipotence and feared that He had left His people, Muss encouraged them to remember Christ's words that the Kingdom of God is among us. So anything that serves to benefit people by eliminating any differences between them is in itself a seed planted for the Kingdom of God. Speaking in this manner, Muss was clearly contradicting the ideals promoted by Stalin and his fellow communists, who were inclined rather to foment distinctions among the people by using contrasting terms like "proletariat" and "kulak."⁹⁹

The April 8 Law on religion and the changing of the workweek were the initial powerful attacks in 1929 directed towards the weakening of religious faith in the USSR. Bishop Malmgren, while writing to Dr. Morehead, admitted as much. The hostility towards all of Chris-

⁹⁸ P-87890, Volume 3, List 22, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹⁹ P-87890, Volume 3, List 22, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

tendom by the Soviet state could be seen “in the new law (April law) on the church and the cancellation of Sundays.” There would, unfortunately, be more attacks. But still Malmgren would humbly and faithfully conclude, “It pays once again to heed the plea of the disciples, ‘Lord, increase our faith!’ ”¹⁰⁰

Collectivization 1929: “Here, One Is Not Allowed To Live Anymore”

With the coming of autumn, a more indirect but equally devastating attack upon the church in the form of Joseph Stalin’s drive for collectivization of agriculture would kick into a higher gear. Already from June to September the number of collective farms had nearly doubled from an initial base of one million.¹⁰¹ The intention was that private enterprise in farming be completely eradicated in five years. Of course, the idealistic goal had been to transform the small, traditional labor-intensive farms into large, state-run collectives furnished with the latest machinery and espousing scientific principles for farming. But one thing appears clear from the evidence of those voices that spoke out among the people: there was little enthusiasm for this radical re-making of the countryside among the farmers.¹⁰²

Lutheran pastor Otto Seib, who served parishes in the Ukraine, wrote to Dr. Morehead about the real effect of collectivization in the countryside. First, no farmer was inclined to join the collective of his own free will. Second, outrageous taxes were levied against him so that the sale of his crops, household appliances or home would be insufficient to pay the government its stipulated fee. As a result, the farmer’s property would be auctioned off at rock-bottom prices to poorer farmers; for example, a horse could be sold at fluctuating prices from as much as \$7.50

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 24, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰¹ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 43.

¹⁰² Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 39–40.

(15 rubles) to \$.50 (1 ruble). Or, even worse—nothing. But if the farmer decided to walk away from it all with what little property remained to him, he would not be allowed to join any other commune and would soon be imprisoned. According to Seib, his was already the fate of thousands, no doubt including many of those who had been warned about the times to come in the last mission festival along the Volga in the summer of 1928.¹⁰³

The situation forced some of these Volga Germans to cry out for help through intermediaries in Germany like German von Schmidt, the editor of a German newspaper in Berlin. Writing to the LWC, Schmidt appealed for the formation of a “Hilfsaktion” to assist the Russian-German Christians. Former Russian-German pastors now living in Germany could lead the committee as they had contacts and knew the nature of the Soviet government, he said. To accentuate the urgency, he went on to describe the heartbreaking story of the typical Russian-German farmer. One night a Russian-German farmer would be awakened at 10 P.M. by the OGPU and brought before a commission and told that he must deliver 2000 poods (1 pood=36.11 lbs.) of grain within three days. The farmer would protest and say that he had only 500 poods and he needed to save some income in order to buy seed for planting in the coming year. The commission would then immediately raise the fee to 3000 poods! “Then why don’t you sell your cattle, or house goods, or home, in order to buy seed for the coming year?” the commission would respond. “Is it because you are a counterrevolutionary or betrayer of the working people?”¹⁰⁴

Through the work of their spies, the commission knew exactly what possessions the farmer held, so he couldn’t fool them. And yet being an obedient sort, he would gather what money he could from friends and relatives and sell his cattle and horse, thus ultimately collecting the

¹⁰³ Otto Seib to John Morehead, November 29, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰⁴ German von Schmidt to LWC, October 31, 1929. For a translation of goods to pounds, see “Pood,” Wikipedia, last modified January 4, 2017.

amount requested of him. In response to his willingness to meet their terms, the commission would then say, “You give us 3000 poods worth? That means you could gather yet another 500 poods!”¹⁰⁵ When he clearly could gather no more, the farmer would be psychologically broken and ready to join the collective. He would be pressured to sell all that he had at a loss and be forced into the collective of his own “free will” with only the clothes on his back. His children could also be taken from him and given to atheistic communists to raise or be sent to an orphanage. This situation was repeated not only in the Volga region but also in the Ukraine and in western Siberia.¹⁰⁶

Unjust actions like these were also taken against ministers like Rev. Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., who had assisted Dr. Morehead with distribution of food supplies to Lutherans during the 1921–22 famine in the Crimea. In the summer of 1929, he was required to turn over several hundred poods of grain to the Soviet authorities as a tax payment. Bishop Theophil Meyer, who was visiting Hörschelmann at the time in order to ordain his son, Ferdinand, Jr., noted that the amount of tax came to the equivalent of 1800 rubles. Naturally since Pastor Hörschelmann, Sr. didn’t own land or work as a farmer and received what bread he could from his parishioners, the government’s request was virtually impossible to fulfill.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Communist journalists went on to accuse Hörschelmann of hoarding powdered milk and other supplies that were to have been given to those affected by the famine in 1922. Now, eight years later, they sniffed, he hadn’t distributed those products but had obviously stolen them.¹⁰⁸ Hörschelmann’s own poverty made the charges appear as ludicrous as they sounded. In

¹⁰⁵ German von Schmidt to LWC, October 31, 1929.

¹⁰⁶ German von Schmidt to LWC, October 31, 1929.

¹⁰⁷ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, November 16, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰⁸ A. Reinmarus and G. Friesen, *Под Гнётом Религии: Немцы Колонисты СССР и Их Религиозные*

fact, the very next day after Bishop Meyer had left, the 74-year old Hörschelmann was forced to sell all of his household appliances at a ridiculously low rate, and was literally forced to sleep on the floor on a straw mattress (as his bed had been sold, too!). Only in this way was his tax obligation fulfilled.

A sympathetic parishioner had compassion on his pastor and purchased Hörschelmann's bed back for him but again, it was taken from him and resold! Other pastors were taxed at a similar rate, and not only they but also those parishioners who held positions on the church councils!¹⁰⁹ In Bishop Meyer's congregation of St. Peter and Paul in Moscow, seven of the ten church council members stepped down because of just such economic pressure applied by the Soviet authorities. The result was that the men, as family breadwinners, felt compelled to leave the church council while mostly women remained. Yet Meyer retained some degree of optimism, recognizing in their circumstances the theology of the cross that the apostle Paul knew so well: (2 Cor. 6:8–9, "We are treated as ... dying, and behold, we live!").¹¹⁰

Given such brutal actions by the government, it is no wonder that violence accompanied much of the forced collectivization throughout the USSR in 1929. Not everyone would willingly accept the new conditions that the Stalinist authorities were placing upon him. Arsons and murders spiked during this time, too, especially during the Fall as commissions like the previously mentioned one tried to extract from communities of farmers their land and goods. Soviet officials, considered to be outsiders by the villagers, were often attacked. But local peasants who

Организацiи [Under the Wrath of Religion: German Colonists of the USSR and Their Religion] (Moscow: Government Publishing Co., 1931), 102.

¹⁰⁹ "Pastorenverfolgung in der Krim," *Der Sonntagsbote*, August 17, 1930; Obituary of Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., from the private collection of his great-granddaughter, Alexandra Nikolaev.

¹¹⁰ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 4, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

served as activists for the Communist Party were also targeted, as were those who informed on other peasants.¹¹¹ Apocalyptic language and images found expression throughout the countryside, as they often had in Russia's past. In the central Volga region in 1929 the rumor was spread that "Soviet power is not of God, but of Antichrist."¹¹² Many felt that they would literally be stamped with the mark of the Antichrist on the forehead for joining the collective. Rumor fueled rumor as the agitated peasants, dreading the Day of Judgment inaugurated by the Beast of Revelation, resorted to violence and riots in order to stave off collectivization.¹¹³

While the evidence is still scanty regarding particulars of revolts in the countryside, it doesn't appear that the Lutheran villages were complicit in such violent reactions. As much as Lutheran pastors were appalled by the actions of the government, they were not theologically inclined to support violence against the authorities that God had instituted. Instead, many Lutherans decided to avoid violence by voting with their feet and traveling to Moscow in order to secure travel documents to emigrate. Karoline Glöckler, the sister-in-law of National Lutheran Council worker Charles Glöckler, wrote that her own children, as well as most villagers in the Kharkov region of the Ukraine, were ready to leave but that Moscow was currently overflowing with people and that most would be sent back. Still, there was little hope for her village of Ryabovo, because although the harvest had been good, the proceeds would go to pay for the "frighteningly high taxes." "Whether it will be difficult to begin over there (America), at least one will have his own property. Here one is not allowed to live anymore."¹¹⁴

In fact, emigration from the Soviet Union, while difficult, was not as hopeless as it might

¹¹¹ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 39–40.

¹¹² Viola, "The Peasant Nightmare," 762.

¹¹³ Viola, "The Peasant Nightmare," 762–67.

¹¹⁴ Karoline Glöckler to Charles Glöckler, December 1, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of ELCA.

seem in retrospect. The Soviet state in 1929 was not as adamantly opposed to allowing its citizens to leave as it would be in the 1930s. Edith Mützel, daughter of Lutheran pastor Emil Pfeiffer, recalls that her father was given the opportunity to immigrate with his family to America in 1929. As a former teacher of languages (including English), he could have resettled his family in the United States without too much difficulty. She was excited about the possibility of going to America and being able to attend school regularly, but he ultimately decided against the move. She remembers him saying that God had called him to serve the people of Norka, a village on the western banks of the Volga. He could not justify leaving his people or his call.¹¹⁵

Along with the Lutherans, thousands of Russian-Germans, including Mennonites and Catholics throughout Russia, left their homes and possessions behind on their way to Moscow in hopes of procuring visas to Germany or America. A precedent had been set in 1918 when many Mennonites had successfully immigrated to North America, so when they now left their villages to make the trek to Moscow, other Christians took note and followed them. The number of potential immigrants encamped around Moscow's suburbs may have numbered as many as 17,000, while an observer from the office of the German ambassador in Moscow counted close to 2500 Lutherans. Obviously, this did not sit well with the authorities, who were praising collectivization and claiming that it had the unstinting support of the people.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the Western press had awakened to the calamity developing in the USSR and vehemently protested the government's actions. In the December 1929 issue of *Bezbozhnik*, the atheist movement's monthly magazine, the proponents of a godless Weltanschauung felt it imperative to answer "the

¹¹⁵ Edith Mützel to Matthew Heise. The NKVD would arrest Rev. Pfeiffer and eventually execute him in 1939 in Butyrki prison in Moscow.

¹¹⁶ Edgar Charles Duin, *Lutheranism under the Tsars and the Soviets* (Ann Arbor, MI.: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975), 747–49.

world-wide bourgeois press” on account of such “scandalous attacks against the USSR.” Press reports portraying the immigration of the Mennonites as “the flight of the peasants from collectivization” was simply not accurate, *Bezbozhnik* author Heinrich Friesen countered.¹¹⁷

In fact, Friesen asserted that several thousand Mennonites did arrive from Siberia and petition the government for immigration. The government, he said, had given permission for them to go to Canada but it was the Canadians who refused them entry. The German Red Cross called for help and even German President Paul von Hindenburg signed one of their pleas. The Germans themselves really didn’t want to allow their fellow ethnic German Mennonites entry into Germany, Friesen claimed, so the German authorities proposed German African colonies or Brazil as settlement options. 300 people managed to leave the USSR and the rest were sent back to their villages. In other words, Friesen said that the Soviet government was being reasonable in its attempts to deal with the Mennonites; everyone else, though, was callous and was using the would-be emigrants as pawns in their ideological battle against the Soviet state.

Accusing the Mennonites of being opposed to the October Revolution from the beginning, Friesen claimed that they were part of the pre-revolutionary wealthy class of farmers who fought on the side of the Whites in the Russian Civil War. Friesen thought it reasonable to assume that the Mennonites were opposed to collectivization and wanted to leave when conditions were no longer prudent for them. Accusing the Mennonites of inculcating an ideology of the kulak-religious worldview among their people for centuries already, Friesen set forth the following argument: Their preachers declare that collectivization is godless. They are leading a class war against the politics of Soviet power. The preacher supports the kulak, because the religious cul-

¹¹⁷ Heinrich Friesen, “Анти-Советская Кампания в связи с Эмиграцией Меннонит из СССР” [“Anti-Soviet Campaign in Connection with the Emigration of Mennonites from the USSR], *Bezbozhnik* 24 (December 1929).

ture among them is strong. So the religious-kulak influence is great and the German Communist Party influence is weak among them. That pretty much summed up the situation in the mind of *Bezbozhnik's* Friesen and one could sensibly infer that his ire could easily be directed towards those of any religious persuasion.¹¹⁸

Of course, the Communists tended to ignore the more negative aspects of Soviet rule among Russian-Germans. German citizen and journal editor German von Schmidt acknowledged that many of those Russian-Germans before the gates of Moscow would be refused emigration papers because the Soviet government feared that they knew too much and would vent anti-Bolshevik propaganda if allowed to leave for the West. This, Schmidt said, were the exact words a colonel among Soviet officials expressed to a leader of the Russian-German colonies.¹¹⁹ As late as February 1930, Bishop Meyer confessed that not a day went by without some poor German from the colonies showing up in Moscow, trying to get a visa but always without success.¹²⁰

However, the *Gustav Adolf Verein* reported that some of the Germans had successfully been spirited out of the Soviet Union. In its publication *Die Evangelische Diaspora*, the Verein acknowledged that 6000 Russian German refugees who had made it all the way to Moscow had eventually ended up in Germany. By the end of 1929 they had been temporarily placed in refugee camps throughout the country. Germans of all political persuasions, except naturally those of the Communist Party, felt a responsibility to their ethnic brethren in Russia even while the government recognized the difficulties of resettling so many people. Contradicting *Bezbozhnik*, *Die Evangelische Diaspora* asserted that at least some of the refugees would remain in Germany

¹¹⁸ Heinrich Friesen, "Anti- Soviet Campaign in Connection with the Emigration of Mennonites from the USSR."

¹¹⁹ German von Schmidt to LWC, October 31, 1929.

¹²⁰ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 25, 1930.

while those with relatives in America would resettle there. But it wondered about what would be done with the yet 100,000 or so who remained in Russia, still desiring to leave.¹²¹

The majority of those who made it to Germany were Mennonites, but Lutherans and Catholics from the villages also were among the grateful ones who exchanged the hopelessness of any future in Soviet Russia for a refugee camp in Hammerstein, Prenzlau or Mölln. They arrived at the camps virtually penniless, as those who had even managed to save a little money had it taken from them by Soviet authorities at the border. Now these former independent farmers were forced to rely upon the charity of the German government, in addition to the German Red Cross and Brüder in Not, an Evangelical aid organization that the *Gustav Adolf Verein* also supported. The Hammerstein camp authorities even erected an altar for church services in order to provide spiritual comfort for the refugees.

The refugees knew that the future was bleak for an ethnic German farmer in Soviet Russia, as the German Communist paper in Moscow *Die Zentralzeitung* bluntly explained in its November 13 issue: “There is no more place for the kulak in Russia; he has been condemned to death.”¹²² But at least those in refugee camps in Germany had made it to freedom. The unfortunate 10,000 or so refugees remaining in Moscow were taken by the OGPU and sent back either to their old villages, which held little prospect for them, or shipped out to the Gulag labor camps in Siberia.¹²³ Naturally, the economic tragedy affecting these farmers was bad enough, but collectivization was really never supposed to have been just a reorganization of the rural economy. From the outset Stalin had proclaimed that the culture of the countryside would be changed, too,

¹²¹ *Die Evangelische Diaspora, 12 Jahrgang* (1930), 18–20.

¹²² *Die Evangelische Diaspora, 12 Jahrgang* (1930), 18–20.

¹²³ Duin, *Lutheranism under the Tsars*, 750.

and that meant the destruction of the religious character of the peasantry.¹²⁴ Emboldened communists went about the countryside determined to show that a new ideology was in force, for example, turning churches into garages housing tractors.¹²⁵ The lesson was not lost on the peasant farmer or his pastor. Pastor Otto Seib wrote to Dr. Morehead, “The five-year-plan... is intended to brush away entirely the little bit which is left of the church and religion, and the quicker the better, since the church is considered the seat of the counter-revolution, and its representatives and adherents, counter-revolutionists.”¹²⁶

Bezbozhnik agreed with the pastor’s sentiments. In its November 1929 issue, journal writer V. Sarabyanov explained that it was only the poor and middle peasants who truly believed in God; the kulaks were just hypocrites, ostensibly using religion in order to keep the poorer peasants in bondage. If the state hoped to carry out the Five Year Plan effectively, then it had to create the conditions that would raise the material and cultural level of life among these lower class peasants. Since these peasants were supposedly deluded by religion, the religious influence surrounding them had to be weakened. The communists would begin the winnowing process by exiling the more influential kulaks. At the same time, the priests and enemy sectants [code word for Protestants] were cited for disrupting the work of collectivization, because “...they clearly understand its socialist and anti-religious character.”¹²⁷

While atheist journals like *Bezbozhnik* portrayed the peasants as naïve and gullible adherents of religion lacking class consciousness, many of the German peasants who left their villages for Moscow were in reality strong Christian believers who cited religious persecution as their

¹²⁴ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 376.

¹²⁵ S. Glyazera, “Солидная Коллективизация” [“Solid Collectivization”], *Bezbozhnik* 19 (September 1929).

¹²⁶ Otto Seib to John Morehead, November 29, 1929.

¹²⁷ V. Sarabyanov, “Пятилетний План на Религии” [“Five Year Plan on Religion”], *Bezbozhnik* 21 (November 1929).

reason for emigrating. They even asked their pastors for their baptismal certificates so that they could prove to those in their new homelands that they were never atheists or Communists. Sadly, these very documents attesting to their Christian faith served to incriminate those who did not escape the USSR, and that included those 10,000 who had made it to Moscow but no further.¹²⁸

In a long letter to Dr. Morehead, Lutheran pastor Otto Seib described how the anti-religious movement accompanying collectivization was succeeding in strangling the Church. Seib spoke of preaching to congregations of ten or twenty parishioners, mostly women, because the men and young people feared losing their jobs if they attended church. The high taxes were another burden that could not be met by congregations given the effects of collectivization upon parishioners' personal wealth. And of course, the new continuous workweek had its effect upon attendance, so that naturally the next step after the churches were emptied would be the confiscation of the buildings. Seib personally knew that Ukrainian Lutheran churches in Nikolayev, Elizavetgrad, Ekaterinoslav, Poltava and Kiev were on the list for confiscation. Once those churches were taken away, Seib guessed that no one would then rent a hall or place for church services. The religious believers would need government approval to rent a building for worship services, and thus alert the officials to their religious convictions with the inevitable results.¹²⁹

From the pastor's point of view, Seib elaborated upon conditions that were reaching the point of hopelessness. People avoided greeting him on the street; parishioners no longer called on him. And even when people did pack the pews to the last person, a local official could simply cancel a service, which, of course had already occurred that summer when Bishop Meyer was not allowed to conduct a service in a Ukrainian village church. Seib himself recalled people

¹²⁸ Duin, *Lutheranism under the Tsars*, 749–50.

¹²⁹ Otto Seib to John Morehead, November 29, 1929.

coming from 50 miles to the village church in Schlangendorf, where he had agreed to do some baptisms and confirm the youth. Although the worship service was conducted successfully, the people left the village secretly in order to avoid detection. And yet despite such precautions, the local authorities accused Seib of holding an illegal meeting and participating in a “religious demonstration.” What, in their opinion, constituted a demonstration? Apparently the fact that Pastor Seib led 25 confirmands to the church from the home in which they had gathered before the service, singing *Jesus Still Lead On!* And to make matters worse, the kuester was subsequently arrested in Schlangendorf. Uncannily echoing St. Paul on his own missionary journeys, Seib went on to give an account of his last two months of pastoral service:

I was driven by force from the village of Neuheim, presumably because I tried to prevent the congregation from delivering to the government the required amount of grain. For this offense the death penalty can be imposed. In another village I escaped arrest only because I had succeeded in finishing the divine service and official church acts and left the place two hours before the writ for my arrest was issued. From other congregations I received cancellations upon receipt of my announcement of scheduled visits together with warnings and heart-rending descriptions of their situation. The church district of Kronau sent a call. A month later, however, I received a letter from them requesting me not to come, as none of the farmers would be allowed to offer shelter to a pastor.¹³⁰

It can only be imagined how much pain this letter caused Dr. Morehead, who was doing his utmost to keep the spirits of Russian Lutherans alive. But Seib’s letter was a genuine reflection of the constant pressure to which Lutheran pastors and their parishioners were subjected. The times were truly changing.

The Lutheran Seminary’s Problems: Fall 1929

As the Lutheran seminary in Leningrad began its fifth year of operation in the Fall, the disruption in the economy brought about by collectivization and the end of the NEP policy adverse-

¹³⁰ Otto Seib to John Morehead, November 29, 1929.

ly affected its budget, too. Bishop Malmgren, after thanking Dr. Morehead for the recent LWC gift of \$1000.00 for the seminary, explained to him the current economic situation in the USSR and its troubling implications for the seminary. In a letter dated October 12, Malmgren reminded Morehead that the state grocery stores were off limits for pastors and church organizations, with the result that they had to pay substantially more than the average citizen at the free market stores. There had even been a rumor that beginning on October 1st, the military would cordon off the cities from the farmers in the countryside. As in the early days of the Bolshevik Revolution, farmers were fearful that they might be prevented from selling their produce as freely as they had been able to do in the days of NEP.¹³¹

The reason for this change was due to the complete collectivization of the economy that the Soviet authorities were currently pursuing with full vigor. The rapid tightening of the noose around the seminary forced Malmgren to confess, “We will not worry but commend ourselves and our work into God’s hand. He has up until now helped us and sent us friends from throughout the entire, wide Lutheran world. He will help us further because we desire nothing other than to build His kingdom.”¹³² Dr. Morehead was not oblivious to the changes taking place in Russia, relating to Malmgren that Paul Hutchinson, editor of the *Christian Century*, had described his recent visit to the churches in the USSR in alarming terms. Furthermore, through news received from Poland, Morehead had apparently gotten word that the local government in Leningrad was threatening to force the seminary to give up its residence in the city. What was going on, he wanted to know?¹³³

Bishop Malmgren answered him on October 24 with assurances that the seminary had been

¹³¹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 12, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 12, 1929.

¹³³ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, September 27, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

given a reprieve for the time being. Malmgren emphasized “for the time being,” because one could in reality never guess what the Soviet authorities might do. Morehead’s information had been correct, for in the summer Malmgren had been strongly advised by the government to have the students vacate their dorm rooms in the building next to the seminary so that “workers” could be resettled there. In fact, he had been given two weeks’ notice at that time to find living space outside the city. Malmgren was certain that if this request had been carried out he would have had to close the seminary. The Evangelical Christians in Leningrad had just been forced to close their seminary or “preachers’ college” (*Predigeranstalt*) under similar circumstances.

But due to persistent efforts and complaints on his part, the authorities retreated on this request “for the time being.” Although Malmgren possessed an official document testifying to the seminary’s three-year lease on the students’ apartments, he had no illusions as to the authorities’ ultimate goal. The Communist Party had reiterated that whoever was not of the Party or serving the Party would be banned from the city. So in the end, what did that piece of paper really mean, Malmgren wondered? Obviously the answer was: “not much.” With the constant pressure of the communists weighing upon him, he assured Morehead, “Nevertheless we have learned to take seriously the Lord’s words, ‘Don’t worry about tomorrow.’ For the moment it is enough that we can work unmolested, but what will happen in the next half year we confidently place in God’s hand. He has helped us so far and He will continue to help us.”¹³⁴ Malmgren’s faith would be put to the test much sooner than perhaps even he had imagined.

As the new school year began, the attempt to continue holding Sunday school classes as in the past would have to be carried out in a manner that would draw less attention from the OGPU. Due to the April 8 Law on Religious Associations, the church could no longer teach the Bible to

¹³⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 24, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

children within the confines of the church building. Pastors Hansen and Muss decided to pursue a loophole in the law so that their Sunday school teachers would be able to conduct classes within the apartments of the students on Sunday mornings. Hansen, in particular, was well aware of the danger involved in acting directly against the new law. Bishop Malmgren had warned him directly that the consequences of such actions might be unpleasant, but Hansen replied in the words of the Apostles Peter and John that he was compelled to obey God rather than man.¹³⁵

In order to guide his instructors, Hansen would regularly gather the Sunday school teachers in his apartment on Friday evenings and review the lesson for the coming Sunday. Ilsa Wasserman noted that the number of teachers attending would normally range anywhere from 30–35, but on two occasions the number of attendees actually reached 50! (Obviously, interested friends of the teachers also attended from time to time). Imagining such a crowd in the small Soviet apartments of that time, and all the more in the very center of the city, it would have been impossible to hide their activities from neighbors and spies who were omnipresent in the Russia of those days.¹³⁶ Elsa Freifeldt's conflict that Fall with a couple of tenants in Hansen's apartment building is proof of how difficult it would be to hide one's religious activities, all the more so if large numbers of youth were clambering up the steps in typical, noisy teenage fashion!¹³⁷

Hansen usually had the basic lesson plan typed out for each of his twenty teachers by a young lady named Margarita Blau.¹³⁸ Blau was a friend of Kurt Muss' sister, Luisa, and with Kurt Muss' suggestion, Hansen decided to employ her to type church bulletins and the texts for

¹³⁵ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 14.

¹³⁶ P-87890, Volume 1, List 116–117, Volume 2, List 610, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹³⁷ P-87890, Volume 1, List 236, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹³⁸ P-87890, Volume 1, List 109, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

the Sunday school classes. Blau, for her part, was not a frequent churchgoer and claimed that she basically did the work in order to get “a piece of bread.” She didn’t see anything especially anti-Soviet in her work, but simply typed quickly without paying too much attention to the contents.¹³⁹ Elsa Freifeldt, having served as one of Hansen’s Sunday school teachers since 1925, explained how Hansen would instruct them. First, she stressed that he stuck exclusively to biblical themes. He would explain the meaning of the text of the week; afterwards, the teachers would relate the instruction to their students according to their age and level of understanding. The foundation of his teaching, she declared, was that Truth and Love would be victorious on earth. The content of the lessons, she noticed, were something he exhibited in the very manner in which he lived his own life.¹⁴⁰

Hansen had begun gathering teachers for the Sunday school program at St. Peter’s back in 1926, when it was technically illegal to teach children Christianity although the government generally didn’t enforce the law. The teachers were usually dedicated parishioners of St. Peter’s and they basically volunteered to teach the classes, not expecting any pay for their work. However, Ilsa Wasserman recalled that the question eventually arose among the teachers: “Are we doing anything illegal by teaching the children Christianity?”¹⁴¹ Hansen replied that with regard to the law, he understood it to allow the teaching of religion to children in their own homes and that teaching up to at least five children could be considered legal. (His logic was that each family, independent of the number of children it had, could add yet three additional children in accordance with the law). Whether Hansen’s interpretation of the law was accurate or not isn’t entirely

¹³⁹ P-87890, Volume 1, List 229–230, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁴⁰ P-87890, Volume 1, List 213, 235, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁴¹ P-87890, Volume 1, List 116–117, 279, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region;

clear, but in 1926 the Soviet state was already in the middle of its NEP program and had previously winked at many laws that were on the books. So Hansen, although he was well aware of the April 8 Law, thought that the risk was worth it.¹⁴²

Renata Schwartz, an ethnic German and 61 year-old retired schoolteacher, was one of Hansen's older instructors. She had taught at the Peterschule since 1906, but like many believers was among those who was fired in 1929 when communists took over the administration of the school from Lutheran administrators like Erich Kleinenberg and Alexander Wolfius. Schwartz had herself offered to teach the children of St. Peter's and had begun to do so four years previous. She noted that in 1928 the biblical instruction of children could be held in the church, but now Hansen informed her that due to the new April 8 Law, they could only be held legally within apartments. Schwartz must have agreed with Hansen's interpretation of the law, because she also mentioned that the parents had given their approval for such biblical teaching. Following Hansen's advice, she moved the classes to her own apartment just around the corner from St. Peter's Church (House number 10, Zhelyabova Street). In the Fall of 1929, she was teaching five students from the ages of 14–16.¹⁴³ In fact, Hansen stressed that the parents were the ones who asked about Sunday school classes in the first place, although he would also at times venture to ask them whether they wanted their children taught the Christian faith.

Statistically speaking, we know from OGPU interrogations of the teachers after their arrests that in the Fall of 1929 that there were 47 Sunday School teachers in total teaching under Pastors Hansen and Muss' direction. The teachers were mostly young and recent confirmands, although all age groups were represented as exemplified by Renata Schwartz. Each teacher had

¹⁴² P-87890, Volume 2, List 616, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁴³ P-87890, Volume 1, List 236–237, 410, 413, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; P-87890, Volume 2, List 648, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

his own group of about five to eight children ranging in ages from 5–15. All in all, the number of students most likely approached 200. (Hansen counted roughly 120 students alone in his circles). Together, the two pastors covered the most popular languages among their parishioners. Hansen, more fluent in German, tended to use those teachers who knew German while Muss’ bilingual skills allowed him to gather Russian-speaking teachers.¹⁴⁴

Helmut Hansen’s boldness in challenging the limits of Soviet law was no doubt a result of his concern with the increasingly strident atheist propaganda that we know found expression virtually everywhere in Soviet Russia in 1929. As he gathered the teachers there were moments that the biblical text corresponded so directly to the times in which they were living, Hansen must have felt compelled to make comparisons. For example, he often spoke about the “unchristian spirit” present in the country and urged the young people to recognize that they were engaged in a spiritual battle. Sometimes in his own sermons he was accused by parishioners of going a little too far in his criticism of the Soviet government. Hansen admitted later that there was some criticism by parishioners and that they could have taken his sermons the wrong way, but he didn’t seem overly concerned about it.¹⁴⁵ Sunday school teacher, Dorothea Mai, claimed that she and his wife Erna had spoken to him about the sharpness of his critique of the Soviet state. (Erna, though, said that she never criticized his sermons as anti-Soviet because they weren’t). In reply to these warnings from her, Mai remembered Hansen saying that he would answer for his own actions. Mai specifically noted how Hansen in his sermons would touch upon the theme of the Soviet authorities being enemies of religion, and in response he would urge his

¹⁴⁴ P-87890, Volume 1, List 116–117, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁴⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 614–616, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; P-87890, Volume 1, List 236, 267, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; P-87890, Volume 3, List 146, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

parishioners to fight for their faith and be faithful to Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁶

More odd, though, was the response that came from seminary student, Bruno Reichert. Reichert was the son of Hansen's colleague at the seminary, Rev. Paul Reichert, who also pastored a congregation at Novosarotovka on the outskirts of Leningrad. Bruno almost sounded hurt that he hadn't been invited to the "coffee evenings", and he remembered Hansen's sermons as "anti-Soviet" in character. Questions, most likely unfairly, would be raised in the coming years about just how loyal the Reicherts' were to the Lutheran Church. But for the present, it seems that while there were criticisms of Hansen's tact with regard to speaking about the Soviet authorities and while his own *dvatstaka* did not take responsibility for his actions, the congregation stood by him. Bruno Biedermann, the chairman of St. Peter's *dvatstaka*, also defended Hansen against these anti-government charges and found nothing in the slightest that could be considered anti-Soviet in Hansen's sermons.¹⁴⁷ Other *dvatstaka* members like the 57 year-old former caretaker of the Volkovsky Lutheran cemetery, Richard Vogel, saw nothing anti-Soviet in Hansen's sermons. On the contrary, Vogel said that they carried a "purely religious character." Biedermann, a 61 year-old retiree, had served for ten years as the *dvatstaka* chairman at St. Peter's and was impressed by Hansen's serious commitment to strengthening a "religious moral spirit" within the youth of the congregation.¹⁴⁸

Hansen's Sunday school teachers were employed in a variety of professions, some even working for the state or at common labor, or were simply university students. Whatever their

¹⁴⁶ P-87890, Volume 1, List 215, 316, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁴⁷ P-87890, Volume 1, List 180–181, 335, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁴⁸ P-87890, Volume 1, List 333–335, 444, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Biedermann also remarked that the Lutheran World Federation's unsolicited financial assistance to St. Peter's was of great benefit in relieving the increasingly burdensome state tax placed upon the congregation.

vocation, Hansen emphasized that they needed to stand united in their defense of the faith and fight because this spiritual battle would only be temporary. At times the teachers asked him directly about how they might live faithful lives in the Soviet state. For example, someone once asked, “Should we follow the five-day school/work week and still attend church?”¹⁴⁹ One can only imagine the quandary in which young people found themselves: How should they live as Christians in a society that was doing its utmost to stamp out religious practice? Hansen’s answer was in line with Martin Luther’s understanding of the right and left hand kingdoms of God. He replied that they needed to do both, live as good citizens and Christians simultaneously. Sometimes he worried that his critique of the state was too harsh and might confuse the youth, so he also took care that he did not directly encourage them to become antagonistic towards the Soviet state. They were, most importantly, though, to recognize the dangers of the godless movement in the society of their day. It was a difficult balance. But if it ever came down to a question of obeying God rather than man, it is rather apparent that his answer to Bishop Malmgren would suffice.

Several of his youth had actually been taking his words to heart and a few years ago had formed a special group within St. Peter’s known as the *Jugendbund* (Youth League). They created the group after receiving communion for the first time, but Hansen noted that this group was not accepted by all of the youth and was beginning to take on an exclusive tone within the church. In fact, he did not give the name to the group and would eventually for his own reasons discourage this separatism within the congregation.¹⁵⁰ Ironically, it appears that his wife Erna had actually given the youth the idea for such a name.¹⁵¹ The *Jugendbund* was formed initially in

¹⁴⁹ -87890, Volume 1, List 116–117, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵⁰ P-87890, Volume 1, List 116–117, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵¹ P- 87890, Volume 1, List 113, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

1926 after a Saturday night vigil before Easter Sunday, when confirmands received communion for the first time. The confirmands received pins that Hansen had ordered prepared by Kurt Muss' brother Conrad. Conrad Muss had directed the operations of the family engraving company of his father, Alexander, after his death. The pins were designed by Kurt and contained an acronym, as far as can be gathered from some photographs, taken from the phrase "Trau bis zum Tod Jesus dein Eigen," or in Russian, "Veren do smerti Iisus tvoi," or as it was written in most accounts, "Veren do groba yemu" (Faithful to the grave, Jesus, Thine own, or "Faithful to Him to the grave"). Initially thirty pins were distributed in 1926, but apparently they were given in succeeding years to those who would join this very active group of youth within St. Peter's.¹⁵² Kurt Muss repeated this practice by handing out his own pins to confirmands in his congregation, too.¹⁵³

In the beginning, Hansen had hoped that the pins would be taken as a symbol to remind the youth to be sturdy Christians. With that idea in mind, he gave them to those who had been confirmed in 1926. But when he noticed in 1927 that there were other youth who, though they were not yet confirmed, zealously attended Bible class and were living like real Christians, he decided to give them the pins, too. In time he would have second thoughts, as stated above, fearing that this group could be interpreted as a distinct, separate group within the congregation. But it seems

¹⁵² P-87890, Volume 2, List 611–612, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵³ P-87890, Volume 2, List 337, 614, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. It seems that the phrase that the OGPU copied as "Trau bis zum Tod Jesus dein Eigen" probably originated from a German Lutheran hymn written by Johann Ludwig Conrad Allendorf...

Bis in den Tod sind wir, Jesus, Dein eigen,
bis in den Tod bleibt uns, Herr, Deine Treu;
und vor der Welt wolln wir freudig bezeugen,
daß unser Leben durch Dich ward ganz neu,

da Du für uns. See "Songs by Johann Ludwig Conrad Allendorf," Songselect by CCLI, accessed December 31, 2013.

that the primary issue that concerned him was that the *Jugendbund*, as a separate entity, could then be subject to government registration. Registering the congregation was enough of a hassle without adding further complications to church life. So Hansen encouraged the youth not to call themselves the *Jugendbund* and told them that they should instead understand the pins as a reminder of Holy Communion.

The number of participants in the *Jugendbund* increased to the point that it appears to have reached 60 members. The list included the Freifeldt sisters, Elsa and Marta, the Kossetti sisters, Tamara and Benita, Gustav Golde (nephew of Bishop Theophil Meyer) and seminary students Conrad Gerling and Peter Mikhailov, among others. *Jugendbund* member Evgeny Hoffman even managed to retain membership although he worked at the factory Elektrosila and apparently was still a member of the Communist youth group *Komsomol*!¹⁵⁴ Despite misconceptions that would ultimately brand the *Jugendbund* as some kind of nationalistic Germanic group, the Hansens' effort to imbue the youth with a solid Christian foundation appears to have been their only goal. Erna, the mother of three young boys, especially sympathized with the youth. She desired, like her husband, to rescue them from the immoral lifestyles that they couldn't help but notice all around them. As a result, from time to time the Hansens invited the youth to their home for fun and games. (These gatherings should not be confused with the regular Friday gatherings of teachers).

Sunday school teacher, Margo Jurgens, had been confirmed as a 16-year old at St. Peter's in 1925 and had upon her own initiative begun to teach several children the Bible in 1926. She

¹⁵⁴ P-87890, Volume 2, List 611–612, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Erna Hansen was a little suspicious of Hoffman. By 1930 she said that she hadn't seen him in two years and was not at all certain that he had received the *Jugendbund* pin or been a member. When she tried to give him ten tickets to invite friends to the church's musical services in 1928 or 1929, he returned them to her saying that he was avoiding their "community" as he was trying to find other work. She didn't recall seeing him after that. See P-87890, Volume 2; List 315, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

was the type of committed Christian invited to the Hansens' apartment on these occasions. Her remembrance of these "coffee evenings" was that they would begin with prayer and then the youth would play games and sing songs. (These gatherings were the so-called "coffee" or "tea evenings," uncovered by the newspaper *Leningradskaya Pravda* in 1928 and which it described in conspiratorial terms).¹⁵⁵ In addition, Hansen, perhaps due to the new five day work week and the difficulty of attending church on Sundays, offered a Bible study every Tuesday night from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. Anywhere from 25–40 youth (primarily *Jugendbund* members) would attend the class, a rather large number for those days given the spirit of the times. In the Fall of 1929, Pastor Hansen would teach from the Gospel of John.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Kurt Muss was forming his own group of Sunday school teachers as well as crafts group instructors. Ever since his return in 1926 from the Gulag labor camp on Solovetsky Island, Muss had immediately begun assisting Hansen with the children's Sunday school groups. In the succeeding three years after his release, he had already been established as the pastor of the first exclusively Russian-speaking congregation in the Lutheran Church. Most likely inspired by Hansen's example, Muss continued the practice of providing spiritual education for the children of his own parishioners. From one small Russian-speaking group led by Viktoria Seleznyova when Muss arrived in 1926, his Sunday school groups had by the Fall of 1929 expanded to ten with the addition of five groups organized around the teaching of crafts.

The crafts' teachers taught skills like sewing, woodworking, and draftsmanship, for which they were paid a small fee. But the Sunday school teachers were, as with Hansen, volunteer workers who shared the pastor's concern about the spiritual upbringing of the children. Included

¹⁵⁵ P-87890, Volume 1, List 113– 114, 243, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵⁶ P-87890, Volume 1, List 121, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

among the Sunday school teachers were Muss' wife Elena, Tamara Kossetti (studying to be a massagist, who taught sewing skills to the girls), Maria Weisberg (a retiree and former member of the Salvation Army), Mikhail Mudyugin (a student in a music school and future Russian Orthodox Church Archbishop) and Dagmara Schreiber (a university student and the future wife of Mudyugin). All in all, there were about fifty to sixty kids, some participating in both the Sunday school and crafts' groups.¹⁵⁷

With the announcement of the April 8 law regulating religious associations in 1929, Muss had, like Hansen, decided that it was too risky to hold exclusively children's services. In response, he arranged regular worship services where the children could attend with their parents. The Sunday school classes were then moved into the apartments so that the children could better understand what was going on during the church service. As for the crafts' groups, Muss gave them the name *Pchjolki*, or "Busy Bees." Muss created the Busy Bees in 1927 with the idea of training children in a particular craft while at the same time emphasizing the Christian view of love for labor. Muss figured that there were about thirty children in the Busy Bees ranging in age from 10–15. Funding for this project would come from the free will offerings of the believers and from the children themselves.¹⁵⁸ Kurt Muss even penned a hymn entitled "*Pchjolki*" which the kids would learn and then sing. The text emphasized a love for Jesus Christ that was to be expressed in love and service to one's neighbor. Most of the kids learned the hymn by heart. The verses went like this:

In the name of the Lord Christ, we carry out our labor; hope and love with
faithfulness we promise to Him; He who shed His blood for us. We strive so that
suffering and tears would cease from the earth; so that the promise of the Father that
all people should be one family would be fulfilled; that people would not be enemies

¹⁵⁷ P-87890, Volume 3, List 9, 13–14, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵⁸ P-87890, Volume 3, List 13–14, 45, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

to one another; that the strong would not oppress the weak; that all would become one flock and that brother would help brother when in trouble. We hold high the holy banner, may Your hand preserve us. Christ, you have promised to always be with us, send us aid in our troubled hour.¹⁵⁹

Those youth (and some adults) who taught Sunday school for Muss gathered at his apartment on Mondays to go over the lesson plans for the next Sunday. Sunday school teacher, Irina Prelberg, would type out Muss' notes and instructions about how to teach the lesson. One of his Sunday school teachers, Viktoria Seleznyova, was a 48-year old widow of German ethnicity who worked as an accountant in a city plant nursery and had already begun teaching Russian-speaking children back in 1925. Viktoria noticed that with Muss' return from the Gulag in 1926, the number of children's groups rapidly increased from four to ten within a few years. She herself was already well above the number officially allowed by the government for teaching, holding classes for eight children. (By 1928, she would reach a peak of eleven students!).

Seleznyova especially admired Muss' concern that the children would not only understand the lesson but would actually apply it to their lives. He would reinforce the children's lesson by preaching on that topic in church, too. She herself was committed to the religious nurture of these children because she believed that this would help them become useful citizens in society. Unbelievers, she felt, couldn't satisfy the demands necessary for any individual's life. But 21-year old Sunday school teacher, Valentina Kerman, remembered more specifically that Muss articulated the goal of their teaching in religious not moral terms. Muss spoke of how the child, when he reached maturity, would become an idealistic Christian who could stand up in society and powerfully defend his faith in Christ.¹⁶⁰

There is little doubt that Kurt Muss made a strong impression upon his teachers and parish-

¹⁵⁹ P-87890, Volume 3, List 41, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁶⁰ P-87890, Volume 3, List 146–147, 151–152, 549, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

ioners due to his oratorical skills and compassion. Some young women, like Irina Prelberg and Tamara Kossetti, were clearly possessed of a religious mindset and drawn to this man of conviction by his “beautiful use of words.” Kossetti recalled that Muss regularly emphasized to the ten or fifteen teachers gathered that they should stress in their lessons God’s existence and responsibility for the creation of all things. Frequently after Muss had completed giving instructions on how to teach the lesson for the coming Sunday, there would be time for conversation. The teachers would commiserate with him about how the Soviet government was persecuting religion. They felt that the mass of believers was beginning to lose its “sense of religion” due to the difficulty of finding employment as a self-proclaimed Christian. Muss’ firm commitment to the Faith was obviously a strong influence on the youth to remain faithful to Christ as they wrestled with being Christians in an increasingly godless society. Both Prelberg and Kossetti were smitten in other ways, too, though, acknowledging a romantic interest in Muss before he eventually married their friend Elena Cherneshyeva in 1929.¹⁶¹

But primarily, Muss’ sincere dedication to the cause of the Gospel was the motivating factor in his popularity. On Holy Trinity Sunday in the spring of 1928 Mikhail Mudyugin, a 17-year old music school student, was sent on an errand by his mother to the Leningrad House of Trade. As he exited the store, he saw the rather striking St. Mary’s Lutheran church directly across the street from him. Intrigued, Mudyugin walked up to the door and read the notice: “Here on Sundays and Wednesdays at 7 p.m., an Evangelical Lutheran divine service is held in Russian.” Sliding onto a bench in one of the back rows, he heard Kurt Muss pronouncing the words of the Apostle’s Creed in Russian, face to face with the youth gathered there for confirmation instruction. Mudyugin noted the eyes of the pastor were inspiring and kindly, so he approached Muss

¹⁶¹ P-87890, Volume 3, List 86–87, 188, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

afterwards and asked if he could attend future sessions. He made sure to stress that it was purely for “cognitive reasons” as he had no intention of being confirmed. Mudyugin would eventually help with summer camps for children in Strelna, where he met one of the teachers and his future wife, Dagmara Schreiber. When Muss moved his congregation into St. Michael’s Lutheran Church on Vasily Island in the spring of 1929, Mudyugin followed him there and was confirmed in October. Since his father was an atheist and his mother was a devout Orthodox Christian, Mudyugin hid this decision from his parents. Soon after his confirmation, he himself began teaching a group of six students aged 13–15, actually not much younger than himself! He gathered them in the apartment of one of his student’s named Obram, a five-story apartment about a fifteen minute walk from St. Michael’s and facing directly across the street from a large Orthodox Church.¹⁶²

Mudyugin noted that Muss was unorthodox in his preaching style, not standing behind the traditional pulpit to address his listeners but actually standing in front of them and moving about during the preaching of the sermon.¹⁶³ Orthodox believer and attendee of Muss’ congregation, Elena Shukino-Bodarets, was mesmerized by his sermons, explaining that Muss was “a great talent” in contrast to Hansen whom she found somewhat ordinary. She, too, was invited to teach the children’s groups as Muss assured her that her Orthodox faith would not be a hindrance in teaching. Of course, Muss was not blindly ecumenical. He would provide his teachers guidance with the lessons, and it’s quite obvious that Shukino-Bodarets remembered his words very

¹⁶² P-87890, Volume 3, List 528–529, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; July 22, 2017; Konstantin Kostromin, “Богослов и Исповедник: Избранные Главы из Книги ‘Михаил /Мудьюгин/: Музыкант Полиглот, Инженер и Богослов’ [“Theologian and Confessor: Selected Chapters from the Book ‘Mikhail Mudyugin: Musician, Polyglot, Engineer and Theologian’”], accessed July 27, 2017.

¹⁶³ Oleg Sevastyanov to Matthew Heise, November 2012.

well.¹⁶⁴

Muss' fluency in Russian afforded him the opportunity to attract youth who would normally stand outside the traditional Lutheran family (German, Estonian, Swedish, Latvian, Finnish), like Shukino-Bodarets and Mudyugin. Perhaps most appealing to the youth, though, was Muss' desire to apply biblical lessons to modern life. His message spoke to the hearts of many young people who were looking for truth in society and not finding it in atheism or communism. Mudyugin noted how Muss would take a biblical text and apply it to the times in which they were living. Muss did not attribute a decisive influence to the anti-religious propaganda prevalent in society, instead saying it would only strengthen the faith of believers. Mudyugin, who was committed to saving children from the influence of atheism, took Muss' words to heart when he preached the necessity of not just speaking loudly about your faith but actually living your life according to the teachings of Christ.¹⁶⁵

Muss' approachability knew no gender bounds, as Shukino-Bodarets would hold many lengthy conversations with him of a theological nature. She especially remembered how he explained that the Bolshevik Revolution was guilty of dividing society into classes. A faithful Christian, as a result, could not simply opt out and remain ambivalent for there was no neutral ground in Soviet society. To paraphrase the Bible, one was either with the atheists or the Christians. But, Muss assured her, God was with them, and they would ultimately win this battle of ideals.¹⁶⁶ Recent historical research into Soviet society of the 1920s has uncovered a serious quest for the meaning of life among Russian youth. The "lost generation" that F. Scott Fitzgerald and T.S. Elliot popularized in the West had its counterpart in Russia, too. The poet Sergey

¹⁶⁴ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 131.

¹⁶⁵ P-87890, Volume 3, List 530, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁶⁶ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* 131–32.

Yesenin, who eventually committed suicide, symbolized one response: “a withdrawal into sensuality and mysticism.” The Communist newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* recorded young people’s fascination with Yesenin and summarized the typical letter they received this way: “The youth is beginning to become genuinely interested in religion.”¹⁶⁷ Clearly, the Communist Party was failing to attract young people as student circles began forming religious philosophy groups for discussion.

These groups would rediscover the religious musings of Fyodor Dostoevsky as well as read the Russian Orthodox philosopher, Nikolai Berdyaev, who had been exiled by Lenin earlier in the decade on the so-called “Philosophy Steamer.” There also appears to have been well-organized anti-establishment political movements within Russian universities by the late 1920s. All of these movements signified a certain restlessness among the youth, but in reality it seems that the vast majority of youth were simply apolitical, seeking solace in sex, vodka and the foxtrot. One thing many young people had in common, though, was their opposition to the Soviet ideal, which was becoming stale and sanitized.¹⁶⁸ While young people in the Soviet Union were searching for their path in life, spiritual mentors like Kurt Muss provided guidance and a listening ear to their problems. Mikhail Mudyugin had hoped to enter the chemistry department at Leningrad University in the fall, but since he was of a higher social class, his exams were structured to be more difficult than that for proletarian youth. Mudyugin didn’t succeed and when Muss returned from his honeymoon that summer, he told the pastor of his failure. Muss responded to him with words that Mudyugin would describe as “prophetic,” advice that would change his life. “Misha,” he said, “Don’t despair! Your path is a completely different one. You

¹⁶⁷ Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin*, 127.

¹⁶⁸ Brovkin, *Russia after Lenin*, 128, 131–132; Chamberlin, *Lenin's Private War*, 1.

have to become a pastor! To accomplish this you will have to study a lot and above all, learn German well, because an extensive amount of theological literature is written in this language in these ‘new times.’”¹⁶⁹ Mudyugin was encouraged, and later in the year, when he mentioned to Muss that he would enroll in the Lutheran seminary, Muss clarified for him the cost of discipleship in Stalin’s USSR — “Misha, know that when you finish the seminary, not one Lutheran church will be remaining here.”¹⁷⁰

Understanding more fully the times in which Kurt Muss was preaching and counseling youth gives us insight into why they would be drawn to this principled, charismatic pastor. Valentina Kerman, who had been confirmed in 1927 by Muss and was one of his Sunday school teachers, remembered one of his sermons on Martin Luther. Muss explained how Luther fought for Christian ideals by battling the Roman papacy on the issue of indulgences. In contrast to Luther, Muss declared, modern believers don’t act this way. “When someone says that our ideology, believing in God, is not suitable, we reject Him quickly enough. In the end we allow them to spiritually disable our children, forgetting that Jesus said, ‘Suffer the little children to come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven!’ No, we should boldly follow the example of Luther into battle and then the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church!”¹⁷¹ Powerful sermons that took the Christian faith seriously would lead to the formation of a strong core of young believers around Muss, a fact that would not escape the attention of the OGPU.

¹⁶⁹ Konstantin Kostromin, “Theologian and Confessor.”

¹⁷⁰ Oleg Sevastyanov to Matthew Heise, September 2017.

¹⁷¹ P-87890, Volume 3, List 549–550, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Winter 1929–1930

Latvian Lutherans: Trying to Balance Church and State

However, not everyone in the Lutheran Church agreed with the tactics of Pastors Hansen and Muss. Latvian Lutheran pastor Julius Zahlit thought that they pushed the envelope too far when confronting the state's regulations on educating youth. Zahlit knew that Bishop Malmgren had told them to be careful about working with children. In fact, Zahlit said that according to the law, he didn't operate a Sunday school at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church but believed that parents should educate their children as in the early days of the church. But when children were ready for confirmation, this was allowed by the state and Zahlit said that pastors have the right to teach them since it was the entry point into the church. He himself had been subjected to a search by the OGPU, but he believed that he had complied with the law and so he wasn't too concerned.

But when it came to atheist and OGPU efforts to close his church in 1929, Zahlit and his congregation fought them tooth and nail. At the beginning of the year, pressure began to be applied by a Latvian Communist club who wanted the church building for themselves. The state had been expropriating the Latvian Lutheran Church's property since 1918; all that remained was the smallest building, the church that was funded by Czar Nicholas I's private treasury at a cost of 10,000 rubles. The communists understood it to be the central meeting place for believing Latvians so they used every excuse to gain the property. (They also said it was in the neighborhood of a technological institute, which did not please members of the scientific community). At community gatherings, lectures, and after going from apartment to apartment, the communists gathered 4000 signatures demanding that the church be closed. The Presidium of the Leningrad Soviet agreed with the Latvian communists to close Christ the Savior Lutheran Church on October 10, accepting the logic that the church was located too close to a technological institute and Soviet Labor School Number 41 ("it doesn't correlate with the viewpoint of Soviet cultivation of

educating youth”).¹⁷²

Zahlit didn't give up. He knew that according to Soviet law, he could appeal the decision to the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow. So he used every means he could to gather 1000 signatures and made the trek to the capital.¹⁷³ While there he also visited the Latvian Foreign Office in Moscow on November 5th and apprised them of the situation. (We know about this visit because the Latvian Foreign Office furnished this report to the U. S. Legation in Riga under the strictest confidence. Americans translated the document into English). From his own words, Zahlit was not wedded to the building per se, acknowledging that the congregation's existence was more important. But while it might be easier for the Latvian Lutheran community not to maintain a building, he felt that nevertheless, they didn't want to just give up their property without a fight. Zahlit intervened with the Latvian Foreign Office because he saw that the communists had attempted similar tactics with the Leningrad German Lutheran churches, but the German consul general had taken up the matter privately with Soviet authorities and the churches remained untouched for the time being.¹⁷⁴

The Presidium of the USSR learned of the protests by the Latvian Lutherans and now considered a proposal to turn the church into the Latvian House of Enlightenment. As Zahlit met with the secretary (Mr. Orleansky) of the Soviet Union's president, Mikhail Kalinin, he stressed that his church bothered no one and stood on its own plot of ground. Attempting to renovate it into a club would not prove successful because of the structure of the church. Orleansky basically agreed with Zahlit and said the church as a whole (and Christ the Savior Lutheran, too)

¹⁷² P-35162, List 55, 63–74, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁷³ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 115.

¹⁷⁴ F.W.B. Coleman to Henry Stimson, January 18, 1930, 861.404/284, RG 59, National Archives II.

would continue to exist for now, but, he added ominously: “It’s probably clear to you that we consider the church to be without rights, and in five years they will all be closed anyway.”¹⁷⁵ The Latvian communists redoubled their efforts with letters to government, regional and Party organizations in Leningrad on the urgent necessity of closing Christ the Savior Lutheran Church, but against all odds, on September 30, 1930, the Presidium of the USSR reached its final conclusion—the church would remain with the believers. Pastor Zahlit and his parishioners had fought the communists and won — for the time being.¹⁷⁶

Moscow’s Latvian Lutheran community was also experiencing similar pressures in its church life. The worshiping community borrowed the large Sts. Peter and Paul Church of Bishop Meyer, as did Moscow’s Estonian Lutherans, for its regular worship. But life was getting more and more complicated for the church. An elder of the Latvian Lutheran congregation, a Mr. Malsen, discussed the problems with the Latvian embassy on a December 5 visit. He informed them that in 1925, 16,000 ethnic Latvians were recorded in the Moscow census, but only 440 were registered as members of the Latvian Lutheran Church. Now at the end of the decade, 200 remained in the church and of that number, only 80 paid the one ruble per month membership fee for the church. Malsen was sympathetic, because he knew the parishioners going to worship were harassed by the authorities and some even dismissed from their places of employment. It wasn’t easy being a dedicated Christian at that time. Malsen estimated it cost 275 rubles a month for the congregation, of which 125 rubles went to the pastor for pay.¹⁷⁷

The pastor of the congregation was the 60 year-old Mikhail Lapping, a former medical

¹⁷⁵ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 116.

¹⁷⁶ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 116.

¹⁷⁷ F.W.B. Coleman to Henry Stimson, January 18, 1930.

doctor who had been ordained in 1922 and was now serving as the president of the Latvian synod in the Lutheran Church. Having already been arrested, Lapping knew persecution well.¹⁷⁸ So he could not have been surprised to have been denied a membership card in a cooperative, which necessitated purchasing food on the more expensive open market. Finding housing was no easier, not even a spare room. He had for a time lived in Mr. Malsen's home, but when the government discovered his living arrangements, they charged Malsen 90 rubles a month for rent and Lapping 60. Not wanting to burden his elder further, he migrated 11 kilometers north to the village of Leonovo and stayed with another parishioner named Tull. The U. S. Legation in Riga was beginning to learn more details about the persecution of the Lutheran Church in the USSR, a topic of which John Morehead was a reluctant expert.¹⁷⁹

Morehead's Fervor for Missions and Optimism: "Is God's Purpose ... accomplished?"

Despite the problems plaguing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and the seminary, John Morehead responded not with pessimism but with a can-do spirit in regard to the mission of the Church. Since books couldn't be imported and Christian literature couldn't be published, what possibilities remained for the Church to educate its people? In a November 22 letter to Bishop Malmgren, Morehead probed, "What systematic measures besides the public services of the Church, religious instruction in preparation for confirmation, and the Christian teaching within the homes of the members of the congregation have been adopted or can be adopted by the Church in Russia under present conditions?"¹⁸⁰ If the Lutheran Church was to survive in the future, Morehead recognized the necessity of training a new generation of

¹⁷⁸ Shkarovksy and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 311–12.

¹⁷⁹ F.W.B. Coleman to Henry Stimson, January 18, 1930.

¹⁸⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 22, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

believers from which pastors could arise and continue to lead the Church. That, of course, was the importance of continuing the seminary at all costs.

Due to “religious indifferentism,” Morehead described how in other countries of the world the LWC was emphasizing the preaching of the Word of God, the teaching of the Bible and Luther’s Small Catechism within Christian homes, and the encouraging of parishioners to witness to their faith. Although he tried to lift the spirits of the bishop with the realization that secularization was a problem encompassing the entire world, Malmgren must have wondered what more could be done in Russia.¹⁸¹ After all, in response to Morehead’s questions: (1) Public services in the church were about all that the April 8 Law actually permitted. The Church had been legally reduced to the bare minimum of activities within the confines of its buildings. (2) Religious instruction for confirmation was not really allowed anymore, although some pastors continued to act as if it was still legal. For example, Seminary dean Friedrich Wacker continued to assist one of his students with confirmands in the village of Detskoe Selo near Leningrad, and he would soon reap the consequences for those actions in the coming year.¹⁸² (3) Finally, the teaching of children in the homes of Lutheran parishioners was continuing, as we know from the actions of Pastors Hansen and Muss and their teachers. But these Sunday school classes were dangerous and were the kind of activities more wary pastors tended to avoid.

The negative reports coming from southern Russia of Lutherans wanting to leave the USSR and emigrate also worried Morehead. He knew that Sweden had already extricated some of their ethnic brethren from that region, and so with missions ever in mind he was forced to speculate: “Is God’s purpose in leaving Lutheran peoples centuries ago into Russia accomplished? Or has

¹⁸¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 22, 1929.

¹⁸² P-87890, Volume 3, List 371, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

He still a great missionary purpose for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in your country?"¹⁸³

Such a question must have pained Malmgren, who was doing everything in his power to keep the Lutheran Church alive, regardless of the huge obstacles put up daily by the communists and atheists. But Morehead was reluctant to give up his hopes for a vibrant Lutheran Church, however unrealistic that might have been given conditions of the time.

Despite his concerns for its effect upon the survival of the Lutheran Church in Russia, Morehead bowed to reality and acknowledged that the Executive Committee of the LWC would now seriously consider what measures needed to be taken in order to help Lutherans emigrate. Ultimately, though, all future actions would depend upon the governments in question, as the LWC was simply a private religious organization with limited influence. But perhaps most importantly, Morehead hesitated to make any moves without the advice and counsel of Bishops Meyer and Malmgren.¹⁸⁴ There also can be little doubt that Pastor Otto Seib's desperate appeal was weighing heavily upon Morehead, too. Seib was no malcontent fleeing at the first sign of struggle, but was one of the long-suffering pastors who had endured throughout the persecutions of the past: the anti-German propaganda of World War I, the civil war, the famine of the early 1920s and the twelve years of revolution. But now, his strength was sapped. Concluding his letter of November 29 to Dr. Morehead, Seib appealed to him, "There is only one salvation possible for our Lutheran people of German descent...to help them get out of present-day Russia, because they will die as a people of German extraction and more so as a Christian people." After reminding him of the success of the Swedes and Mennonites in extracting their people, and speaking of the German Lutherans' thrift and willingness to work, Seib concluded, "please save

¹⁸³ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 22, 1929.

¹⁸⁴ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 22, 1929.

us, the pastors and our children from this misery and from this communistic prison.... We and our children will thank you for it for the rest of our lives.”¹⁸⁵

The Hansen–Muss Case

As the year drew to a close, Helmut Hansen wrote to his protégé, Kurt Muss, encouraging him to remain firm in the battle against atheism. “This new year in our lives will no doubt be one of the most difficult years of the struggle. Full speed ahead! A strong wind is inclined to give you strength, but constant battle will sink a person. And so I send you my special wishes for your approaching birthday. To the coming year of battle and war to the finish!”¹⁸⁶ Muss and Hansen both would need those encouraging words to keep up their spirits, because the battle was coming to them maybe even sooner than they realized. The students and parishioners of the church must have sensed conditions were getting increasingly dangerous to practice one’s religion. Stalin’s determination to eradicate religion could readily be seen in the laws of the nation and the actions of the OGPU. Seminary student Peter Mikhailov that Fall displayed his VDGE pin from Pastor Hansen’s congregation to fellow classmate Bruno Toryassan. As they looked at the pin, Mikhailov said, “If they find this on me, it’s going to be bad!” He then took the pin and threw it into the furnace.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, his fears proved prophetic because a critical moment would soon be reached in Leningrad.

On December 17, the OGPU struck in symbolic, biblical fashion, as those who seek to hide their nefarious activities have often done. It carried out mass arrests of the pastors and Sunday school teachers of St. Peter’s and Jesus Christ Lutheran Church in the dead of night. It was

¹⁸⁵ Otto Seib to John Morehead, November 29, 1929.

¹⁸⁶ P-87890, Volume 2, List 610, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁷ “Этот день в Истории Прихода Святого Михаила [This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael’s], accessed May 9, 2017.

always easier to conduct night raids so that people would not observe the activities of the secret police, and on this occasion the OGPU followed precedent. In total, thirty-one persons were arrested from the ages of eighteen to sixty-six. They included Pastor Helmut Hansen and his wife Erna; Pastor Kurt Muss and his wife Elena, along with his sister Luisa; Ilsa Wasserman; Evgeny Hoffman; seminary students Gotthold Sterle, Conrad Gerling, Otto Tumm and Peter Mikhailov; Inga Karlblum; Dorothea Mai; Maria Weisberg; Tamara Kossetti; Alexander Chaplygin, the woodworker; Viktoria Seleznyeva; Gustav Golde, the architect; Elsa Golubovskaya; Irina Prelberg; Ida Monakhova; Lydia Voznesenskaya; Karl Meyer, Zinaida Petrova; Wilhelmina Duvan; Ksenia Rodzayenko; Ivan Grossman; Nadezhda Loran; Ksenia Bulatova; Tatyana Schaufuss and Yekaterina Kartseva.¹⁸⁸

Naturally, since seminary student Johannes Lel and his fellow classmates lived in the student apartments next to the seminary, they were instantly made aware of the events of that night as four of their classmates were among those arrested. Later in his life, Lel would describe Pastors Hansen and Muss as “wonderful, educated people” who of course taught the children gathered around them “nothing bad.” However, from the point of view of Soviet ideology, they had created “a hotbed of obscurantism.”¹⁸⁹ The more generous Russia that Hansen and Muss had known in the past was now nothing more than a memory. In Stalin’s Russia, there would be no quarter given to those caught educating children in the basics of Christianity. By virtue of these arrests, the message of intimidation that the OGPU hoped to impart to all believers would not fall on deaf ears.

On December 19, the OGPU began interrogating Kurt Muss, requesting that he first relate

¹⁸⁸ P-87890, Volume 2, List 642, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁹ Lel, “How They Were Trying to Destroy Us,” 16.

his history in the Lutheran Church and the reason for his activities. Muss took the occasion to explain his rationale for creating the children's Sunday school groups: "I don't consider the groups that I formed as illegal, for freedom of religion has its place in the USSR and it allows for the religious nurture of children. And likewise, I don't consider the children's groups as an underground organization because there was no conspiracy involved. We have the signatures of the children with their attendance or non-attendance recorded, as well as the lists which were preserved by me and handed over to the representatives of the government during my arrest."¹⁹⁰

Muss' protestations notwithstanding, the Soviet government did not interpret the law in the same optimistic manner that he did. They interpreted his and Helmut Hansen's actions as "attempting to get around the laws forbidding the teaching of religion to children." In their deception, the OGPU decided, Muss and Hansen were attempting to "prepare a cadre of religious-nationalist youth."¹⁹¹

The real concern of the communists, who were advocating the idea of class struggle, was that young Lutherans like Peter Mikhailov were actively working against the development of class consciousness among Soviet children. Under Muss' and Hansen's influence, Mikhailov admitted, "Working with children, we pursued the goal to plant the idea of Christianity within them, and the main thing, love to your neighbor, because we *cannot* (emphasis mine) carry out the basic goal of violence and class struggle."¹⁹² One of the most remarkable observations from a reading of the OGPU files is the honesty with which the arrested Lutherans answered the questions of the OGPU. The OGPU had to have been impressed, and perhaps just a little frightened, by the zeal of these believers as well as the lack of fear that many showed during

¹⁹⁰ P-87890, Volume 3, List 9, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹¹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 614, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹² P-87890, Volume 2, List 617, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

their interrogations.

Since he was convinced that he was doing nothing illegal, Kurt Muss had no qualms about answering honestly and engaging his interrogators in a discussion of what was and was not legally permissible in the Soviet Union. For example, Muss admitted that he had moved the teaching of children to apartments since the April 8 Law had made it illegal to teach children in the church building. He acknowledged the accuracy of the list identifying his eleven Sunday school teachers, all of whom were in their teens or twenties except for Maria Weisberg (66) and Viktoria Seleznyeva (48). He listed the five crafts' teachers and spoke of how he formed the Busy Bees children's group. Muss confessed that he had no idea of his teachers' political convictions, no doubt to the amusement of his interrogators who could think in nothing less than political terms. What mattered most to him is that they were earnest and sincere Christians. Trying to explain to them in a language with which they were obviously not familiar, Muss described in Augustinian terms that there was a community of God existing upon the earth. Soviet power only interested him in how it impacted upon the faith of Christian believers. "My sermons, which you consider anti-Soviet, had the goal of revealing the sense of the times in which we are living. I wanted the believers to understand that all of life is under God's direction."¹⁹³

As the interrogations continued on Christmas Eve, Muss requested pen, paper and books, lamenting that a man who worked with his mind could not do without these things for an extended period of time. (The request must not have been fulfilled, because he repeated it again in July 1930). More interesting to his interrogators, though, must have been the content of his sermons because he returned to them repeatedly in the recorded sessions with the OGPU. While addressing the topic of faith and atheism, Muss acknowledged urging his parishioners to battle

¹⁹³ P-87890, Volume 3, List 13–14, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

atheism. Since atheism exists as a factor in Soviet society, he explained, the church could not simply ignore it but had to offer a response. In fact, Muss told his parishioners that atheism was actually “a forethought of God,” allowed by Him in order to strengthen faith!¹⁹⁴ How small the OGPU must have seemed in comparison, since God was using *them* for his purposes rather than vice versa! Muss explained to the OGPU how God was providentially controlling all events, a topic that he had reiterated time and again to his teachers and their students.

Explaining further how he steered clear of politics in his sermons, Muss stressed that he did not use the words “class” or “party” but addressed the issues of faith and non-faith. If he did briefly use one political term, it was when he mentioned that some live in the past and some in the future and others, yet, in “five year terms.” Although his point ultimately went beyond the politics of the day, by elevating the language of faith Muss was subtly belittling the role of politics. An observant OGPU interrogator would have come to the conclusion that Muss believed God was in charge of time, not Stalin. Of course, with Stalin’s Five Year Plan now fully in operation, the OGPU were not amused with his answers. Sunday school teacher, Dagmara Schreiber, remembering the rest of his sermon where he referred to Stalin’s Five Year Plan, would finish his thought in her own interrogation. Most important, she remembered Muss saying, was to live in the present time. God’s time clock does not stop; it continues to move. “When we see how they deface church buildings and ...in fear listen to how they say in five years time there will be no more churches, it is all futile. *All these persecutions only strengthen hearts in faith and together with all of the ruined churches, God is creating for Himself temples in the hearts of the people.*”¹⁹⁵ (Emphasis mine).

¹⁹⁴ P-87890, Volume 3, List 563, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁵ P-87890, Volume 3, List 563, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

In fact, Muss made clear in his January 21 interrogation that atheism, not the activities of the government, was the point of his sermons. The Lutheran Church was committed to an apolitical outlook, thus the form of government in the country was of no genuine interest to him. The fact that Luther's Two Kingdoms' theology resonated with his Sunday school teachers came through in their own interrogations by the OGPU. For example, next to the question "political convictions," Zinaida Petrova described herself as "non-partisan" and elaborated further, "It doesn't matter to me which Party is in authority." A review of the typical answers given by the teachers on this topic were of the same variety: Irina Prelberg, non-partisan; Elsa Golubovskaya, non-partisan; Peter Mikhailov, no political convictions; Tamara Kossetti, non-partisan; Maria Weisberg, none; Luisa Muss, "I submit to any authority in power;" Otto Tumm, no; Ida Monakhova, no. Not once did a Sunday school teacher express political opinions, which certainly must have been disconcerting to communists who were used to fighting an enemy that they knew, political parties like the Cadets or Social Revolutionaries.¹⁹⁶

Muss' Sunday school teacher, the thoughtful 18-year-old Dagmara Schreiber, would give one of the most detailed and interesting answers on politics. Although she acknowledged that the teaching of the Bible to children was illegal, Schreiber nevertheless acted according to her conscience and religious convictions. Like Muss, she stated that she was standing up to atheist and anti-religious propaganda with religious propaganda. (n.b. – propaganda in this instance simply meaning "expression"). "At the same time I am guided by my religious convictions and fulfilling the laws of the Soviet power as long as they do not contradict my convictions."¹⁹⁷ If that explanation of who deserved her ultimate allegiance wasn't clear enough, Schreiber detailed

¹⁹⁶ P-87890, Volume 3, List 22, 438, 188, 119, 86, 66, 49, 104, 222, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁷ P-87890, Volume 3, List 651–652, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

the contents of one of her classes to the no doubt astonished OGPU agent. She explained how she taught the story of Amos, God's prophet who lived in Judea in difficult times. The Assyrians had threatened Judea and because of their fear, the kings felt pressured to enter into an alliance with the empire. Amos, however, told them to rely instead upon God. But the kings didn't listen to Amos and as a result the Assyrians conquered them. Schreiber went on to relate how the discussion points after the basic lesson would go a little deeper into critical thinking and make connections to the times in which the children were living. In short, they, too, were living in times like Amos and needed to pray and trust in God exclusively. Schreiber left this last part out not out of fear but only because she didn't think the children would be able to comprehend it. What was obvious was that Kurt Muss, in writing the lesson, remained quite convinced of the persecutions that would come to the children in the future and was in the process of preparing them for it.¹⁹⁸ Dagmara Schreiber would also be arrested shortly after the New Year.¹⁹⁹

Hansen's Interrogations

Kurt Muss was dangerous for the OGPU because he boldly preached to a new generation of believers, but Helmut Hansen was the one whose leadership they were really seeking to obstruct. Hansen was always considered Muss' mentor and the organizational mind behind what the OGPU would describe as a vast conspiracy taking place at St. Peter's. Hansen also preached strongly worded sermons against the atheists, but it was his close ties to the German consulate that the OGPU found most suspicious. Through his consulate connections, Hansen was able to put into place a system of aid for the poor in his congregation, attracting people away from the

¹⁹⁸ P-87890, Volume 3, List 651–652, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 362, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

state's influence and binding them to the church.²⁰⁰

When the OGPU began questioning Hansen, they demanded concrete answers concerning the nature of his sermons and conversations with youth in his apartment. Gathering a collection of his quotes from parishioners and those who heard his sermons, the OGPU presented a picture of a man highly critical of the atheist perspective of the Soviets. For example, one G. Tissen quoted Hansen: "During the persecution of Christians [Early church], there were few believers. But thanks to their endurance, they were able to conquer, and as a result, believers ruled the whole world. At the present time, likewise, there is a battle with atheists and I am certain that victory will end up on the side of the believers."²⁰¹ Moreover, seminary student Otto Tumm remembered Hansen preaching the following on a Confirmation Day in 1929: "They may close up our mouths, but their lies won't stand. For a little time this prattle will continue, but Truth will prevail because you can't conquer it, although you might be able to enslave the people. Today the youth have given their oath to be true to God, and they will help us fight to the end."²⁰²

Similar quotes painted the picture of a pastor who knew very well that his people were involved in a spiritual battle, whether they themselves were entirely aware of it or not. Hansen showed clarity of thought in his interpretation of the times, comparing the church's circumstances in the Soviet Union to the persecution of the Early church during the Roman Empire. In fact, he believed that the threats to the church were worse than in Roman times and the subsequent history of the Lutheran Church in the USSR would not contradict him. In this existential battle for the life of the church, Hansen admonished his parishioners to remain faithful

²⁰⁰ P-87890, Volume 2, List 604 and P-87890, Volume 1, List 277, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰¹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 606, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰² P-87890, Volume 2, List 607, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

to Christ.²⁰³ Despite the urgency of the times, though, Hansen was more careful in his utterances than some parishioners and OGPU agents characterized him. Sunday school teacher Inga Karlblum recalled that he never advocated for the removal of the Soviet government. Instead, his call was for a softening of its politics so that freedom of speech could exist and that aid to the poor and charitable housing for the elderly would be allowed.²⁰⁴ Fellow teacher Renata Schwartz also saw nothing “anti-Soviet” in his sermons.²⁰⁵ Another teacher, Magdalina Freifeldt, remembered that in one of the last Bible classes he held, the conversation had strayed into politics. In response to this unwanted diversion, Hansen replied, “We have gone a little too far off our topic, already straying into the realm of politics. But we aren’t concerned with politics here; our only concern is religion.”²⁰⁶ Even Dorothea Mai, a member of the St. Peter’s Lutheran *dvatsatka* and one who had questioned the sharpness of his sermons, also confirmed that Hansen did not consider the Soviet authorities but rather atheism as his enemy. And for that matter, he prayed that God would set the atheists on the proper path to faith. Although he could speak forthrightly at times, Mai did not see Hansen as an opponent of Soviet power and actually heard him say that Russia could not return to the past.²⁰⁷

While the OGPU did take notice of the content of Hansen’s sermons, his interrogators took care not to become drawn into philosophical discussions with him as Kurt Muss’ interrogators did. They were more concerned with focusing upon his contacts abroad and his occasional reception of money from foreigners. Hansen admitted that the LWC and the *Gustav Adolf Verein* sent

²⁰³ P-87890, Volume 2, List 606–607, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁴ P-87890, Volume 1, List 222, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg.

²⁰⁵ P-87890, Volume 1, List 237, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁶ P-87890, Volume 2, List 495, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁷ P-87890, Volume 1, List 312 and P-87890, Volume 2, List 349, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

money for the aid of pastors and the seminary. All of this money was generally channeled through Bishop Malmgren, although he received funds on occasion. In reply to the money that he received, he admitted using it for the poorhouse that the German government still owned and supported. (Ironically, those poorhouses belonging to the Lutheran Church had been illegal according to Soviet law since 1918!). In addition, Hansen received Bibles, hymnbooks and other spiritual literature from Leipzig. In effect, Hansen's ties provided a lifeline to the Lutheran Church so that it could receive literature and continue its work among the poor.²⁰⁸ His wife Erna emphasized that one of the goals in her husband's life was to "help the poor and serve God and be faithful to Christ;" this is what he wanted to leave as a testimony to his neighbors and parishioners.²⁰⁹ Future parishioners and church leaders would remember his legacy of service to the Lutheran Church, but for the present, the OGPU would not understand his activities as simple Christian charity. Instead, the OGPU suspected or twisted his actions to be part of a sinister conspiracy forming a cadre of willing youth who would carry out the aims of the German government.²¹⁰ The OGPU showed special interest in the spiritual musical concerts given at St. Peter's. Elena Muss told them that tickets were sold for fifty kopecks or one ruble, or simply given away free to parishioners or friends of theirs. The idea behind the concerts was to raise money to pay for the high taxes levied upon the church, and also to cover heating bills and other essential repairs to the building. Registration from the authorities was not necessary, Muss claimed, because the concert was similar to a worship service in the church. Unfortunately, this is not quite how the OGPU would eventually interpret Hansen's actions after sorting them out.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ P-87890, Volume 1, List 267–268, 270 and P-87890, Volume 2, List 622–623, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁹ P-87890, Volume 1, List 267, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁰ P-87890, Volume 2, List 620–621, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹¹ P-87890, Volume 3, List 41–42, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Life in the Russian Lutheran Church Carries on Despite the Arrests

While all of these interrogations were proceeding, the OGPU struck at another seminary professor and the pastor of St. Catherine's in Leningrad, Arnold Frischfeld. The 55 year-old Frischfeld was arrested on December 18 and queried about his relationship to the children's groups formed by Kurt Muss. He denied having anything to do with them, even admitting that he thought they were illegal. He only confessed to teaching at the seminary where he taught Greek and New Testament courses. He also added that the seminary existed primarily due to the funds sent by the Lutheran World Convention. Any further questions about these finances should be directed to Bishop Malmgren. The OGPU released him on the evening of December 23rd, but ordered him not to leave Leningrad and to be prepared to appear before them upon request. He would at least be able to make it in time for the Christmas services, but they had to have been a somewhat solemn affair given conditions now prevailing in the country.²¹²

As all of these events were taking place, the seminary dean Friedrich Wacker was overseeing the work of one of his students. The student had been doing his practical work with confirmands in the village of Detskoe Selo, just outside the city limits of Leningrad. Wacker had gone there five or six times during the winter in order to conduct services at the church since there was no regular pastor. On Christmas, he invited the confirmands (ten or eleven of them) to his apartment at Kirochnaya 8 (right next door to the seminary). There they joined with his four daughters to celebrate the season, singing songs and playing music. Wacker had studied music theory and probably played a few instruments himself, so the students were evidently given a real taste of Christmas.²¹³ (As a matter of fact, when Wacker once heard that his students were going to the

²¹² P-87890, Volume 3, List 454–456, 458, 461, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹³ P-87890, Volume 2, List 642, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Philharmonia to hear Beethoven's 9th Symphony, he prepared lectures on the composition of the piece so that they would better understand Beethoven's intent).²¹⁴

Wacker was highly suited for his role as dean, having studied philosophy and theology at Leipzig University for two years before completing a four-year degree in theology at Yuryev University in Estonia. But surprisingly, although he had to have been aware of the arrest of his colleague at the seminary, Helmut Hansen [and perhaps even Frischfeld?], he continued to openly carry out his activities as if the arrests were just a misunderstanding and not a new pogrom aimed at the very existence of the Lutheran Church. With the coming of the New Year and a new decade, he and the students would learn that previous threats against them would now be more insistent and violent.²¹⁵

A Somber Christmas: 1929

After the arrests of the three Lutheran pastors and scores of parishioners in Leningrad, Christmas took on a decidedly more somber tone. This was the case, though, in all of the churches in Leningrad and many cities in the USSR that winter, as the Stalinist plan to deliver a death-blow to Christianity gathered steam. Pastor Mikhail Lapping appeared at the Latvian embassy in Moscow on December 23, alerting them to the fact that Muss, Hansen and Frischfeld had been arrested. [Of course, Frischfeld would be released on the day Lapping informed the Latvians of his arrest. The Americans, who were translating the document, must have been a little confused because they listed Kurt Muss as "... the Catholic priest Mussar."].²¹⁶ Lapping felt that the arrests had been timed so that Christmas services would be cancelled. He also informed the embassy

²¹⁴ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 15.

²¹⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 642, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁶ F.W.B. Coleman to Henry Stimson, January 18, 1930.

that the house in which he had been staying, that of a Mr. Tull in Leonovo, had been sold so that he was once again without housing, relying upon the kindness of parishioners to give him the means for subsistence. Astonished by the brazenness of the Soviet persecution of Christians, U.S. ambassador to Latvia, F.W.B. Coleman, wrote to the American Secretary of State, Henry Stimson, declaring, “The enclosed report ... shows that the pastors and the congregations of the Lettish [n.b., Latvian] Lutheran churches in the Soviet Union are being subjected by the Soviet authorities to a persecution which is probably not paralleled anywhere in the world today.”²¹⁷

Other chroniclers of the times could only add to the evidence that the U.S. Legation in Riga was now compiling. A Catholic priest named G.J. MacGillivray reported the closing of 540 Orthodox churches and 11 Protestant churches in November/December alone, bringing the total number of church closures in 1929 to approximately 1200. Between December 15 and January 15, 1930, another 2000 were supposedly slated for closure.²¹⁸ The U.S. State Department’s legation in Riga offered a more conservative figure, citing the closure of about 579 houses of worship including synagogues and mosques in 1929.²¹⁹ In his report, MacGillivray quoted English-language newspapers, even mentioning the arrest of the Muss’ and Hansens’, saying that they had simply “disappeared.” Their case was thus publicized prominently in the Western press. All of these attacks, including the new five day workweek, where workers could be fired for attending church on Sundays or peasants could be expelled from their lands for doing the same, intensified the pressure against believers beyond anything that they had experienced since 1917.²²⁰

²¹⁷ F.W.B. Coleman to Henry Stimson, January 18, 1930.

²¹⁸ Rev. G.J. MacGillivray, *The Anti-God Front of Bolshevism: A Statement of Facts* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1933), 21.

²¹⁹ Louis Sussdorff, Jr. to Henry Stimson, January 15, 1930.

²²⁰ MacGillivray, *The Anti-God Front of Bolshevism*, 22.

As Christmas drew near, an anti-Christmas campaign in the country was unleashed with ferocious intensity by those who were utterly convinced that the tide of history was turning in their favor. In Kharkov and other cities of the Ukraine, the post office workers refused to accept or deliver Christmas mail for ministers of all Christian denominations.²²¹ The *Moscow Peasant Gazette* on December 20 printed a host of propagandistic anti-Christmas slogans to be promoted: “The Christmas sermon, preaching class peace, facilitates the predatory work of undermining;” or “Against Christmas—for the uninterrupted work week” and “Struggle against the tendencies making for reconciliation with religion.” Newspapers took special glee in emphasizing that with the new workweek, Christmas would be an ordinary working day, whether celebrated on December 25 or January 7, Orthodox style. Further rubbing salt in the wounds of believers, Moscow’s *Pravda* announced that December 25 would be declared the “second day of industrialization” and the workers’ wages would be donated to an industrialization fund.²²² The newspaper *Rabochaya Moskva (Working Moscow)* in its December 24, 1929 issue, reveled in the plans for Orthodox Christmas Eve. On the south banks of the Moscow River, a torchlight procession would celebrate the burial of religion, with trucks transporting models of churches, synagogues and mosques. They would all be burned in one of the city squares, including any Bibles, hymnbooks and icons that were collected along the way.²²³

Church bells, which had often been confiscated during the Civil War, were now once again removed from steeples and utilized for the purposes of industry. The February 1930 issue of *Bezbozhnik* produced a photomontage of bells being removed from churches and was

²²¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 292.

²²² Louis Sussdorff, Jr. to Henry Stimson, January 15, 1930.

²²³ MacGillivray, 26.

entitled, “Bells—For Industrialization.”²²⁴ Icons, prepared for destruction, were placed on bonfires. The OGPU went from house to house in the villages on Christmas Eve, searching for Christmas dinners to be confiscated or destroyed. In place of the usual Christmas decorations in the stores in Moscow, now “anti-Christmas” displays were in vogue, highlighting a gigantic worker kicking the Christian, Jewish and Muslim God down the stairs. Finally, according to a decree published by Moscow’s *Izvestia* on December 18 even Christmas trees were forbidden.²²⁵ Pastor Lapping had also informed the Latvian embassy that the government was very strict in regard to lighting Christmas trees this year. A citizen could not “cut, buy or sell Christmas trees” without being subjected to a heavy fine or imprisonment.²²⁶ Those Christmas trees that Helmut Hansen had arranged through the German consulate to be purchased for poor children in 1928 were no longer acceptable in a revitalized, godless Soviet Russia.

Regardless of the bevy of attacks directed against the church, not all of the young believers were intimidated. twenty-year old Sunday school teachers, Margo Jurgens and Benita Kossetti, who for some reason would not be arrested until February, continued gathering their Sunday school classes after the Hansens’ arrest. They even formed a committee to provide aid for the arrested, with Jurgens specifically gathering money for Hansen and his family! Margo stayed in his apartment and must have helped look after his sons, informing the congregation of the Hansens’ arrest. The OGPU would describe them as “incorrigible followers of Hansen” who refused to give testimony, distorted facts and exhibited “defiant behavior.”²²⁷ Reading the OGPU files one can only marvel at the incredible bravery of these girls, standing against the all-

²²⁴ *Bezbozhnik 4* (February 1930).

²²⁵ MacGillivray, 26–27; *Bezbozhnik 4* (February 1930).

²²⁶ F.W.B. Coleman to Henry Stimson, January 18, 1930.

²²⁷ P-87890, Volume 2, List 613, 630, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

powerful secret police and defending their pastor and fellow believers. According to Mikhail Mudyugin, they were not alone. He described the mood of the youth of Muss' circle as "tense" due to Kurt Muss' arrest, but "...our naive certainty in the justice system led us to gather signatures demanding the release of all of our innocent who were imprisoned."²²⁸ The Hansens' aged nanny, Amalia Meyer, would even be questioned after her arrest about the gathering of signatures for the Hansens' release. Alas she could tell them nothing.²²⁹ However, other agents had already discovered that the subject had come up during a meeting of St. Peter's *dvatsatka*. The chairman of St. Peter's *dvatsatka*, Bruno Biederman, and another member named Lorek, had urged the committee to gather signatures for the release of Pastor Hansen, too. The majority of members, more cautious, refused to sign any document and decided to wait for actual charges to be filed against the pastor first. But all of the evidence gathered by the OGPU indicates that despite the climate of fear that they had so meticulously created, there were still some believers willing to challenge them.²³⁰

New Year 1930: Attacks against the Churches and Seminary Continue

Just after Christmas, the Leningrad Housing Administration renewed its demand from the previous summer that the students move out of their dormitory rooms. Bishop Malmgren informed the Soviet authorities that he had a legitimate contract (with 2 ½ years left on it), plus a special "Protection document" (*Schutzschein*). However all the paperwork he had accumulated was to no avail. Malmgren made calls to the state attorney and again appealed to the German consulate to intervene, as they had done so successfully in the past. But this renewed assault

²²⁸ Konstantin Kostromin, "Theologian and Confessor."

²²⁹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 499, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²³⁰ P-87890, Volume 1, List 383, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

against religion and the church was more determined than any that he had ever seen before. The German consulate would not be able to save them this time. The students were going to have to leave their reasonably comfortable living quarters.²³¹

On January 29, the official order came down. The students were ordered to vacate their rooms within two days. Punctually, in the early morning of February 1, hardened Soviet Red sailors arrived and forcefully demanded that the students immediately remove themselves and their belongings from the premises. Gathering everything they could as quickly as they could, they fled. But to where? The local Soviet authorities informed Malmgren that they would need to move no less than 25 kilometers outside of the city limits! Thankfully, they were able to find some accommodations in the Ingrian village of Martyschkino, 30 kilometers outside Leningrad and literally at the end of the Leningrad regional tramline. In October, Malmgren had just ordained the seminary's former graduate and current pastor in Martyschkino, Paavo Haimi. Now Haimi was forced to attend to the needs of the students, who could no longer use a common kitchen, not to mention the lack of available foodstuffs to be had in the village. Dean Wacker was forced to move with his family to Martyschkino, too. He and the students occupied the parsonage with Haimi and settled into the homes of farmers willing to take on this added responsibility.

In the long run, Malmgren confessed to Morehead, the situation was untenable. Four-hour roundtrip travel every day was going to eventually exhaust the students and affect their studies.²³² Yet with good courage, the students endeavored to study hard despite the obstacles. Seminary student Johannes Lel recalled that his classmates would prepare lunch right there in the

²³¹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 9, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²³² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 9, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

classroom where they studied. Malmgren pressed for solutions, though, scouting out alternative lodging that would allow the students to be able to at least reside somewhere closer to Leningrad.²³³ Truth be told, the housing situation wasn't that much better for Malmgren, either. While he was able to stay in the city, unfortunately he, too, was kicked out of the apartment that he had occupied with his family since 1891. The government had been reducing the size of his apartment, allowing new residents to settle into his rooms in keeping with the policy of the communalization of housing. Finally, though, he was able to find a new apartment to share with his youngest daughter. Unfortunately, it lacked sufficient heat; in fact, he once confessed to his students that it was downright cold. If it became unbearable, he joked, he could always take a cold shower!²³⁴ Malmgren was probably engaging in the traditional Russian practice of "black humor" when he said this, but Lel was nevertheless impressed with how the 69 year-old bishop conducted himself despite these inconveniences. He remembered Malmgren as physically strong and possessing the gait of a younger man.²³⁵

In the meantime, as Malmgren was writing to Morehead in early February about the new attack on the seminary, Wacker was being questioned by the OGPU. His work with the confirmands in Detskoe Selo had come to their attention, and he was now being accused of "membership in an underground organization and having been engaged in anti-Soviet activities." It didn't help that Wacker already had a police record, having been arrested in 1925 for dissemination of Christian literature, which resulted in his being sentenced to one year's probation. But now, the OGPU confiscated six of his foreign books and probably asked him to explain why he was teaching confirmands in contradiction to the laws of the Soviet Union. They had received evidence

²³³ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Annihilate Us," 16.

²³⁴ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 84, 86.

²³⁵ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 16.

that he apparently at one time tried to explain to the confirmation students that religion does not harm a culture. Taking freedom of religion in countries like Germany, England and America as an example, Wacker tried to illustrate that religion could actually lead to progress. Wacker was of course well informed about America as he had relatives who were members of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and he often corresponded with them. Still, his reflections must have sounded more anti-Soviet in the students’ retelling, because Wacker freely admitted to expressing these thoughts but allowed that as he spoke Russian poorly, perhaps the students hadn’t understood him properly. Although he remained free for the time being, he was now forbidden to travel beyond the Leningrad oblast.²³⁶

Hansen–Muss Case Expands–1930: “I do not consider myself guilty”

The Hansen-Muss case continued to accumulate names and addresses, as the OGPU arrested more Sunday school teachers and brought in others for questioning. Those under arrest now included: Elsa Freifeldt, arrested on December 22, 1929; Mikhail Mudyugin and Dagmara Schreiber, arrested on January 24, 1930; Bruno Biedermann, arrested on January 21; Margo Jurgens, arrested on February 1; Benita Kossetti, arrested on February 7.²³⁷ Years later Mudyugin recalled his arrest this way: “I can’t say that I took the search and arrest in any kind of tragic manner. Life was ahead of me, I was suffering for a holy cause and yes, of life in prison I had a very vague impression. In any case, the future appeared to be a novelty and promised something unusual, and for a 17 year-old youth, this was extraordinary and that was perhaps the main thing. However, during the search I was praying fervently and was completely certain of the closeness

²³⁶ P-87890, Volume 3, List 368–371, 375–377, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Margarita Schulmeister to Matthew Heise, October 2013. An “oblast” would be similar to a “county.”

²³⁷ P-87890, Volume 1, List 153, Volume 2, List 362, 418, 455, and Volume 3, List 528, 566, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

of God.”²³⁸

Benita Kossetti, one of the newly arrested and the younger sister of the already imprisoned Tamara, proved to be a thorn in the side of the OGPU. As the agents questioned her, they claimed that she was obstructing the investigation into Hansen’s guilt. Not only that, when they announced that her case was closed in early March, she wrote them a *zayavleniya* (declaration).

In her complaint, Kossetti charged:

On the 13th of March I was informed that the investigation into Case No. 2195 had been concluded. Since that day, three months have passed and I think it proper to write to you a declaration that I do not consider myself guilty according to Statute 58 (Law against Counter-Revolution). I was not a member of some counter-revolutionary organization and did not work in a counter-revolutionary group of Pastor Hansen because: (1) Such an organization did not exist; the congregation of St. Peter’s was his and my place of work, to which I went only because I was a member of this congregation. While I was there I did not support anything that was hostile towards the government... (2) I consider that participation in any counter-revolutionary organization is contrary to my religious convictions; as a matter of fact, I am completely apolitical and sympathetic to the idea of socialism, which I try to carry out in my own life. Concerning Statute 122 as it was explained to me, I definitely was teaching the Bible since May 1927 but I did it willingly and without pay as accepted in the Lutheran Church.²³⁹

As the arrests continued, Erna Hansen’s physical condition was deteriorating in prison.

Doctors were called in late January to do a checkup, and she was subsequently diagnosed with a nervous condition that was affecting her heart. We know from a witness outside the church circles that Mrs. Hansen was deeply troubled about her depositions with the OGPU. She blamed herself for her husband’s arrest, thinking that she had through her own naiveté convicted him by her testimony. The interrogator had falsely informed her that her husband had confessed to everything, so it would go better for all of them if she just signed a confession. Mrs. Hansen was clearly miserable and cried often that she had “hung” her husband. The witness, Natalya Stackel-

²³⁸ Konstantin Kostromin, “Theologian and Confessor.”

²³⁹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 613, 210, 579, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

berg, was an unemployed historian who had been arrested in January, accused of developing a discussion group for historians. In her published recollections, she gives us a valuable outsider's view of the character of the imprisoned Lutheran Sunday school teachers.²⁴⁰

Upon entering the cell, Room Number 43, Stackelberg was initially surprised that she was not in the company of hardened prisoners but rather some upstanding young ladies. She described a well-lit room where the eleven prisoners resided, furnished with a large bronze teapot. They washed up right there in the room and took their meals at a large table. Given the somewhat pleasant conditions, she couldn't believe that she was actually in a prison. But perhaps most encouraging for her was the stalwart character of the Lutheran prisoners. She described them as ranging mostly from 18–25 years in age, some working, some studying, albeit not in institutions of higher education. And although they were not as well educated as she, Stackelberg noted their cheerfulness, orderly behavior, hard-working nature and neat appearance. They would help each other out in all things.

These “German Lutherans,” as she called them, astonished her because they observed an etiquette that had long since disappeared from Soviet society. For one, they addressed Mrs. Hansen with great respect as their superior, despite her forlorn condition. Obviously such behavior was not in keeping with the class consciousness propagated by the communists. In fact, Stackelberg would discover in this room what she would call her best friend for the rest of her life, Elsa Golubovskaya. Elsa had immediately helped her get settled when she arrived in the prison cell, finding her a bunk. Her gentleness and concern towards Stackelberg exhibited a

²⁴⁰ P-87890, Volume 2, List 503–505, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Natalya Stackelberg, “Кружок Молодых Историков и ‘Академическое Дело’” [“Circle of Young Historians and the ‘Academic Affair’”] in *In Memoriam: Исторический Сборник Памяти Ф.Ф. Перченка* [*In Memorium: Historic Collection of Memories of F.F. Perchenka*] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Feniks, 1995), 19, 25.

Christian spirit that was mirrored by the behavior of the other Lutheran ladies imprisoned with her.²⁴¹

Just like the ladies, Mikhail Mudyugin was also sent to the preliminary investigative OGPU prison on Shpalernaya Street known colloquially as the *Bolshoi Dom* [Big House]. His reminiscences of prison life in 1930 exhibited the same curious spirit the devout young believer had exhibited during his arrest. Although his cell was overcrowded, there were other Christians imprisoned with him and Mudyugin didn't feel alone. There was also an excellent library, and he actively utilized it, reading classic books like Victor Hugo's *Sea Tilters*. Of course, there was also a dog-eared copy of the New Testament that was passed from cellmate to cellmate. Once Mudyugin recalled foregoing a morning walk in the courtyard and lounging on his cot, reading the New Testament, when he was approached by a limping, 63 year-old Polish Catholic priest, Stanisław Przerembel. In a loud voice, speaking in German, the priest said, "It is best to read that Book on your knees, and not lounging on a cot!" Mudyugin jumped up immediately and thanked the priest for this lesson in how to revere God's Word. He would remember and quote the priest's words for the rest of his life.²⁴² Father Stanisław had been arrested on October 10, 1929 for "systematically teaching Christianity to children," as well as running an underground seminary and the requisite accusations of espionage, in his case, Poland, that would be added to any Christian who had foreign contacts [or was a foreigner]. The heroic Polish priest would be sent to Solovetsky Island camp on September 13, but would then be accused in 1932 of holding secret Masses in the labor camp and smuggling out information about the treatment of Catholics in the USSR. His activities would lead to his transfer to Butyrka Prison in Moscow. Upon his release

²⁴¹ Natalya Stackelberg, "Circle of Young Historians," 24–25.

²⁴² Konstantin Kostromin, "Theologian and Confessor."

that year in a prisoner exchange, he returned to Poland, dying in Warsaw in 1934 at the age of 66.²⁴³

Mudyugin took ill at the end of February and found himself in the prison infirmary. One day as he looked out the window, he saw his Sunday school teaching colleague, Dagmara Schreiber, walking in the courtyard. It was only then that he learned she had been arrested, too. That was also the moment, he mused, when he knew for a certainty that he loved her. It would lead to their marriage in a couple of years. Healthy again, Mudyugin was now transferred to the Kresty prison at the end of the Spring, albeit a prison with a stricter regime. While there he got to know a future Archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexander Ranne, as well as the Catholic priest, Father Boleslav Yurevich, with whom he became acquainted through the sending of secret messages that prisoners employed to communicate with those in other cells. In the prisons it seems that an ecumenical spirit among Christians prevailed, probably due to the fact they knew they were all engaged in a spiritual battle with the atheistic state. Mudyugin learned that Father Boleslav would receive a ten year sentence just a few days before his own release on October 21. Father Boleslav would eventually be among those executed during Stalin's Great Terror in 1937. Before his release from prison, Mudyugin would also see another familiar face, that of Kurt Muss. It would be the last time he ever saw him.²⁴⁴

Regardless of whether conditions in prison were accommodating or under strict regime, prison was still not freedom. On April 19, Elena Muss' mother wrote to the authorities pleading with them to allow her daughter to be released with the promise that she would not leave the city.

²⁴³ "Book of Remembrance—Biographies of Catholic Clergy and Laity Repressed in the Soviet Union (USSR) from 1918 to 1953: Biography of Monsignor Stanisław Przerembel;" January 20, 2016, 1354.

²⁴⁴ Konstantin Kostromin, "Theologian and Confessor."

Elena was suffering from a condition in her lungs that would become exacerbated every spring, and being incarcerated had only worsened her health.²⁴⁵ Perhaps in response to this situation about which Kurt Muss must have somehow learned, he began to carry out acts of protests against the prison authorities. On July 3, Muss announced a hunger strike, something he had employed in 1922 when he was arrested for the first time while working with the National Lutheran Council and Dr. Morehead. This time he was protesting on behalf of his wife Elena and sister Luisa, calling for their release. While his hunger strike did not free them, it apparently improved their prison conditions, because Muss called it off at 4:45 p.m. on July 7. On the July 11, the OGPU announced the transfer of seventeen of the female prisoners to another building. Included among the seventeen were Elena and Luisa Muss.²⁴⁶

The Show Trial of Pastor Albert Koch: Grossliebenthal, Ukraine

The attacks against Dr. Morehead's old colleagues, Kurt Muss and Ferdinand Hörschelmann, would not be the only arrests in 1929–1930 that would cause him great discouragement. In January 1930, his friend and comrade during the difficult years of famine in the early 1920s, Pastor Albert Koch, was arrested in Gross Liebenthal (Ukraine). Morehead and his replacement from the NLC (National Lutheran Council) in Russia, Pastor Scheduling, had visited Koch and his family often and worked closely with him in distributing food to starving villagers during the famine years. On June 19, 1930, the district court in Odessa began what would amount to a show trial in “the criminal case of the counterrevolutionary pastor A. Koch.” The case was covered via radio broadcast where it was hoped Koch would be vividly portrayed as the traitor the Soviets

²⁴⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 542, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁴⁶ P-87890, Volume 2, List 583–585, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

made him out to be.²⁴⁷

Accumulating a plethora of paid witnesses, Court Prosecutor A. Mueller, a communist from Austria, conducted a virtual kangaroo court trial against Koch. Apparently the witnesses had their one ruble journey to the regional court in Odessa paid as long as they followed protocol in accusing Koch of counter-revolutionary activities. Some, however, had a conscience, as in the case of one man who defended Koch and was denied his ruble for the travel. When told that he would not be reimbursed because he had lied, the man boldly responded that he knew full well why he had been denied his money: because he had spoken the truth about Koch and exposed the lies.

The particulars of the accusation actually concerned an uprising that had taken place in Grossliebenthal back in 1919, when peasants rose up against the Red Army who was forcibly confiscating food from them during the period known as “War Communism.” The revolt had then been brutally suppressed by the authorities. Now eleven years later, the court retroactively accused Koch of belonging to a German nationalist organization and conducting “counter-revolution” by actively participating in a “kulak revolt.” (Of course, the term “kulak” was of more recent origin and had been utilized by Stalin to brand reasonably affluent farmers as enemies).²⁴⁸ In 1931, *Bezbozhnik* journalist Lev Brandt would elaborate upon the accusations against Germans from the Ukraine by publishing a book entitled *Lutheranism and its Political Role*. Brandt specifically identified Albert Koch as a prime example of a Lutheran pastor serving as a counter-revolutionist, providing assistance to the White armies during the Civil War of 1919–1920. Imperial German troops had intervened on the side of the Czarist-friendly White

²⁴⁷ Heinrich Roemmich, “Die Ev. Luth. Kirche in Russland unter der Sowjetherrschaft” in *Heimatsbuch der Deutschen aus Russland 1961* (Stuttgart: Die Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 1961), 92–93.

²⁴⁸ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

armies during the Russian Civil War and had even for a time held villages like Grossliebenthal. On his own initiative, Brandt asserted, Koch actually led the revolt in Grossliebenthal, Alexanderhilfe and other villages against the Red Army. As a result, 20 “Communist-Spartacists” were shot on his own orders with the one caveat that it not be done in the church: “the house of God is a house of prayer and should not have blood spilled on its holy floor.”²⁴⁹

Brandt was not alone in singling out Koch. In *Pod Gnyetom Religii (Under the Rage of Religion)*, the authors also painted a picture of the pastor as an active participant in league with the officers of White Army General Denikin who went to the front in order to bless “the kulak-rebels.” Koch was said to have been part of a five-man committee leading the peasants and crying, “Beat the communists, who want to take our land and our faith from us!”²⁵⁰ As late as 1937, when once again the language of the communists would emphasize “spying,” *Bezbozhnik* journalist Boris Kandidov returned to this episode in history and accused Koch of being an agent and spy of the German occupationists.²⁵¹

What can one actually believe about these bizarre accusations? The language alleged to have been used by Koch is almost too grotesque and the charges too surreal to dignify. These accusations beg the question—why were they only now being leveled against Koch? The fact that these accusations had not been made against him in 1919 and that he had continued to minister freely would naturally lead one to believe that Koch had nothing at all to do with the revolt. In fact, as far as theology is concerned, Lutheran pastors were simply not inclined to be

²⁴⁹ Lev Brandt, *Лютеранство и его Политическая Роль [Lutheranism and its Political Role]* (Leningrad: OGIZ Priboi, 1931), 87–88.

²⁵⁰ Reinmarus and Friesen, *Under the Rage of Religion*, 89–90.

²⁵¹ Boris Kandidov, *Церковь и Шпионаж [Church and Espionage]* (Moscow: Government Anti-religious Publishing, 1937), 17.

advocates of violence against the Soviet authorities. The reality was that the Red Army had shown no magnanimity towards its White opponents at the end of the Civil War.²⁵² If Koch had been an active participant in the rebellion against Soviet power and even more, a leader, what would have prevented his execution back in 1919? Any thoughtful observer of the evidence would be led to the conclusion that the times had now changed and the government was hell-bent upon eradicating the influence of active Lutheran pastors on their parishioners. His German ethnicity was just another piece of ammunition they could use against him.

Furthermore, the nebulous nature of these so-called counter-revolutionary activities would tend to confirm such a hypothesis. While it is true that Koch was accused due to the supposed content of his sermons, he was also condemned for pastoral activities: making private visits to parishioners and instructing youth in order to prepare them for confirmation. What any disinterested observer would see as normal church life was now portrayed in the most heinous manner.²⁵³ Koch's activities could be twisted to fit the stereotype of the German Lutheran agitator that the authorities were actively promoting. He was a relic of the past that had to be done away with. Brandt seemed to let the cat out of the bag when he accused pastors like Koch of preaching to women "the old kulak-priestly ideal of 'Church, Children and Kitchen.'"²⁵⁴ Discerning the exploitation of women and children simultaneously within these ideals, Brandt claimed that Lutheran pastors were using women as "instruments" to raise children as "true wards of the church" while setting church and family against the Soviet school system. The

²⁵² Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, Location 3172, 3184, 3196.

²⁵³ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930.

²⁵⁴ Lev Brandt, *Lutheranism and its Political Role*, 93–94. Brandt used the phrase "Kirche, Kinder und Küche." He would go on in the following pages of his book to accuse Kurt Muss of using philosophy to engage youth in counter-revolutionary activities.

inculcation of Christian values to children in a state now actively working against it with atheist indoctrination seemed to be the real issue in the accusations against Koch.²⁵⁵

Koch, he declared, had freely admitted his devotion to these Christian ideals during his trial. But all of these nefarious actions of Koch, Brandt informed his readers, were only carried out under a “mask of Soviet ‘loyalty.’” This is why Koch and other Lutheran pastors could publicly pray for the government in church on Sundays while engaging in counter-revolution. It was all a ruse, he cried, just as their biblical texts to “love your neighbor” were deceptively used to increase the dependency of the poor through “community chests.”²⁵⁶ Koch, for his part, denied all of the accusations. He had never urged anyone to rebel against the authorities nor had he been a member of the “rebellion committee.” The latter denial was important because Koch admitted to being a member of the union of colonists; but he reminded his accusers that this was merely an ethnic organization joined by all of the German colonists in 1917 during the interim Kerensky Government. The goal was simply to preserve their German heritage, nothing more. Ever since Germans began immigrating to Russia in the 16th century, they had taken pains to preserve their language, faith and cultural habits.²⁵⁷ The times in which they lived, though, would no longer allow for innocent, non-political actions. Everything had to be interpreted in the light of politics.

To be honest, the attacks of the communists were broader in scope, being conducted not simply against Lutherans but the Christian church at large. In an article from June 25, the communist-affiliated *Zentralzeitung* explained the central theme of the trial: “Pastor Koch, the coun-

²⁵⁵ Lev Brandt, *Lutheranism and its Political Role*, 94.

²⁵⁶ Lev Brandt, *Lutheranism and Its Political Role*, 94. For Russians, the word “mask” generally implies deception, not simply playing a role. The author has learned through practice the difficulty of using Martin Luther’s phrase “masks of God.” Many Russians interpret the phrase as implying that God is deceitful, rather than using the mask as a cover for His actions.

²⁵⁷ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930.

ter-revolutionist, stands before the proletarian court. But not only he as a pastor stands there, [but] with him and through him, the whole Christian faith. Koch did only what the Christian church and religion does [for] 2000 years. He defends the ‘rights’ of the oppressors and exploiters, fights with all possible means against them that dare to shake the old ‘divine’ system of the world or try to break it. We demand a severe punishment for the counter revolutionist Koch of Grossliebenthal.” Setting out the primary lesson of this tutorial, the paper concluded,” At the same time we hope that through this process thousands of our German peasants will begin to see the counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet character of the Christian church and religion and that they will draw the appropriate conclusions.”²⁵⁸ It stands to reason that one could probably add, “or else!”

Regional communist newspapers would attack specific, local churches, though, if need be. In its editorial on July 1, the German Soviet newspaper, *New German Village (Das Neue Dorf)*, apparently felt just such a need to narrow the accusation against the church in these German villages of the Ukraine, specifically accusing Lutheranism of being an enemy of Communism. Pastor Koch was described as “...’the true servant’ of the Lutheran church, which has been created four hundred years ago by old Luther in the interest of German trading-capital.”²⁵⁹ Brandt would eventually describe the Lutheran Church as being “the center of counter-revolutionary propaganda” as well as organizing the arming of the peasants for battle with the Red Army.²⁶⁰

The Albert Koch case illustrates very well the severe clash of cultures that the Stalinist assault upon the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and the Ukraine had initiated in 1929. All actions of Lutheran pastors would henceforth be interpreted in a conspiratorial and negative

²⁵⁸ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930.

²⁵⁹ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930.

²⁶⁰ Lev Brandt, *Lutheranism and its Political Role*, 87.

manner. If one wanted to work with youth, he was then subverting future generations from becoming godless, Soviet citizens. If he wanted to provide assistance to the poor as the Christian church has always done, he was only doing it to keep the peasant class in thrall to its exploiters, the kulaks. If he showed any kind of pride in his ethnic heritage, he was suspected of being a German spy. Nothing he did could be seen outside the lens of politics.

The *Russian Evangelical Press* [REP] abroad cut through the haze of lies to remind its readers of the goal of the trial: “Pastor Koch, an active, convinced minister of the Gospel, a real religious leader of his congregation, universally loved, . . . religiously deeply influencing wide circles of the German population has to be got out of the way.”²⁶¹ The truth behind REP’s defense of Pastor Koch was born out by the actions of his own parishioners. They boldly yet silently gathered and rallied before the courthouse in a show of support for their pastor. They knew his character and saw the accusations of anti-revolutionary propaganda for what they were worth. Accusations made against a guiltless man. The OGPU discovered that it was best not to publicly engage in these trials against believers.²⁶²

But unfortunately the ultimate lesson of these assaults against Koch and the Lutheran church, as with Pastor Hörschelmann, was to bring the German peasant in line with the new Soviet reality. Simply put, a Lutheran believer could not be a good Christian and Soviet citizen at the same time. Ambiguity on this account would no longer be allowed as in the past. Sooner or later, the believer would have to choose. The verdict in the case against Koch was most likely already predetermined by the Soviet government’s determination to stamp out religion: “The numerous transgressions and crimes of Koch fully and entirely entitle the application of the max-

²⁶¹ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930.

²⁶² Heinrich Roemmich, “Die Ev. Luth. Kirche in Russland unter der Sowjetherrschaft,” 93.

imum amount of the social safeguard: ‘to be shot.’”²⁶³ While the court was concluding its deliberations into the case of Koch, his allies appealed to American President Herbert Hoover for his release. Recognizing Hoover’s “humanitarian principles”, Lutheran Pastor O.H. Groth of Milwaukee urged the President to intervene, lamenting the fact that Koch was responsible for the care of his elderly mother, wife and four children. “Will the civilized world remain silent while the very foundation stones of its existence are being destroyed? Will not, cannot our government raise its voice in protest?”²⁶⁴

Of course, at this time President Hoover was occupied with his own troubles, the crash of the stock market in October 1929 and the rapidly advancing Great Depression. Although the U.S. government had a legation in Riga, Latvia monitoring religious freedom issues within Russia, its lack of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union tied Hoover’s hands. Robert Kelley, chief of the Eastern European Affairs for the State Department, answered Groth on behalf of President Hoover saying, “...there would appear to be no immediate action which it would be practicable for this government to take which would be helpful.”²⁶⁵ John Morehead could do no less than appeal on behalf of Koch to his old friend, Herbert Hoover, reminding him of the days when they worked together to save as many lives as they could from the famine in southern Russia. Morehead told the president that Koch had hosted him during the famine and had continued to be of assistance to those suffering in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia in the succeeding years. Since he now served an influential role as the District President of the Regional Synod in the Odessa Region, Morehead surmised that the local Soviet authorities were singling out Koch as an example of the enemy with which concerned Soviet citizens had to be aware. Morehead

²⁶³ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No.8, 1930.

²⁶⁴ O.H. Groth to Herbert Hoover, March 24, 1930, 861.404/306, RG 59, National Archives II.

²⁶⁵ Robert Kelley to O.H. Groth, April 1, 1930, 861.404/306, RG 59, National Archives II.

supplied Hoover with secret correspondence from Lutherans on the ground in the Odessa region, apprising him of Koch's innocence and the true facts of the case.

Informing the president that he himself was trying to keep the Lutheran seminary in Leningrad alive, despite the fact that there were now only 80 pastors serving a Lutheran Church of one million people, Morehead pleaded one more time: "Mr. President, are there any measures you can kindly adopt through channels open to the Government of the United States by which a proper appeal may be made to the authorities of the Russian Government for the release of Pastor Koch? If so, the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and other countries will be profoundly grateful for your mediation."²⁶⁶ Hoover had already been and would be continually deluged in the coming years with letters from American organizations and interested citizens committed to defending the rights and publicizing the persecution of religious believers in the Soviet Union. Morehead's own "The American Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities" (hereafter ACRRM) and the "Hollywood Citizen," an organization of publishers, printers and engravers, were among those who pleaded with the president to intervene.²⁶⁷ Most likely, the president realized there was nothing he could do, even for his dear old friend, John Morehead. Hoover had effectively fought Soviet bureaucracy tooth and nail back in the early 1920s for the right to distribute food and clothing to hungry and poor citizens, but Stalin's government of the early 1930s was in a different position. They would not be subjected to the demands of capitalists anymore. It was a new day and Stalin was proving that Soviet power was a force with which to be reckoned.

²⁶⁶ John Morehead to Herbert Hoover, July 10, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁶⁷ Arthur J. Brown to Herbert Hoover, February 17, 1930, 861.404/288, Hollywood Citizen to Herbert Hoover, February 10, 1930, 861.404/287 and Edlef Sell to Herbert Hoover, January 13, 1932, 861.404/344, RG 59, National Archives II.

Nevertheless, Hoover immediately and sympathetically wrote back to Morehead, “It is certainly a most distressing situation. I am asking the State Department to see if there is anything they can do, although I am afraid we have but little effect in Russia, even indirectly.” Instructing him as to how to proceed further, Hoover continued, “The friends of Reverend Koch should present his situation to the German government as they, of course, have relations which we do not have.”²⁶⁸ Hoover’s point was well taken, as the German government still held influence with the Soviet government despite the accusations of pan-Germanism leveled against Koch, Helmut Hansen and Kurt Muss. Hoover’s secretary, Laurence Richey, sought advice from the Secretary of State after receiving translations of the letters that Morehead had sent. The answer to Morehead was short and to the point: “I regret to say that there would appear to be no action which it would be practicable for this government to take which would be helpful to Pastor Koch in the circumstances.”²⁶⁹ It seemed that only the German embassy had any real clout with the Soviets, and when Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 that influence would be dramatically reduced if not completely curtailed.

Fortunately for Koch, though, the Soviet government was not as harsh yet towards its internal enemies as it would be in 1937. Koch was sentenced to five years imprisonment in the Solovetsky labor camp in the White Sea, followed by three years of exile outside of the Ukraine.²⁷⁰ The German embassy could not help. Meanwhile, Albert Koch would begin the process of being shuffled between Gulag camps and exile, ultimately leading to his execution in 1937.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Herbert Hoover to John Morehead, July 15, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁶⁹ W.R. Castle to Laurence Richey, August 5, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁷⁰ *Russian Evangelical Press*, No. 8, 1930.

²⁷¹ Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR], “Albert Koch,” last

September 1930—Hansen-Muss Case Decided: The Church is Broken

Finally, after serving more than half a year in prison, the verdicts came down for the Lutherans in the Hansen-Muss Case. On September 17, 1930, the courts declared that seventy-two of the accused in the Hansen-Muss Case were found guilty. Only thirteen of them would be allowed to walk free. According to the verdict, Pastors Hansen and Muss were named as the ring-leaders of this “counter-revolutionary group.” Ironically, though, their actions were not considered to have been isolated. They were said to have been part of a greater conspiracy, foreshadowing the tactics the NKVD would use to round up as many of its enemies as it could during Stalin’s Great Terror later in the 1930s.²⁷²

The “Academic Affair” was a conspiracy of “monarchical, counter-revolutionary” character supposedly led by Professor Sergey Platonov of the Academy of Science in Leningrad. (Natalya Stackelberg had been arrested as part of the “Academic Affair,” too). According to the OGPU, there were several groups connected to this conspiracy including a “German group.” This is where Hansen and Muss, along with their Sunday school teachers, fit into this diabolical plan to undermine the Soviet state according to the active imagination of the OGPU. It also explains why Hansen was continually questioned about his relationship (he had none) to Orientalist academic Alexander Mervart (born in Germany as Gustav Mervart). (Hansen—“Mervart I don’t know at all and never attended any consultation with him or Furman” [Alexander Furman was a professor whom Hansen did know].²⁷³ Mervart had ties to St.

modified December 13, 2016; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and Soviet Government 1917–1938*, 360.

²⁷² P-87890, Volume 2, List 627–641, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁷³ Natalya Stackelberg, “Circle of Young Historians,” P-87890, Volume 2, List 581–582, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Catherine's in Leningrad, though, so connecting Hansen to this academic was a simple matter in the minds of his NKVD handlers.²⁷⁴

The Academic Affair was primarily an attempt by the OGPU to induce fear among the intelligentsia of Leningrad since communists had been steadily losing positions of authority within the universities of Leningrad. The real heart of the accusations leveled against Hansen and Muss concerned their religious activities in contradiction to the April 8 Law on Religious Associations. In the final verdict, seven primary accusations were made against Hansen and Muss. (1) Agitation; (2) Creation of the *Jugendbund*; (3) Organization of Children's Sunday school classes; (4) Organization of Charity Work; (5) Dissemination of Literature; (6) Relations with the German Consulate; and (7) Relations with Foreign Organizations.²⁷⁵ In the view of the court, all of these crimes served the interests of the church and worked against creating loyal citizens for the Soviet state. Agitation entailed a "hiding behind the religious flag of sermons and conversation" to deflect youth away from the activities of the Soviet state and the use of biblical texts to make critical parallels with the current path of the state.²⁷⁶ The *Jugendbund* and Busy Bees were identified as youth groups formed around the pastors with the goal of supporting their religious ideals. Hence, the need to train a new generation of "cadres of religious-nationalist youth" through Sunday school groups. The OGPU, using the lists compiled from the Hansens, counted 120 youth in the Hansen group alone.²⁷⁷

The charity aid that Hansen distributed highlighted his ties to the German consulate, as he

²⁷⁴ St. Petersburg Martyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church.

²⁷⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 607–625, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁷⁶ P-87890, Volume 2, List 606, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁷⁷ P-87890, Volume 2, List 611–620, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

often received money from them and handed it out among the needy. However, the OGPU twisted his actions so that it would appear that the aid was given, “not to everyone who is needy, as the Gospel commands a spiritual person, but patronizing instead those anti-Soviet and nationalist elements who couldn’t count on the support of the Soviet authority.”²⁷⁸ In doing this, Hansen utilized the *Jugendbund* to identify needy parishioners. These youth also assisted in the sale or distribution of tickets for concerts and at times themselves participated in the musical services since they were members of the church choir.²⁷⁹

The concerts themselves were described by *Bezbozhnik* journalist, Lev Brandt, as dangerous in their ability to attract not only “former people” of the Czarist past but also ordinary Soviet citizens. Concerts highlighting religious themes, like those of Bach (Lutheran), Mozart and Beethoven (Catholic requiems and masses) and Orthodox Church music could lure people away from Soviet ideology. The concerts were apparently very elaborate affairs, with academic choirs, the orchestra of the Soviet Philharmonia and various soloists from the State Opera, Theater and Ballet participating. They drew large numbers of attendees and thus contributed greatly to the reduction of the church tax burden, since a free will collection usually took place at the conclusion of the concert.²⁸⁰ Although the proceeds from these concerts went to the fund of the German poor house or to those who were needy in the church and not to Hansen himself, the OGPU still painted his actions in a conspiratorial manner. “In this way Hansen not only ‘scooped up’ funds that were not known to the governing authorities, but diverted the mass of Germans from attending culturally-enlightened state institutions all the while strengthening the German

²⁷⁸ P-87890, Volume 2, List 622–623, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁷⁹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 620–623, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸⁰ Lev Brandt, *Lutheranism and its Political Role*, 93.

religious-patriotic feeling.”²⁸¹

The remaining charges built upon this theme of Hansen and Muss developing a nationalistic spirit among Germans in Russia. The literature that Hansen assisted in distributing to Lutheran pastors came from the publishing company *Rutter* in Leipzig. Hansen had on occasion visited the German consulate and had workers of the consulate attending his church with whom he often conferred. His and Muss’ ties to foreign organizations clinched the sense among the OGPU that there was something of an anti-Soviet character taking place at the Lutheran churches in the city. Dr. “Marhead” [sic., Morehead] was specifically mentioned as one of their suspicious contacts, being the executive chairman of the LWC.²⁸² The anti-German spirit among the Stalinists was in contrast to the early years of the Soviet Union’s existence, when Germany and the USSR worked closely together in evading the military restrictions placed upon Germany as punishment for World War I. The situation would become far worse in the 1930s for Lutherans who treasured their relationship with the German embassy or consulate.

If all of these charges weren’t enough to convict Muss and Hansen, for good measure the OGPU added the accusation that two weeks before their arrest, they had engaged in an act of sabotage. Conspiring with the chairman of the German Reformed Church council, Ivan Grossman, the pastors had supposedly attempted to dismantle the pipes in the church basement with the goal of poisoning the water supply with lead. This startling accusation is almost too unbelievable to consider, even for the fertile imagination of the OGPU. But it certainly fit recent government paranoia that acts of sabotage were being committed by enemies of the Soviet Union, as indicated in the famous Shakhty Trial that took place in the Donbass region of the

²⁸¹ P-87890, Volume 2, List 620–621, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸² P-87890, Volume 2, List 623–625, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Ukraine in 1928. During Stalin's Great Terror, accusations of sabotage in league with the Germans or Japanese would become more common.²⁸³

As the OGPU concluded its accusations against Hansen, Muss, and their Sunday school teachers, the final statement read as follows: "All of these listed facts establish in sufficient measure that all of the activity of Hansen, his wife, Muss and the accused, were definitely directed towards the development and strengthening of Pan-Germanism for the disruption of the activities of the Soviet authorities not only regarding religious questions and the cultural-Soviet education of the mass of Germans, but in contradiction to socialist development in the interests of the foreign bourgeoisie, in which most of the efforts of Hansen and Muss were to estrange the youth from Soviet reality in order to prepare and create future anti-Soviet cadres."²⁸⁴ All that remained were the sentences. Pastors Hansen and Muss were sentenced to a Gulag labor camp for ten years; Erna Hansen and Elsa Freifeldt were sentenced to five years; most of the others (Prelberg, Selezneva, Benita Kossetti) were given three-year terms while youth like Dagmara Schreiber and Mikhail Mudyugin were released with time served.²⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the Swedish press publicized the sentences given to Hansen and Muss and their Sunday school teachers, indicating that the foreign press was well aware of the court's decision.²⁸⁶ The Hansen-Muss Case would become a major turning point in the state's relationship to those who served in the Lutheran Church. Until all of the Russian Lutheran churches were finally closed in 1939, no pastor would again act as boldly as Hansen and Muss.

The parishioners in Leningrad were especially frightened by the sentences given to the

²⁸³ P-87890, Volume 2, List 558, 627, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 150.

²⁸⁴ P-87890, Volume 2, List 627, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸⁵ P-87890, Volume 2, List 627–641, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸⁶ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe, Pfarrer, Bischof*, 83.

Sunday school teachers. It had a negative impact those who might have wanted to participate in church activities, dramatically reducing the role of the laity. The Soviet authorities, assured that the battle was moving decisively in their favor, must have felt convinced that they had set the new guidelines for future activities in the Church. Hence they could afford to be magnanimous at times in individual cases because they knew that ultimately the future was with them.²⁸⁷ A good example of Stalin's ability to compromise temporarily was on display in his famous March 15, 1930 article "Dizzy with Success." In the article he claimed that some overeager communists had exceeded the requirements for collectivization, in the process closing churches without warrant. In hypocritical fashion, Yaroslavsky, who had shrieked loudest in the past for the closing of churches, now did an about face. This leader of the League of the Militant Godless now criticized those atheists who had dared to obstruct Easter celebrations. The Soviet government had come to the conclusion that there was a real danger of peasants refusing to work the collective farms, so they retreated from collectivization for the time being and also called a halt to the forcible closure of churches. It was only a tactical maneuver, however. Stalin had no intention of going back to the socially liberal NEP era of the 1920s, and with regard to religious policy, he would soon begin attacking the church again after a short breathing spell.²⁸⁸ For the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, though, the die had already been cast. After the conclusion of the Hansen-Muss Case, it was living on borrowed time.

²⁸⁷ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe, Pfarrer, Bischof*, 83.

²⁸⁸ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 45.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LUTHERANS' ROAD TO GOLGATHA

For the most part, Lutheran parishioners had humbly acquiesced to the violent actions of the Soviet government, going to prison without starting revolts or fomenting uprisings. They might publicly protest, as Albert Koch's parishioners did. Or they might gather signatures in defense of their pastors, as Benita Kossetti and Margo Jurgens felt compelled to do. But in general, they would not resort to violence against the authorities. That is why the actions of the people of the Volga River city of Marxstadt marked a radical break in the way Lutherans responded to the Soviet authorities' lawlessness. The tension may have first surfaced when Pastor Arthur Kluck was arrested on December 1, 1929. Actually there is some debate as to just when Kluck was arrested. Historian Olga Litzenberger, who had access to his diaries in the local Volga region archives, dates the arrest on December 1, 1929.¹ On the other hand, the records of human rights societies in Russia, such as the website "Victims of Political Terror in the USSR," date his arrest to June 20, 1930. The latter date is almost certainly incorrect, though.²

Johannes Schleuning described how Arthur Kluck, District President Nathaniel Heptner, a church elder named Schulz and thirty-four believers were transported east towards Siberia from the pris-on cells in Marxstadt under unbelievable circumstances. For ten days they were locked in a cattle car, allowed only a little food with no light or fresh air, mired in dirt and stink without

¹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 360.

² Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Terror,] last modified December 13, 2016; Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

any sani-tation. After the first ten days, they arrived in Nizhny Tagil of the Ural Mountain range. As the doors to the cattle car were opened, the horrified prisoners gawked at each other's emaciated and run down appearance.³ In a February 25, 1930 letter, Bishop Meyer related additional details of this odyssey to Dr. Morehead. It seems that Kluck and Volga District President Nathaniel Heptner had been sent to "an easternmost part of Russia" where they had to literally travel on foot to a camp in -30 degree Celsius conditions. Heptner, who was already sixty-seven years old and quite weak, couldn't manage the travel on his own, so he had to be transported via sledge. He had just served two months' imprisonment under harsh conditions in Pokrowsk (also known as Engels, on the Volga River) before being sent into exile. Meyer's letter would only make sense if Kluck had already been arrested on December 1st of the previous year, as Litzenberger attests.⁴

While Pastor Kluck was serving his time in a Siberian concentration camp, his parishioners and other citizens of Marxstadt were becoming increasingly incensed by the actions of the government. All of the major churches, Lutheran, Catholic and Russian Orthodox, had been closed, their pastors all arrested. The Lutheran Church was converted into a "Palace of Culture" (something like a community center). The Catholic Church was turned into a theater and the Russian Orthodox Church reduced to rubble. A red flag had been fastened to the iron cross placed high on the exterior of the Lutheran Church. On the church's dome, a red star was attached which glowed at night with an electric lamp inside of it.⁵

The Lutherans could not reconcile themselves to the fact that they had lost their church. At first, they protested at the government gatherings but all to no avail. People then started gath-

³ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 144–45.

⁴ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 25, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵ Arvid Liebert, "Unruhe in Marxstadt," *Der Bote* 2 (1995): 26.

ering in small groups on the streets, their restlessness beginning to grow. Whenever they became too obstinate in the demands to return their church, the police would drive them away. Now their numbers grew larger as the ladies gathered on the streets to meet their husbands when they finished work for the day at the main factory, *Vozrozhdeniya* (Rebirth). Scattered groups of the irate began to linger on the streets after work where a ten year-old Lutheran boy, Arvid Liebert, heard the men discussing a plan to reoccupy the church. Little Arvid once counted twelve such groups. Questions discussed included where to get the key, how they would take apart the stage that had replaced the altar, and the most important question: when would it all begin? It was decided that 20 minutes after the horn sounded for the end of the day, they would make their way toward the church. Since work ended at 4 p.m., the recapture of the church would start at 4:20 p.m., although for now the day was kept secret. On June 5, a typical warm, summer workday, the planners sprung into action. Liebert noted that at a signal, some men began running towards the church. The crowd got larger and larger. A key was produced, but no one could open the door. Liebert counted the numbers in the hundreds now, as the men contemplated whether they should break down the door. However, a small window was partially open and a young boy named Nikolai Schmidt was lifted up to the window by the men, whereupon he slid through into the church. Other boys soon followed him through the window, and soon the door was opened as the people streamed into the church.⁶

The ladies present began to break up the stage that had been constructed in the place of the altar, tearing it apart in their haste without the assistance of hammers or axes. The news spread quickly to the villages and more people flocked to the church. Meanwhile, the men tore apart the boards that had been constructed as the inside of the church took on the look of a construction

⁶ Liebert, "Unruhe in Marxstadt," *Der Bote* 2 (1995): 26–27.

zone. Liebert remembers the faces as strained and joyless, as they set about the task of reclaiming what was rightfully theirs. Ladies went to the kitchen to prepare food. Pictures of the members of the Politburo of the Communist Party were ripped off the walls as banners with quotations from the works of Stalin were torn down. Parts of the altar were found in an adjoining room, but apparently the communists had made off with some of the church art because a favorite painting of Jesus seemed to have disappeared. As the work continued, a woman touched the keys of the organ as a familiar sound rang out and soon died away.⁷ It is quite likely that the woman Liebert remembered striking the keys on the organ was none other than Pastor Kluck's wife, Bertha. She had been the organist at the church and her daughter remembers her saying that she had wanted to see what the Communists had done to the organ.⁸ Some of the children now set about dismantling the red star from the church's cupola, as well as taking away the red flag from the church tower.

The club soon began to look like a church again, as the altar was restored by some of the ladies while the objects for the club were taken away. While the men worked, many began to ask each other why the horn for the factory *Vozrozhdeniya* had not sounded. They certainly could use the help of the factory workers, and yet they had not come. Had they been detained? While they wondered, a group of youth came into to church shouting, "They're coming! They're coming!" But it was not the factory workers who were coming. It was the militia on horseback with many armed communists behind them. When the ladies in the church heard this, they quickly ran home. Liebert and his friend Viktor ran out of the church to the river bank where they saw two rows of horsemen with Comrade Schitva leading the troops. Liebert knew that Schitva was not a

⁷ Liebert, "Unruhe in Marxstadt," *Der Bote* 2 (1995): 27–28.

⁸ Gisela Kluck-Detterer to Matthew Heise, April 2014.

native of Marxstadt since Schitva's daughter had been in his kindergarten class. He also described Schitva as a not terribly likeable fellow. Liebert got the sense that day from Schitva's countenance and the horsemen's movements that they meant business as the troops closed off the central square where the church was located. Soon cars came and arrested some of the men, taking them away from the square so that it was quickly vacated. More cars continued to stream in, this time with soldiers. The state was preparing for a battle.⁹

Apparently the uprising had started earlier than expected due to some hotheads. The expected signal from the factory never came because the Communist Party had its spies well placed, and apparently some had informed them of the plan to retake the church. That accounted for the troops arriving quickly as well as the fact that the factory workers were barred from leaving the plant on time. However, in their anger the workers broke down the gates of the factory and pushed the militia guarding it aside, flooding to the central square. There they ran into the horsemen and armed communists, so that they couldn't enter the square. The horsemen and communists guarded the square all night while the Soviet authorities went about the task of rounding up hundreds. Many were not guilty, but they were all imprisoned with at least a sentence of five years and then banished. None of them ever returned to Marxstadt.¹⁰

In this way, the communists of Marxstadt broke the spirit of the people. The Communists were wise enough to move Schitva out of the city and from this time forward they moved more slowly. But gradually, the red star was reattached to the church's cupola. A red flag was placed on the tower. Liebert's uncle Peter, who was a tailor, had been asked to make a more durable flag but he refused. Continuing their renovation of the church, the communists took the pews out

⁹ Liebert, "Unruhe in Marxstadt," *Der Bote* 2 (1995): 28–29.

¹⁰ Arvid Liebert, "Unruhe in Marxstadt," *Der Bote* 3/4 (1995): 38–39.

and placed them in the park. They widened the former churchyard and brought in chairs to create more of a theater atmosphere inside the church. Within a year, the church was once again a Palace of Culture and the Lutherans of Marxstadt had acquiesced. With their pastor Arthur Kluck in a Siberian Gulag concentration camp and their church now gone, the situation in Marxstadt aptly symbolized how the communists attacked the Christian faith in the Soviet Union. First, those who stood up to the Soviet authorities would be destroyed, their families scattered and dispersed. Meanwhile, life would go on normally with the remaining citizens realizing the futility of challenging the Communist Weltanschauung. A new generation that didn't know the church would be then be raised exclusively in a proletarian spirit. There would be no future revolts in Marxstadt because everyone knew who held political power and authority in the city and country.¹¹

The Servant of the Church as an Enemy of the State

Despite setbacks like these, Dr. Morehead persevered, not willing to give up hopes for an eventual return of freedom to the church. The bishops of the Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union, however, did not share his optimism. The Hansen-Muss Case in Leningrad and the difficulties surrounding housing for the seminary certainly weighed heavily on their minds. In an emotional letter to Morehead on February 25, Bishop Meyer expressed his deep concern that Christianity was dying in the Soviet Union. "The struggle against the Church, which has been ongoing for several years, is taking increasingly sharper form and the outcome has already been determined: in the course of the year 1930 the last traces of Christianity in Soviet Russia must be destroyed, for in a land like present day Russia there is no more room for the Christian faith but

¹¹ Liebert, "Unruhe in Marxstadt," *Der Bote* 3-4 (1995): 39-41.

only for the Communist world view (Weltanschauung).” Meyer went on to state that, “The servant of the Christian Church is portrayed by society as an enemy of the state that must be fought against and thrust aside. Everything that is connected to the Christian faith or reminds one of it must disappear from the life of the people and its individual citizens.”¹² Anyone taking up the pastoral office was, in the biblical expression, being sent out “as a sheep among the wolves.”

Meyer further explained to Morehead how the newly established workweek was limiting at-tendance at his church and how collectivization had decimated the congregations in southern Russia and the Volga region. In fact, church bells could no longer be rung legally in Moscow, and the church bells had indeed been forcibly confiscated from many churches.¹³ Although the occasional removal of church bells had already been occurring back at the time of the Russian Civil War [1918–1921], when churches would use them to alert the people of an approaching communist raid, the act took legal form on April 10. In August, Prime Minister Alexey Rykov declared in a special amendment to a decree that local officials could limit the use of church bells, in essence giving the central government cover that the actions taken were the result of the people’s will. At times the communists were reduced to petty rationalizations, claiming that the church bells disturbed the workers. But the real purpose was to melt down the bells so that they could be turned into coins. Of course, since any property of the church belonged to the state, the communists could do whatever they wanted with the bells. They even used the materials as relief and paneling for the façade of the newly constructed Lenin Library in Moscow.¹⁴

Meyer’s pessimism was usually less pronounced than that of Malmgren, but given the cur-

¹² Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 25, 1930.

¹³ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 25, 1930.

¹⁴ Arto Luukanen, *The Religious Policy of the Stalinist State: A Case Study: The Central Standing Commission on Religious Questions, 1929–1938* (Helsinki, Finland: Societas Historica Finlandiae, 1997), 70–77.

rent conditions within the Church and the seminary, neither could claim to have an optimistic out-look on the future. Malmgren expressed their feelings quite well: “In this difficult time of need in which our Lutheran Church in Russia exists, only the knowledge that our brothers in the world are raising hands in prayer for us helps us maintain our perseverance.”¹⁵ Morehead took care to continually encourage the bishops to not give up hope no matter how difficult the conditions. While expressing his profound sympathy with Malmgren, Morehead assured him that “...we are grateful that this institution for the training of pastors exists.... Be assured of our unceasing prayers and abiding interest that God may give to the Evangelical Lutheran Church and to all the other Christian churches of Russia a great future of service that the Kingdom of God may more fully come to the millions of Russia in the future.”¹⁶ To prove that his words were not mere rhetoric, Morehead informed Malmgren that the LWC was sending a check for \$2000.00 for the seminary. Furthermore, he comforted him with the assurance that the LWC would look favorably on funding a seminary building if Malmgren could find an appropriate place for the students. Given that it was the 400th anniversary of the publication of the *Augsburg Confession*, Morehead confessed that he had hoped they could distribute Bibles, catechisms and tracts in Russia. But he understood that the times called for patience. Still, his enthusiasm to stand with the bishops and the Lutheran Church in Russia, even if his plans were not very realistic, gave strength to them when they were hard pressed on every side. They were not alone.¹⁷

¹⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 9, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁶ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren,

¹⁷ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, April 2 and April 29, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. Morehead had expressed the hope that the Christian churches and the Soviet authorities could reach a “modus vivendi” in order that “... the Churches and their institutions may have freedom to worship, to work and develop in their congregational and institutional life.” Of course, the Soviets under Stalin’s leadership had no intention to allow the Church to develop any kind of institutional life. See Morehead to Malmgren, April 29, 1930.

In the meantime, Bishop Malmgren had been searching for better housing conditions for the seminary. After almost 40 years of residence in the city, Malmgren had established many contacts, among them a German industrialist by the name of Ahrendt. Given the difficult economic conditions and his own health problems, Mr. Ahrendt had decided that it was time to return to his home in Mecklenburg, Germany. Therefore he wanted to ensure that his two story wooden house would have a suitable caretaker. For Malmgren this was an answer to prayer because he knew that the students would soon wear out from the 60 kilometers of strenuous round-trip daily travel from Martyschkino to Leningrad. Even more important for Malmgren was the knowledge that the house was protected as extraterritorial property, being covered by the German-Soviet Treaty of Rapallo [1922]. The only condition Ahrendt required from Malmgren was that he and his heirs receive a certain amount of rent every year. Malmgren appealed to the Gustav Adolf Verein for the bulk of the amount (8000 Deutschmarks) while the LWC agreed to pay additional rental costs (\$1000.00 per month, albeit not with regularity).

Since the Ahrendt house was practically in the center of Leningrad, Malmgren and Dean Wacker could finally relocate back home with their families. The classes themselves would take place in the house instead of St. Anne's, as they had in the past.¹⁸ The new house would come with a garden, another possibility for procuring food for the students and leaders of the seminary. Morehead greeted the news with thankfulness that the seminary would now be protected from the nationalization of its property. In April, Malmgren signed a five-year contract for the house, ensuring a suitable haven for the students to pursue their studies. Of course, everything would still be dependent upon a state that did not mask its animosity towards religion. Morehead

¹⁸ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 86–87, 93; John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, June 23, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

understood that the church was going through difficult times, but the foreign press seemed to indicate that the pressure had eased somewhat lately, in keeping with Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" article. But how long that respite lasted would soon be revealed.¹⁹

The World Condemns Persecution: Shocking the Moral Sense of the Civilized World

Historically, we know that this period was only a short breathing spell for the church. Stalin's retreat from collectivization and the closing of churches appear to have been in response not only to the people's anger over collectivization but also due to foreign pressure. For example, a March 21 editorial in *Pravda* excoriated foreigners for their prayer meetings on behalf of persecuted believers in the Soviet Union. In apocalyptic language, the newspaper declaimed that the nations were mobilizing their masses for a crusade against the Soviet Union. In a previous letter dated February 8, Pope Pius XI had strongly protested Soviet persecution on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York now chimed in, too, on behalf of believers in the Soviet Union.²⁰ The Christian Protest Movement in Britain likewise threatened the Soviets where they were most exposed—the threat of recognition being removed by many nations. These actions were troubling for the Soviet Union, because in order to succeed in the first Five Year Plan it was beholden to foreign states for financial aid. In response to the unwanted attention, the Soviets probably felt pressured to reopen some churches, although it doesn't appear that any Lutheran congregations benefited from this leniency.²¹

From the other side of the ocean, Americans also were also pressing the Soviet government in support of religious believers in the Soviet Union. The American Committee on Religious

¹⁹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, May 26, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁰ Luukkanen, *The Religious Policy of the Stalinist State*, 90–92, 100.

²¹ Timasheff, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 45.

Rights and Minorities (hereafter ACRRM) was formed in 1920 by a coalition of Americans of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant backgrounds. After the letters of the Pope and Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the ACRRM wrote to President Herbert Hoover requesting that he not recognize the Soviet Union unless it guaranteed religious rights for people of both nations. One of the influential members of the committee and chairman of a subcommittee that had drafted resolutions calling for the President and Secretary of State to defend religious freedom was none other than Dr. John Morehead.

Morehead's committee urged the United States government to go one step further and secure the basic principle of religious freedom; that is, that it recognize the right to practice religion as a "primary human right" and communicate that principle to other nations around the world. Such language was groundbreaking, and Morehead was joined in his advocacy by influential American personalities in the sphere of religion like Henry Sloane Coffin (President of Union Theological Seminary) and Edmund Walsh (Georgetown University), as well as political figures like Henry Morgenthau (former Ambassador to Turkey) and media titans like Adolph Ochs (Publisher of the *New York Times*).²² Adding fuel to the fire directed against the Soviet Union, on March 24 a scorching article appeared in the *New York Times*. The influential newspaper quoted extensively from the ACRRM report, warning that if the Soviets persisted in persecuting religious believers it would seriously damage any opportunity for recognition from the United States government.

Since the committee consisted of representatives from all Christian denominations and included Judaism, its accusation that the USSR was engaging in "Religious persecution on a scale unprecedented in modern times" offered a stinging rebuke to the policies pursued by the gov-

²² Arthur J. Brown to President Hoover, February 17, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

ernment. Obviously the committee was aware of the actions of the Soviets, professing that these actions “shock the moral sense of the civilized world and ... overwhelmingly justify the protests that are being made.”²³ While sympathizing with the government’s suspicion about the Orthodox Church’s past ties to the czars, the committee nevertheless pleaded on behalf of the Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic minorities that had likewise suffered under the former regime. The committee was also well versed in the particulars of the April 8, 1929 Law on Religious Associations, citing several passages specifically and recognizing in it Stalin’s desire to raise children to “hate religion.” Rallying the leaders of all denominations to make their voices heard in support of religious freedom, the committee reminded the Soviets one more time that “nations, like individuals, cannot live alone and cannot defy with impunity the opinion of mankind.”²⁴ As much as the Soviets would hate to admit it, good relations with Europe and America were essential to a state that was far from developed industrially or agriculturally. Of course they had no desire to retreat permanently from a future where atheism reigned and religion was relegated to the scrapheap of history, but they had to move carefully and pragmatically in their plan to destroy the church.

While all of these protests were occurring, Morehead was simultaneously writing to his old friend Herbert Hoover, appealing for Bishop Malmgren, whom he mistakenly believed had been sent to the Gulag prison camp on Solovetsky Island. It appears that the Reverend Per Pehrsson, head pastor of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Gothenburg and also a member of the Swedish Parliament, had received information from the Swedish press that Malmgren had been deported to Solovetsky and that other clergymen in Leningrad had been imprisoned. Obviously half of the

²³ “Warn Soviet it Kills Hope of Recognition,” March 24, 1930, *New York Times*.

²⁴ “Warn Soviet it Kills Hope of Recognition,” March 24, 1930, *New York Times*.

information was correct since Pastors Hansen and Muss had been arrested although Malmgren remained free. Morehead was concerned enough to write to the president, pleading for his intervention. In January, Hoover had sent his greetings to the NLC at its annual convention in New York City, showing his awareness of its important work overseas and especially in Russia. In its resolution at the convention, the National Lutheran Council sent its greetings to the pastors and parishioners of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, too, assuring them of their prayers. It also resolved to adhere to “the principle of religious freedom of individuals as a primary and universal human right.” Now was the time to show that these were more than mere words on paper. Morehead asked President Hoover to determine whether Pehrsson’s information about Malmgren was correct, and if so, could he do anything to influence the Soviets to free Malmgren and the imprisoned pastors?²⁵

Apparently Morehead soon received confirmation that Malmgren had not been deported, either because the Hoover Administration informed him (the NLC Archives contain no record of this) or more likely due to the fact that Malmgren himself wrote to Morehead on February 9. It is entirely possible that the confusion of the Swedes arose due to the subsequent move of the seminary students to Martyschkino, prompting the concern that something was amiss with Rector Malmgren and the seminary. The mention of Solovetsky Island would be a natural assumption on the part of the Swedish Lutherans since religious dissidents were often sent there after sentencing.²⁶ The desire to establish direct contact with Bishops Meyer and Malmgren now prompted Morehead to inquire as to whether it might not be beneficial for a small delegation of the LWC to come to them in the Soviet Union. Given the current conditions in the country it

²⁵ John Morehead to Herbert Hoover, February 7, 1930, RG 59, 861.404/285, National Archives II.

²⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 9, 1930.

probably illustrated a certain naiveté on the part of Morehead, although he logically reasoned that it was more difficult for the bishops to secure visas to travel to Europe.²⁷ In response, the bishops wrote a joint letter telling Morehead in no uncertain terms that the situation in the Soviet Union had changed dramatically in the past year. “It appears that the mistrust of the abroad has grown stronger, making it an unfavorable time for such a visit from foreign guests.”²⁸ Although it would obviously be much easier to speak to each other face to face about the problems besetting the church, the time was not propitious. Nevertheless, the bishops were touched by Morehead’s consideration for them, no doubt remembering his own health problems when he traveled in Russia almost ten years ago. His disregard of the physical difficulty he would have in traveling to Russia was a strong testament not only to his character but to his love for its Lutheran Church and the commitment to do whatever necessary to aid it in its battle for survival.

Even though they had some reservations, the bishops did advise Morehead not to give up on the idea of a visit entirely. Perhaps after a meeting of the Executive Committee of the LWC in Oslo in early September, then a visit might be more appropriate?²⁹ Morehead appreciated the blunt honesty of the bishops concerning a visit and assured them of his longing to meet them personally. But just in case political conditions changed, he decided to submit a request to the Soviet government for a visa. He soon received word that Senator William Borah of Idaho could intervene to secure him a visa. Morehead also sent the bishops a letter that he had sent to the Lutheran churches of the world, enlightening them in frank terms as to the situation of the Lutheran

²⁷ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, May 26, 1930 and June 23, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁸ Theophil Meyer and Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 24, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²⁹ Theophil Meyer and Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 24, 1930.

Church in Russia.³⁰ The bishops had to be encouraged that their Lutheran brethren throughout the world were remembering them and that Morehead was playing a major role in speaking out for them to presidents and international churches.

Despite all of his efforts, on August 14 Bishop Meyer had to inform Dr. Morehead that it was not possible for any visit this year to the Soviet Union, lamenting that conditions were not improving. “We can only beg the Lord of the Church that He bestow upon us the power to save the roots of the Lutheran faith life out of this tumultuous time, so that later again the tree of the Church can grow.”³¹ But when the LWC asked Malmgren to transfer a \$500.00 gift from the Danish Relief Committee to the Russian Orthodox Church, Malmgren showed a rare trace of anger. He reminded Morehead that “every step of mine is watched.”³² If Malmgren would be seen transferring money publicly to the Orthodox Church from foreign sources it would look “counterrevolutionary,” especially as the Orthodox Church remained the state’s number one enemy. In light of such an action, Malmgren could also be accused of receiving this money and putting it into his own bank account. In order to protect himself, Malmgren returned the \$500.00 to the Danish Consulate, cautioning Morehead, “I plead with you urgently, don’t give me such a commission again.”³³

As the students began the sixth year of the Leningrad Lutheran Seminary, the new housing situation reflected a more hospitable atmosphere than the previous year. The rooms were spacious and airy, providing far better living arrangements for the twenty students currently enrolled. But not all was positive. Seminary costs for the previous year were above \$20,000.00, a

³⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren and Theophil Meyer, July 18, 1930, John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 1, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³¹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 14, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 31, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 31, 1930.

sharp rise from the \$12,000.00 spent in the early years of the seminary. There was also now a lack of wood and coal for heating due to the objections of the government supplying heating material for a church institution. Furthermore, according to Bishop Malmgren the price for groceries had never been higher in the Communist era. Perhaps the above reasons contributed to the fact that a new class had not been added; and yet, the Fall sessions were at least beginning at St. Anne's without further governmental interference.³⁴

But then the OGPU struck again. Arnold Frischfeld, who had been arrested for five days and then released at the end of 1929, was now re-arrested on September 20. This time the charges were graver. As the OGPU had connected Kurt Muss and Helmut Hansen to the Academic Affair and Professor Albert Mervart, Frischfeld was now accused of belonging to a "counterrevolutionary monarchical organization."³⁵ It was called the Popular Union for the Fight for a Revived Free Russia, supposedly headed up by the key figure in the Academic Affair, Sergey Platonov.³⁶ Frischfeld was said to have been a paid informer and agent of the Orientalist and specialist in the Tamil language, Albert Mervart, whom they identified as being a German secret service agent. Frischfeld was to have been providing Mervart with information from the ethnic German communities in Leningrad and the Volga and Crimean regions. Furthermore, he was creating "...illegal circles and organizations of a religious and national character among the German intelligentsia, carrying out monarchical propaganda and disseminating among the

³⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 24, 1930, Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, Nov 4, 1930, Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 10, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. It had been decided not to hold the classes in the new student dormitory. Since St. Anne's was located on the same street, the distance wasn't too far for the students to travel.

³⁵ P-74581, List 76-77, Archives of the FSB of the St. Petersburg Region.

³⁶ P-82833, Volume 8, List 18, Archives of the FSB of the St. Petersburg Region.

members of the congregation religious and patriotic literature.”³⁷ Lastly, he was charged with preparing warring cadres for an anti-Soviet German youth cell called the “Steel Helmet.”³⁸

The activities were said to have taken place at the home of Frischfeld, where weekly gatherings called “Gemeindeabend” were held. There “active parishioners” held “religious conversations and anti-Soviet propaganda,” all the while forming cells for the Steel Helmet. St. Catherine’s Lutheran parishioner and a professor by trade, Emmanuel Furman, was said to be a leader in this group which included youth from Hansen and Muss’ circles. Large amounts of money were said to have been transferred for the support of the Lutheran congregations, including \$1500 given to Pastor Helmut Hansen for St. Anne’s and the *Jugendbund*. (The irony, of course, in these questionable accusations is that Hansen’s congregation had been St. Peter’s, where the *Jugendbund* was active, not St. Anne’s).³⁹ Giving some insight into the conditions in the prison, by November 18 Frischfeld made a stern, written request as to why he was refused a fresh change of undergarments since he had already been imprisoned for one month without clean clothing.⁴⁰ As his case came to a close, Frischfeld acknowledged knowing Furman (he was the chairman of the congregation’s *dvatstaka*) and having met Mervart. But he categorically rejected all of the preposterous charges made against a longtime pastor and seminary professor who had actually been careful to be obedient to the authorities. He never formed an organization called the Steel Helmet. He never spied or gave anyone secret information about the situation in the ethnic German colonies in the USSR. Neither did he handle large sums of money. The only

³⁷ P-74581, List 76, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁸ P-74581, List 77, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁹ P-82833, Volume 8, List 71, 73, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁴⁰ -82833, Volume 6, List 327, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

funds he received from abroad he acknowledged to be from the National Lutheran Council in America, when they gave him \$100 for a Christmas present every year.⁴¹ The bizarre charges against Frischfeld combined with naming the bookish Mervart a German agent testified to the paranoia enveloping the Soviet Union. It didn't matter that Frischfeld rejected the charges. He would be sentenced on February 10, 1931 to a ten-year Gulag labor camp term in the Solovetsky Island camp.⁴² But perhaps most agonizing for Pastor Frischfeld was the fact that his 26 year-old daughter Gerda and 20 year-old daughter Nora would share his fate, being sentenced to a ten year term on the same day.⁴³

Despite these difficulties brought to bear upon Bishop Malmgren and the Lutheran Church, John Morehead forged on and wrote to him in October about the prospects for future mission work. While educating future pastors was the primary task of the seminary, Dr. Morehead also expressed his interest in training a cadre of young men to, when the time was right, “carry on aggressive missionary work in your country.”⁴⁴ Morehead explained to Malmgren that the Roman Catholics were preparing priests for future work in Russia. Reformed Christian churches were also considering establishing an “Ost Institute” to accomplish a similar task. Morehead, though, wanted to encourage the Lutherans to prepare for such a day with the intention that the LWC would do all in its power to assist in mission work.⁴⁵ While his earnest and optimistic view of an eventual opening for the church in the Soviet Union had to strike the bishops as proper

⁴¹ P-82833, Volume 6, List 328–331, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁴² P-82833, Volume 7, List 300, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; St. Petersburg Mar tyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church.

⁴³ P-82833, Volume 9, List 169, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁴⁴ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 21, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴⁵ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 21, 1930.

theologically, they knew that it was far from realistic. As politely as he could, in a December 1 letter Malmgren answered Morehead that now was not the time for any mission work. In the midst of millions of people who still retained Orthodox Church affiliation, it was much too early to push those parameters. In fact, the Lutheran Church was having enough trouble supporting its own daily existence.⁴⁶ With regard to an “Ost Institute” or some institution of that kind, Meyer quickly dissuaded Morehead from even considering it given that the costs and needs for the seminary would only increase in the future. Not only that, any suggestion of founding a special institute on the part of the LWC would bring more harm than good since the close relationship between the LWC and the Russian Lutheran Church was evident to the Soviet government. Any foreign connection for citizens of the Soviet Union was becoming increasingly suspect in the government’s eyes.⁴⁷

Of course, Morehead was not oblivious to the persecution despite his energetic spirit in missions. To that end, in November of 1930 he earnestly conversed on this subject with a counselor in the German embassy in the United States, O.C. Kiep. Having received word about the sentences handed down to Helmut Hansen, Kurt Muss, and the large number of teachers/parishioners involved, as well as Arnold Frischfeld, he inquired of Kiep: “Do you advise worldwide publicity? Or do you advise representations to the governments of Western Europe and America?”⁴⁸ Morehead had already been pressuring the Soviet government through international opinion via the ACRRM, but he must have wondered whether its efforts were having any impact upon the Soviets. Kiep promised to write to a reliable source for advice on the

⁴⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 1, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, November 4, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴⁸ John Morehead to O.C. Kiep, November 12, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

situation.⁴⁹ When Morehead wrote back to him in December, he was able to add that those professors, pastors and lay delegates affected had taken part in a large meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Leningrad shortly before their arrests in December 1929. From all of the relevant sources available, it is unclear whether this meeting triggered the government's action or not. Nor do we receive any more information from Kiep to Morehead. Most likely, the Soviet Union would not publicly acknowledge the impact of world opinion, but in the future evidence would bear out that international criticism of its policy on religious freedom exerted real pressure upon the government.⁵⁰

With regard to Morehead's admonition to missions, the bishops were not entirely opposed to supporting work in that sphere or towards the strengthening of dying congregations. A good example would be the situation of Pastor Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., who had been arrested in late 1929. Upon his release from prison, Hörschelmann had agreed to be sent to Siberia in order to uphold and serve vacant congregations. He would conduct his work among Estonians, reviving the language he had learned as a child growing up in the region that eventually became the independent nation of Estonia at the end of World War I. Morehead had always evinced a strong desire to restore the congregations populated by Latvians, Estonians and Finns in Siberia. Naturally, Hörschelmann's call intersected exactly with his wishes.⁵¹

Hörschelmann was one of those pastors that Bishop Meyer had mentioned as being prepared for retirement in 1928. After his arrest, Hörschelmann clearly rethought what he would do with the last years of his life. Since his wife was dead and he was already seventy-five years

⁴⁹ O.C. Kiep to John Morehead, November 18, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁰ John Morehead to O. C. Kiep, December 5, 1930 and John Morehead to Rev. Henry Bagger, November 14, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵¹ Alexandra Nikolaeva [great-granddaughter of Hörschelmann] to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

old, an age at which most pastors would have already retired to a quiet existence, his courageous decision was a bold leap of faith. Morehead's respect for Hörschelmann knew no bounds from the time he had worked closely with him during the famine in 1922. He immediately informed Meyer that the NLC (through the LWC) would send \$200.00 towards the mission expenses of Hörschelmann and his elder daughter, who would assist him. The Siberian congregations themselves would contribute to the Hörschelmann mission fund, too.⁵²

Acknowledging his "deep interest" generated by the "heroic mission" of Hörschelmann, Morehead plied Meyer for further information. Morehead's real concern was with the large number of Lutheran pastors now suffering in concentration camps throughout Siberia. "Will he be able also to visit and give physical and spiritual relief to our banished fellow Lutherans in Siberia in the concentration camps?"⁵³ A measure of his interest in this mission could be seen by his request that Meyer send copies of Hörschelmann's report to the world Lutheran press. Hörschelmann and his daughter began their journey in mid-October, traveling first to his brother, Christian, who served a congregation in the Volga region. The plan was to eventually arrive in Omsk on October 30 and ultimately travel on to Slavgorod.⁵⁴ Hörschelmann's dedication to missions is all the more impressive given that Slavgorod's previous pastor, Friedrich Deutschmann, had fled to Zaporozhe in the Ukraine due to government persecution. Similarly, Pastor Friedrich Merz had been banned from Omsk.⁵⁵ He would not be walking into a calm, peaceful environment.

⁵² John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, October 14, 1930 and December 11, 1928, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵³ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, December 10, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁴ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, December 10, 1930; Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, November 4, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁵ Arthur Malmgren to Professor Bruhn, December 24, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Of course, throughout the Soviet Union there were no longer any places where a pastor could serve without some evidence of persecution. Pastor Otto Seib, who had written a highly detailed letter to Morehead in 1929 about the persecutions in the Ukrainian region, took the place of Hirschelmann and the other arrested pastor in the Crimea, Arthur Hanson. Seib, like many pastors, was continuing to serve despite the fact that his financial support was dependent upon whatever the foreign Lutheran organizations from Germany and America could gather for him. The High Church Council sent him to the Crimea in the hopes that they could secure for him some place of service while still supporting the church in that region.⁵⁶

In 1930, though, trouble soon found him. While making a visit as a “traveling preacher” (*Reiseprediger*) to the Ukrainian village of Neuheim, which was against the law, too, Seib was threatened by commissars brandishing weapons and warned to leave the village by eight o’clock the next morning. His real crime, though? He had been carrying out the duties of his pastoral office. Seib acted as so many Lutheran pastors did in those days, with extraordinary courage, oblivious to his own safety. After the commissars left, he asked the people to gather at six the next morning for baptisms and weddings, to be followed by a communion service. When the commissars learned that they had been tricked, they came galloping after him. Seib outmaneuvered them, just making it across the border into the Elizavetograd region where they had no jurisdiction. After he arrived in Elizavetograd, he learned that the authorities had retaliated against the Neuheim congregation, taking away their church.⁵⁷ The commissars always exacted their revenge, one way or another.

Three weeks after Seib’s arrival in the Crimea, the subtle and overt forms of persecution

⁵⁶ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 137.

⁵⁷ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 136–37.

started again. He was refused permission to work in Hörschelmann's congregation in Neusatz. Meanwhile, in Hanson's parish in the village of Byten, the authorities attacked him by first arresting his landlord. Although the landlord had paid all of his taxes, he was charged with non-payment and sent to the prison in Simferopol. Seib understood that this man had been punished for taking a pastor into his house. One month later, the landlord's entire wealth, including his home, was sold at a public auction. By applying such pressure, the Soviet authorities made it abundantly clear to Lutheran parishioners that there would be consequences for taking a pastor into their house. Seib sadly concluded that he no longer had any opportunity to faithfully serve the people of the Crimea without endangering their own lives. So he gathered students for a last rite of Confirmation on Reformation Day, October 31 [1930].⁵⁸ In November, the defeated pastor went to the German consulate in Odessa to apply for repatriation to Germany.⁵⁹

Words of Encouragement: "Stand and eat, you have a long way to go"

Given the increasingly gloomy situation in the church, it would have been difficult to glimpse any silver linings of hope. But even though the state's persecution of believers was gathering steam, those parishioners and pastors who remained carried on with the work of the church. Rev. Alexander Streck served faithfully under primitive conditions, despite the fact that his church of St. Peter and Paul was virtually in the shadows of the OGPU offices at Lubyanka. The lack of heating material was not confined to the seminary housing in Leningrad, because no church could easily acquire wood or coal. St. Peter and Paul was an enormous cathedral, seating about 2500, and with the lack of heat the temperatures rarely rose above 32 degrees Fahrenheit in those days. Under state persecution, the numbers of parishioners had declined from 20,000

⁵⁸ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 137–38.

⁵⁹ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 138.

before World War I to approximately 2000 by 1930. Young boys were rarely spotted in confirmation classes now.

And yet, despite the lack of heat, atheist propaganda all around them, stringent laws on religious practice, the staggered workweek, the constant persecution of believers, a solid remnant of believers still came to church. A faithful choir of 60 persons sang the traditional Lutheran hymns on days of worship. Pastor Streck confirmed 21 children that spring, including his own daughters Stella [16 years old] and Ellen [15 years old].⁶⁰ Included in the list of confirmands was Erich Franz Sommer, who would go on to become a noted diplomat for West Germany in the future.⁶¹ The children were taught in an adjoining building of the church where evidently not all rooms had been nationalized. In the 1990s, Elsa Leventhal, who also had been confirmed in 1930 with her sister Irina, recalled her confirmation classes. Pastor Streck would often give them homework, she remembered, but one of the students would always do it in school. Of course, the school was now a Soviet school and as such its teachers were actively engaged in atheist propaganda. When one female teacher saw his religious books, she took them away and questioned him intensively. The boy told her everything: what the pastor taught, what books were used, who attended.⁶²

The school authorities warned Leventhal that if she continued to attend church, she would be expelled. It was not an idle threat given that expulsion would naturally harm her chances of attending any university or institute. Coming from an educated family, as her father was a natural

⁶⁰ Victor Dönninghaus, *Die Deutschen in der Moskauer Gesellschaft*, 518, 525–527; P-45647, List 7, 29, FSB Archives of Moscow Region.

⁶¹ Erich Sommer, *Geboren in Moskau: Erinnerungen eines Baltendeutschen Diplomaten 1912–1955* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1997), 12.

⁶² Elza Georgiyevskaya, “Церковная Жизнь Москвы в 20–30-е Годы” [“Church Life in Moscow in the Years 1920–30”], *Наша Церковь* 3–5 [Our Church], (1996): 62.

science professor at a Communist university for foreigners [e.g., Hungarians, Romanians, Germans], this would be a great blow to them. Despite the danger, Leventhal still had great respect for the Streck family, often visiting with her sister Irina to play with the pastor's daughters. If they happened to stay until dinner, they were always fed. Leventhal remembered the warm manner in which the family treated its guests and also that the girls always said the prayers, not the pastor.⁶³ (Perhaps, like Bishop Meyer, Streck was also preparing his daughters for the time when they would need to express their faith on their own?). However, the incident with her teacher taught Leventhal to hide her faith in God, a practice that many of the former Sunday school teachers in Leningrad would follow upon their release from the concentration camps, too. (E.g., when the author lived in Moscow in the 1990s, he remembered an elderly lady in the subway car once telling a friend of his to hide her cross and place it inside her blouse. It was not an item for display). As for Pastor Streck and his family, the fears of Bishop Meyer concerning his apartment on the church grounds came to fruition in 1930. The Streckes were forced by the state to leave their apartment, relocating to a small apartment next to the Lutheran cemetery in the northeast of Moscow (not too far from the closed church building of St. Michael's). They didn't remain long before again being obliged to move since they were the family of a pastor. This time the Streck's were banished beyond the city limits to the village of Bakhovka, located west of Moscow and reached by electric train from the Belorussky train station. A generous parishioner had lent them his dacha [cottage] in the village, but the journey to the city for church activities would be physically taxing from now on, proving that Bishop Meyer's fears about clergy housing were well-founded.⁶⁴

⁶³ Georgiyevskaya, "Church Life in Moscow," 61–62.

⁶⁴ Georgiyevskaya, Church Life in Moscow in the Years 1920–30," 62–63.

As the trying year of 1930 drew to a close, Bishop Malmgren learned in October that his friend and colleague of many years, the seminary's dean, Friedrich Wacker, had now been officially arrested and afterwards deported to eastern Siberia for three years.⁶⁵ (Earlier in the year Wacker had been brought in for questioning by the OGPU and put under observation). What Malmgren didn't know is that the OGPU had been questioning Wacker about the finances of the seminary, who received money and from whence it came. Wacker admitted that since one person couldn't receive more than \$500.00 from abroad, he once received money from the LWC in his own name. Usually, Malmgren and his son-in-law, Heinrich Behrendts, would receive \$500.00 apiece. In this way the LWC sent money to the seminary in the amount of \$1000.00 a month. There, of course, was nothing sinister in these actions except from the perspective of the OGPU who distrusted foreigners, especially foreigners sending money to keep a "counter-revolutionary" organization alive. Fortunately, the OGPU didn't move against the seminary itself at this time, but Wacker became a victim in their struggle against religious organizations. He would never return to work at the seminary.⁶⁶ In his despair, Malmgren gave vent to his frustration in a November letter to *Gustav Adolf Verein* director, Franz Rendtorff: "Why is God such a hidden God? Has the hour now really come, where the judgment on us will begin?"⁶⁷ Malmgren likened his position to that of the prophet Elijah. "It's the voice of Elijah under the juniper tree that often attacks me and now which I can only resist with the exertion of my last bit of strength."⁶⁸ It is worth remembering that Malmgren had just celebrated his 70th birthday and had been traveling regularly from Leningrad to Moscow over the past few years as a member of

⁶⁵ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 87.

⁶⁶ P-87890, List 553–554, 692, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁶⁷ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 95.

⁶⁸ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 95.

the High Church Council. For example, from September 1928 to March 1930 alone there were 33 meetings, which given Bishop Meyer's failing health and the fact that there were only five members of the Council, would lead one to believe that Malmgren had been needed at most of them.⁶⁹

While commiserating with him in all the trials he had to undergo the past few years, Rendtorff continued with the theme of Elijah in flight. Eloquently encouraging Malmgren, he said, "I am certain that the God, who has called to you out of the deep, has also called to you with a powerful, 'Stand and eat, you still have a long way to go', and certainly will not fail to nourish you, but will give you power to go further along the troublesome desert path unto the mountain of God at Horeb."⁷⁰ Morehead likewise took time to sympathize with Malmgren and assure him of the Americans' constant prayers. As he thanked God that He had placed Bishop Malmgren in a position of authority for such trying times as these, Morehead emboldened him: "Be assured again, therefore, that we are thoroughly with you, with all the professors of the institution, and with the students in sympathy, the confession of our common faith, earnest prayer for their welfare, and the abiding readiness to be practically helpful as God may give us ability and opportunity."⁷¹ Such words on the part of German and American Lutherans cannot be dismissed as mere rhetoric. Malmgren needed to know that he was not alone in his struggle, as his very real empathy with the lonely predicament of the biblical Elijah would confirm.

A recapitulation of his problems in the Church would explain why his level of stress had been severely elevated: (1) The April 8, 1929 Law on Religious Associations had drastically hampered the work of the Lutheran Church; (2) The continual hassle with housing, food and

⁶⁹ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 87–88.

⁷⁰ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 95.

⁷¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 10, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

heating for the seminary; (3) The recent spate of arrests of pastors and professors; (4) The constant need to secure funding for the seminary; (5) The travel necessary to attend High Church Council meetings in Moscow; (6) The fact that he was 70 years old and handling the responsibilities of a pastor, rector, district church supervisor and bishop. Even Malmgren was coming to the realization that he could no longer handle all of these duties. As a result, in the Fall of 1930 his former student, Eugen Bachmann, was ordained as the new pastor of St. Anne's congregation in Leningrad.⁷²

As Bishop Malmgren surveyed the damage from the active campaign against the churches at the end of the year, he concluded that the church had suffered its greatest blow since the early years of Bolshevik rule. His letter to Professor Bruhn in Leipzig expressing this opinion was passed along to Morehead and the NLC. The evidence he cited was disheartening. (1) Virtually all parsonages had been taken over by the state, forcing the pastors to find other housing and pay the rent. (2) Due to the 1929 Law on Religious Associations, the historic role of the "traveling preacher" (*Reiseprediger*) had been abolished. (3) Among the parishioners, the so-called "kulaks" had been deported to concentration camps or exile. (4) The "middle farmers" and the lower class city dwellers had been reduced to such poverty that they could no longer support the congregations. (5) Churches or prayer houses were more frequently requisitioned for cultural or social purposes.⁷³

Of the 183 Lutheran pastors serving Russia in 1917, by October 1930 only 83 remained.⁷⁴ The impudence of the Soviet authorities was best illustrated by the case of Ukrainian Pastor Johann Völl. With soldiers brandishing pistols and surrounding him in front and back, he was

⁷² Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 215.

⁷³ Arthur Malmgren to Professor Bruhn, December 24, 1930.

⁷⁴ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 326.

marched from his church to an interrogation while his frightened parishioners looked on. By the end of 1930, at least 16 pastors were counted as prisoners of the state, including the 75 year-old Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., who had been arrested as a “harmful element” after his first worship service in Slavgorod. Pastor Gustav Schwalbe had been sentenced as a counterrevolutionary in Smolensk and shot on September 30. Four of the most recent graduates of the class of 1928 had also suffered, one being called to martyrdom. David Kaufmann was murdered in late December in the north Caucasus; Lazhis Bluhm, who had graduated later in 1928, was threatened by the OGPU and driven from his congregation in Belarus into exile; Konstantin Rusch had been deported to Archangel, and lastly, Gotthold Störrle was arrested in the Hansen-Muss Affair.⁷⁵ The 16 pastors and professors in prison camps or exile were: Helmut Hansen, Kurt Muss, Gotthold Störrle, Albert Koch, Johann Völl, Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., and Jr., Arthur Kluck, Gottlob Koch, Friedrich Merz, Arthur Hanson, Nathaniel Heptner, Konstantin Rusch, and pastors and professors Friedrich Wacker, Arnold Frischfeld and Professor Saal.⁷⁶ The Lutheran Church could not survive if the number of arrests continued at this pace, a situation of which the Soviet government was undoubtedly aware and relishing.

1931: “Will the Christian Church be Brought to an End This Year?”

Bishop Meyer knew that it was time to take the pulse of church-state relations, especially since the Soviet government had begun to introduce more and more restrictions upon religious life. At the onset of the year 1931, Meyer told Dr. Morehead that the number of Lutheran pastors in the country had now dwindled to 83, and of those, 21 were currently in prison or a concentra-

⁷⁵ Arthur Malmgren to Prof. Bruhn, December 24, 1930; Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 19, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, August 19, 1930, Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, November 3, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Schleuning, 128–29.

tion camp. Those who remained at their posts could not satisfy the demand of the number of congregations and they themselves were in serious danger of losing their freedom. Meyer in all seriousness expressed to Morehead, “The word is out that in the course of this year the Christian church will be brought to an end, and it looks that way unless a Higher Power intervenes.”⁷⁷ Lutheran congregations no longer existed in many of the cities and had been forced to give up their church buildings. Those who remained were mostly large congregations in the more populated cities and the German colonies [Volga and Ukrainian regions]. Meyer now wondered openly: how much longer could the church last?

Growing thoughtful in a letter to Morehead, Meyer reflected: “Often the children of God ask, ‘Watchman, what time of the night?’ [Isaiah 21:11]. But we also know: ‘Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep?’ [Psalm 121:4]. This is what we believe and pray. That our brothers in the wide world do the same [pray]; that we know and that is our comfort.”⁷⁸ Morehead couldn’t have missed from Meyer’s further comments that the NLC (through the LWC) had been performing great acts of brotherly love. Meyer thanked the Americans for sharing their distress, a true brotherly act that had to mitigate somewhat the path of martyrdom that he saw ahead for the Lutheran Church in Russia. He knew that the OGPU was constantly watching him and the other leaders in the Church, so he felt compelled to warn Morehead to be careful about publicizing any of his statements abroad. Such international publicity would be dangerous for him at home.⁷⁹ Even Bishop Malmgren worried about the OGPU’s house searches, which we know were taking place throughout the country against those perceived to be enemies

⁷⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 10, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 10, 1931.

⁷⁹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 10, 1931.

of that state. Malmgren quietly informed Morehead that he was hiding important papers in an undisclosed location. Of special importance were the letters from abroad, which could subject him to accusations of espionage.⁸⁰

With his wife suffering from rheumatism of the joints and confined to her bed for one month, as well as his own inability to travel to distant congregations, Bishop Meyer could now devote time to chronicling the history of his ministry and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia. Concluding that the rapidly approaching end of the church was near, he no doubt felt led to philosophize on his life's work. He told Dr. Morehead in March 1931 that he had recently completed two books, one a 400 page tome entitled 40 years in the Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia. The other book was a brief 100-page history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia from its founding in the sixteenth century until the present.

Naturally, Meyer knew that it would be impossible to publish such books in the Soviet Union and Germany didn't offer him much hope due to its own severe financial situation. He decided to leave the texts under lock and key at the High Church Council offices in Moscow, but did send the shorter work to Morehead personally. Perhaps, Meyer wondered, someone in America might be able to publish it? Meyer refused any honorarium, but did ask that he be allowed to have a couple of copies.⁸¹ Morehead was clearly intrigued by the possibilities of publishing books of this kind. Having received the shorter version of the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, Morehead speculated about how they might make the history more interesting to Americans. He recommended tacking on an additional chapter that would focus upon the historic contributions of the Lutheran Church to the nation of Russia. For

⁸⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 10, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸¹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 10, 1931.

example, had the Lutheran Church simply existed as if on an island or had it influenced the religious, educational, cultural, social or political life of the country in any way? Had the emphasis upon the Gospel as revealed in the Scriptures and the historic Lutheran Confessions had a positive effect upon the Catholic Church [meaning, Orthodox Church] within Russia?

These questions would certainly have made for interesting reading among students of theology and history abroad, but Morehead also made the bold but unrealistic suggestion that Meyer add a chapter on the current persecution of the Lutheran Church. Morehead was only thinking of how an awareness of the situation of the Lutherans in the Soviet Union would awaken foreign readers to the limits on religious freedom and the nature of those adversaries who were intent upon destroying it. Naturally he knew that Meyer might find this difficult [how could he not?!], so he considered how it might be accomplished. Perhaps someone else could write these chapters from information that Meyer had supplied? A famous publisher with whom he had spoken suggested Morehead himself, although in his modesty Morehead did not want to take any credit away from Meyer for his work.⁸²

Morehead obviously meant well, but it is rather astounding that he would even suggest such a project. Meyer had not refrained from letting him know how the OGPU had been watching his activities and reading his mail, so much so that he had to take special precautions in sending out any sensitive material. How could Meyer possibly write a chapter on the persecution of the Lutheran Church when he just got through saying that it was nearing its own Golgotha? Morehead's naiveté, however good his intentions, is a bit surprising for a man who must have known that current conditions were not suitable for such a chapter. Even if Meyer's name would

⁸² John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, May 19, 1931 and November 16, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

be omitted from an appendix to the book, it is more than probable that the OGPU could have guessed who would be in a position to supply such information. After all, they had their informants in America as well, too. Meyer answered Morehead's suggestions directly by reminding him that adding chapters like those he proposed would have to pass the censor. So in reality, they would have little chance of seeing the light of day.⁸³

Malmgren's Lament in the USSR: "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here"

Even as the winds of persecution howled about them, Bishop Malmgren reported that the seminary students remained energetic and retained a sunny disposition. In his telling, they continued to study diligently as if they lived on an island surrounded by raging waters. But in reality, Malmgren said it appeared as if there was a big sign visible to all who enter the Soviet Union, straight out of Dante: "Abandon all hope," [ye who enter here]. The conditions were becoming more oppressive by the month and the voice of Christians was becoming more irritated and despondent. Children were growing up in a state that was indoctrinating them in an "atheistic-materialistic Weltanschauung."⁸⁴ New and arbitrary taxes were plundering the Lutheran parishioners of any money that they could scrape together. Prices for food were rising. In fact, Malmgren described his plan for the students to bake their own bread since the word on the street was that ration cards would only be given to factory workers, beginning on April 1. In response to the threat, Malmgren was buying up as much flour as he could.⁸⁵ The prices for the most necessary foodstuffs were increasing throughout the country, and naturally as "non-persons" the students and pastors/professors were not allowed to purchase food in the state

⁸³ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, December 19, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 31, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 31, 1931 and March 28, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

consumer cooperative. Malmgren had been searching out alternatives when he discovered a newly opened market in Leningrad where groceries could be bought at a marked down price. The catch was that he needed foreign currency in order to buy the goods. Malmgren asked Morehead to send \$1000.00 of the usual \$2000.00 that the LWC sent bimonthly to a special bank address where he could use foreign currency to purchase the foodstuffs at a better rate of exchange. Morehead heartily agreed, thankful that Malmgren had found a means whereby the LWC could use its resources more effectively to support the seminary.⁸⁶

Maximizing the gifts from the LWC and other Lutherans throughout the world was imperative because the ability of the average Lutheran parishioner to support the Church in Russia was becoming more and more untenable. In order to describe what that parishioner was up against in the countryside, Malmgren cited the typical example of a so-called “kulak” farmer. If a farmer held more than two horses and three cows, he could be designated as a kulak and sent into forced labor. For example, in one case after the authorities initially overlooked one of these farmers in the Leningrad region, it soon recognized its mistake and tried to tax him retroactively for his harvest. Since the man didn’t have the money they demanded, he asked to sell one of the two cows he still possessed. He received written permission from the court, but afterwards the signed document was not accepted. He was asked who had given him the right to sell his cow. Why hadn’t he sold his house instead? Even though he produced the document, the farmer was fined 6000 rubles [approximately \$3000.00], an extraordinary amount, to be paid within three days. Since he obviously could not come up with the money, he was sent into forced labor while his wife and three children remained behind destitute. Actions like these were destroying

⁸⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 30, 1931, John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, November 16, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Lutheran families and with it the congregations that they had supported.⁸⁷

Collectivization of agriculture had now resumed, because despite Stalin's tactical call for a slowdown in March 1930, the results had been discouraging to say the least. For in response to his "Dizzy with Success" speech, 8 million families had left the collective farms between the middle of March and the end of May. Stalin's initial retreat from full collectivization was predicated upon his desire to save the sowing of crops for that Spring. But in reality, Stalin had no intention of eliminating collectivization permanently. He sent his Communist Party Committee chairman in Moscow, Lazar Kaganovich, to personally instruct local officials that collectivization of all farms was still the goal. In the Fall of 1931, collectivization would again proceed, forcefully.⁸⁸ Malmgren made clear to Morehead that due to collectivization, congregational support of the seminary was sporadic. Given examples like the situation of the one farmer he cited previously, he didn't expect parishioners to be in a strong position to finance the Church in the future.⁸⁹ As it was, the parishioners could only cover one-fifth of the Church's costs in 1931. Furthermore, the taxes that Bishop Meyer was forced to pay the state as the President of the High Church Council of the Lutheran Church increased monumentally in 1931: A good example of the dramatic uptick in taxes on the Lutheran Church can be seen from the chart below:

1928– 393 rubles, 92 kopecks

1929– 259 rubles, 6 kopecks

1930– 228 rubles, 34 kopecks

1931– 3609 rubles, 31 kopecks

⁸⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 31, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸⁸ Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 186–88.

⁸⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 10, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

The tax bill levied against the Lutheran Church in 1931 was obviously an attempt by the state to make it virtually impossible for the Church to survive. Instead of direct violence (although that was always an option and used extensively), the wiser heads of state had decided upon a course of indirectly strangling the Church.⁹⁰

To make matters worse, the heating problem had once again become acute, with factories even limiting their operations due to the especially harsh winter. The supply of wood and coal at the Ahrendt House was dangerously low and the contractors who had agreed to deliver materials in February had not done so. The shortage was seriously affecting living conditions because it was difficult to keep the bedrooms and living room space reasonable temperatures. The seminary was also running a deficit of almost 5000 rubles [approximately \$2500.00], despite all of Malmgren's efforts to save money, for example, by baking bread. Malmgren was forced to purchase wood in lesser quantities from the farmers in the environs of Leningrad at extremely high prices.⁹¹

Malmgren was also coming to terms with the fact that Helmut Hansen was gone for good and would never return to the seminary. Likewise, the situation of Dean Wacker looked grave. The seminary had expended every effort to secure his release to no effect. He had been sent to a concentration camp in Bratsk (eastern Siberia) on the Angara River and whether he would even be allowed to eventually resettle in Leningrad was questionable at best. Furthermore, Professor Arnold Frischfeld had been held in detention since September 1930 and now had been sent north to the Solovetsky Island camp. As a result of the rapid reduction in the number of professors, Malmgren decided to take up many of the lectures himself, having been freed from his service at

⁹⁰ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 125–26.

⁹¹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 12, May 20 and August 30, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

St. Anne's by Pastor Eugen Bachmann. Of course, the more the weight of the work was placed upon only a few shoulders, the less likely it was that the seminary could survive. Having now reached the age of 70, Malmgren confessed that he was uncertain how much longer he could physically keep up with the work. In addition, he worried how long he might even remain at liberty to lead the seminary. He really needed to find new professors, because if something happened to him the whole operation would come crashing down.⁹²

In spite all of the pressures and his realism in regard to the Lutheran Church's situation in the Soviet Union, Malmgren could at times sound surprisingly upbeat and ready for a fight. Who knows if perhaps the students' enthusiasm and encouragement hadn't invigorated him? But what remained unquestioned was Bishop Malmgren's strong faith in his Lord. After relating to Morehead all of the problems besetting the Lutheran Church, Malmgren intoned, "Only God the Lord can help here! But He will help only if we as His co-workers stand at command and are prepared for the hour where He needs and will call us."⁹³ Malmgren would continue to stand at God's command, but the gale-force winds of persecution surrounding him and the seminary would not grow any calmer.

The Advancing Darkness: "Morning Comes, and also the Night"

When speaking about the persecution of the church, Morehead had often considered Meyer to be the optimist among the two bishops. His confidence, though, was now exhausted. He explained to Dr. Morehead that when foreigners speak of some positive improvements in the religious situation in the Soviet Union, it was simply inaccurate. Using his favorite phrase from

⁹² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 12, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 31, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Isaiah 21, “Watchman, what time of the night?” in relation to the church’s situation, Meyer said that the church’s answer was always the one Isaiah’s watchman supplied: “Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again.”⁹⁴ The Lutheran Church, too, was on the parapet and asking and waiting. In the meantime, the Lord strengthened them for the day. Their real comfort during the time of waiting was that they had comrades in the Faith abroad who were tirelessly interceding for them. Remembering that the “Keeper of Israel” neither slumbered nor slept when they offered their prayers, Meyer sent out a circular to his pastors to gather with their parishioners on Wednesday evenings and to follow a suggested program of prayer time. This prayer community would strengthen them in a time when no more church gatherings, synods or conferences would be held. Meyer already seemed to sense the end was coming quickly and that he needed to prepare his people for a future that they had never known in Russia. If others could intercede for them overseas, why should they not pray ceaselessly in turn?⁹⁵

Given his fears for the future of the church, it is instructive to ponder what had prompted this more dramatic turn towards pessimism. Certainly the Law on Religious Associations had initiated a serious, concentrated attack upon his own Church in 1929, but there were still a sufficient number of shepherds to lead the people. By 1931, though, the number of pastors was falling to precipitous levels. Earlier in the year, sixty-two pastors were active; now, that number had reportedly been reduced to 40.⁹⁶ Georg Rath, the bedraggled pastor and district president in the Ukraine that Morehead had met during the famine years, had died. Furthermore, Meyer

⁹⁴ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 19, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 19, 1931.

⁹⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 19, 1931. Wilhelm Kahle still number 53 pastors as active in 1932. See Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 326.

informed Morehead that their dear friend and colleague, perhaps the most respected man in the entire Lutheran Church, Ferdinand Hörschelmann, had died on October 15 in a Siberian concentration camp at the age of 76. Hörschelmann had forgone any thoughts of retirement and given his life to the Lord of the church by making the arduous journey to Siberia to serve as a pastor in extremely difficult circumstances at an advanced age. Now he was gone.⁹⁷

Yet even as the darkness of persecution descended upon Russia, there were moments when the light of Christ came through the called servants of the Word. Ferdinand Hörschelmann was one of those servants. As he lay dying in a concentration camp in Minusinsk, he prepared his own funeral sermon and handed it to a fellow believer. A pastor to the last, Hörschelmann hoped that his words would strengthen the faith of his fellow believers in the camp.⁹⁸ Just before he died he was said to have received communion from the hands of an Orthodox priest.⁹⁹ This action illustrated how denominational lines often broke down inside the camps. Although theological differences had been magnified while they remained free, behind the gates of the camp a sort of ecumenism reigned. Persecution had the tendency to remind believers that anyone who acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord was an enemy of the state. Now in prison, they were all brothers in Christ.

When he learned of the deaths of Rath and Hörschelmann, Morehead gave vent to his emotions. Expressing his profound regret to Bishop Meyer, he recalled the days when he had first become acquainted with them, traveling through the Ukraine and Crimea, feeding the hungry. In his despair he cried out to Meyer with the familiar refrain of the Old Testament prophets, “Lord, how long!” But, as if correcting himself in mid-thought, Morehead quickly

⁹⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 19, 1931.

⁹⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 19, 1931.

⁹⁹ Alexandra Nikolaeva to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

regained his composure. Remembering that they suffered no longer, he comforted Meyer with these words, “But what joy it must be to them to rest from their labors and to be in the presence of the Lord!”¹⁰⁰ The comfort that the Lord gave to His people when contemplating the rest of the martyrs would become a more familiar theme to Morehead and the bishops in the coming years, as the Lutheran Church in Russia trod its own path to Golgotha.

Malmgren and Morehead’s Complicated Communications

For all of his correspondence with Malmgren over the past decade, it is ironic to note that Morehead had never met him personally. That point was brought home to Morehead when he learned that Malmgren had made a quick visit to Germany in the summer of 1931. “I have a feeling of genuine regret that I did not know in advance of your plans.”¹⁰¹ Morehead went on to write that he had long hoped that Malmgren could meet with the Executive Committee of the LWC, a trip to Germany being easy to arrange for Morehead and the Europeans. The situation of how best to support the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia had become more complex after the 1929 Law on Religious Associations, and a face-to-face meeting would have cleared up any misunderstandings between them. A case in point would have been the plans to acquire food for the students given the new restrictions for purchases enacted by the Soviet government. Morehead requested that Malmgren inform him in advance the next time he was given permission to travel and Morehead would either travel to Europe or invite him to New York.¹⁰²

In fact, a meeting would have been helpful in that Morehead would have become more aware of how completely Malmgren’s hands were tied in traveling and requesting aid for the

¹⁰⁰ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, November 16, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 5, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰² John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 5, 1931.

seminary. For example, Malmgren had been alerted by “incontestable sources” that the OGPU was actively seeking a pretext to arrest him. As a matter of fact, Malmgren himself was thoroughly surprised that he had actually received a visa, no doubt remembering all the times he tried to meet Morehead in the past few years and was refused permission to travel. But since Germany had officially recognized the Soviet Union and been an important trading partner for years, its representatives would have had more influence in Russia than the Americans.¹⁰³

In May, a German diplomat by the name of Dr. Johannes Kriege in Berlin had made arrangements through the Russian ambassador for Malmgren to obtain a visa. The only conditions on his visa were that he not stay in a hotel nor speak out publicly against the politics of the Soviet Union. Malmgren balked initially as he was concerned that any of his actions could be interpreted in a negative light by the Soviet government. But ultimately he decided to go since he was offered the opportunity to meet with the Russian ambassador to Germany, believing he might be able to gain a hearing for the troubles of the Lutheran Church. Everything moved quickly as he received the visa in a few days and then set off for Berlin in the middle of June.

But concerning any potential trip to New York, the visa stipulated that he could only travel to Germany and expressly only to Berlin. Only later was it allowed for him to add some time at a resort in Wiesbaden for his health. When Malmgren had heard that Morehead was planning a trip to Europe in the fall, he felt it would be too much for Morehead’s health to force him to make a second journey earlier.¹⁰⁴ In fact, his concerns were not far-fetched. Morehead had been incommunicado for a few months earlier in the year due to an infected foot. He had spent time in hospitals in California and New York, so Malmgren was aware of his health issues. Morehead

¹⁰³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 30, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 30, 1931.

replied that he would have made the trip on any account, causing Malmgren to regret not having informed him sooner.¹⁰⁵ He instinctively knew from correspondence with Morehead that a personal meeting would render moot any misunderstandings that had been generated through their letters. Still, Morehead's communications with Malmgren were regular enough that he told the bishop that the LWC would be able to pay off their deficit. That, of course, was always welcome news.¹⁰⁶

When Christmas was Illegal, but Still Celebrated

Prior to the arrival of Christmas in 1931, the Soviet government struck a decisive blow against one of the former Russian Empire's most potent symbols. A building project that had been conceived as a memorial to the victory over Napoleon in 1812, Christ the Savior Cathedral had dominated the skyline of the Moscow River since its completion and dedication in 1883. The cathedral still had an active congregation and without question, standing resplendently within view of the Kremlin, was an eyesore to Stalin and a continual reminder of the glories of "Holy Russia." The time had come to rid the Soviet Union of this powerful vestige of Christianity, once and for all. First, the cathedral was stripped of its ornaments, sculptures and frescoes. Second, its marble was plundered, eventually being used to build a new temple to Soviet communism, the underground Metro transportation system. And finally on December 5th, Stalin had the cathedral demolished. It took several tries with dynamite before the massive edifice was reduced to rubble. A planned Palace of the Soviets, topped by a stainless steel statue of Lenin 246 feet in height, ultimately failed due to the onset of World War II and later the program of de-Stalinization

¹⁰⁵ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, May 19, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 30, 1931.

¹⁰⁶ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 5, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA. The gifts totaled \$4000.00 plus an unmentioned sum from several churches.

carried out by Nikita Khrushchev following Stalin's death. But at least for the time being, Stalin's view of the Moscow skyline was clear.¹⁰⁷

Another symbol of Russia's past was the celebration of Christmas. As usual, with the arrival of Christmas in 1931, Lutherans quietly prepared to celebrate the birth of Christ. However, given the current state of affairs, except in large cities, one had to mark the day in private. Edith Müthel remembers that her family in the Volga village of Norka would place broken branches up their sleeves and periodically bring them home in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Out of the collection of branches they would, in conspiratorial fashion, construct a small Christmas tree.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile in Moscow, the sale of fir trees had been banned. Not so easily deterred, some believers would go into the forests just outside the city and secretly cut down their own trees. If you wanted to challenge the law, you would need to cover the windows with thick curtains. Given the communal living arrangements forced upon inhabitants of large cities like Moscow, it can only be imagined how few believers could effectively defy the authorities.¹⁰⁹

Lutheran parishioner Regina Bisko-Blümenau admitted that in the 1930s all members of the family could suffer for celebrating Christmas, especially the children.¹¹⁰ Erich Sommer recollected how the Young Pioneers communist youth group would post watch at the gates of St. Peter and Paul in Moscow in order to find out which students would attend Christmas services with their parents.¹¹¹ Rumors abounded that the parishioners would be forced to register with the

¹⁰⁷ Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, tran. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2012), 546–48, 553, 556.

¹⁰⁸ Edith Müthel to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Dönninghaus, *Die Deutschen in der Moskauer Gesellschaft*, 526.

¹¹⁰ Dönninghaus, *Die Deutschen in der Moskauer Gesellschaft*, 526.

¹¹¹ Erich Sommer, *Geboren in Moskau*, 37.

government, in effect forcing believers to publicly declare their allegiance to the church.¹¹²

Believers were increasingly forced to live their lives carefully, on the outside appearing to be loyal citizens of the Soviet Union but inwardly acknowledging Christ as Lord. How much more difficult it would become for Lutherans who were truly conflicted between the hazy boundaries of their duties as citizens and believers. Where did one's obligations to Caesar end, and how did one balance his duty to Christ and the church with the state? These were genuinely complicated relationships that believers had to manage, and the more intensely the state persecuted them the more believers gradually began to fall away from the church.

But there were still those who would not allow the state to drive them away from the practice of their faith, although they might be forced to worship in private. The niece of Friedrich Wacker, Margarita Schulmeister, vividly remembers one of her last Christmases in the Volga village of Kamyschyn. While her uncle was serving time in a concentration camp in eastern Siberia, his relatives secretly celebrated Christmas. Even at the age of 88, Schulmeister fondly recalled old Christmas traditions from the Volga Lutheran community that obviously had thrilled a 6 year-old girl. Three to four weeks before Christmas, the smell of Lebkuchen permeated the air of the village as the women prepared for the coming Christmas feast. The houses were cleaned, gifts were bought and everything in the community shone brightly in the days before Christmas. Then on Christmas Eve, although you could no longer go to church, the children would be dressed up and gathered in the kitchen. Someone would knock on the window, presumably the Christ Child, who would then pose the most important question: had the children been good? If not, they would not receive any gifts. After all, she said, the Christ Child knew everything!

Then someone would play the piano while the children sang traditional Christmas carols

¹¹² Victor Dönninghaus, *Die Deutschen in der Moskauer Gesellschaft*, 526.

like *Stille Nacht* and *Ihr Kinderlein Kommet*. A bell was rung, the doors to the living room were opened, and there she discovered that her father had already set up the Christmas tree. Schulmeister recalled that there were no electric lights on the tree, but the gifts would be carefully placed under it while the tree would be decorated with pfeffernuss cookies, bon bons and apples.¹¹³ In the much larger Volga village of Norka (17,000 inhabitants), Edith Müthel remembered the big church being vacant that Christmas Eve because Pastor Emil Pfeiffer, her father, had gone to Saratov to celebrate Christmas in the large Lutheran cathedral of St. Mary's. The collectivization of the countryside had struck Norka hard. Many families from the church had lost fathers, sons and brothers, to the concentration camps. Naturally, Müthel mused, the families wondered where in the far north of Siberia their men were on this holy night and whether they were even among the living.

For the first time in ages, the grand old church was dark and still. No Christmas candles, no voices of children singing traditional Christmas hymns, none of the three large bells ringing out and calling the faithful to worship. Müthel remembers it being a particularly snow-laden Christmas in 1931 and that the people had not forgotten their faith, celebrating secretly within their own homes. As the believers held their own private celebration, the oldest would utter the table prayer before the Christmas Eve dinner. It would be a modest feast given the weak harvest. The Christmas stockings at the Pfeiffer's home were wrapped in white crepe paper while the oven heated the whole house, creating a warm, cozy atmosphere despite the absence of her father. Her father, though, had not forgotten them. He had left them hazelnuts for the occasion, and modest presents were distributed in his absence. Her little brother even got ice skates.

Edith's mother recited the table prayer on this night, and the children sang the old

¹¹³ Margarita Schulmeister to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

Christmas carols, such as *Von Himmel Hoch*, *O Du Fröliche*, *Stille Nacht* and *Welchen Jubel*, *Welche Freude*. The last verse of this carol was especially poignant for Edith: “Shortly such joy will soon be extinguished with the candle light; Jesus alone can prepare a joy that will never pass away.” The Christmas cactus filled with candles evoked never-to-be forgotten memories that would encourage Müthel throughout the years, as she remembered it well into her nineties. In her autobiography Müthel proclaimed, “The Christmas cactus for me today is like a glittering hope, like a beam of love, like the light of faith in Jesus Christ for one’s life. Whenever possible, a Christmas cactus will stand on my windowsill.”¹¹⁴ And so it does to this day.

1932–Spiritual Life of Russian Lutheranism: Trapped in Snow and Ice

“Here in faraway Russia we are stuck deep in snow and ice, not only in the life of nature but also in the spiritual life.”¹¹⁵ Those words from Bishop Meyer to Morehead accurately described the perilous condition of the church in early 1932. The number of pastors continued to decline, sometimes due to natural causes but more often because they fell victim to the precarious existence within the concentration camps. Like his father, 44 year-old Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Jr. had been deported to a concentration camp in Siberia. On February 12th he was working in the forest as a slave laborer when he was struck by a falling tree, which killed him. One of the older pastors in the Volga region, Johann Allendorf, passed away at the age of 75. Mikhail Lapping, the 63 year-old head of the Latvian section of the Lutheran Church in Russia, died in Moscow in March. Bishop Meyer now estimated that only 41 pastors remained active in the Lutheran Church.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Müthel, *An Gottes Hand*, 47–50.

¹¹⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 17, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹¹⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, March 17, 1932.

Lapping's death would for all intents and purposes end any opportunities to hold services in the Baltic languages of Latvian or Estonian at St. Peter and Paul, services which he had previously conducted. The last Latvian confirmation class of eleven children, five boys and six girls, would be taught by an ethnic Latvian, Pastor Julius Zahlit. Zahlit came from Leningrad to teach an accelerated course for the students, confirming them on June 12. To predict the lifelong impact that Lutheran pastors would have on their students was impossible at the time, but there are witnesses who lived to see the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Ethnic Latvian confirmand, Olga Striks, for example, would remember her confirmation all her life and retain her faith. Wherever she lived during the days of the Soviet Union, she would carry her confirmation certificate with her. As of January 2017, the 99 year-old Striks remains the oldest member of St. Peter and Paul in Moscow.¹¹⁷

As the numbers of pastors continued to plummet, Meyer's confidence in the Church's future dimmed even further. His impressions were valuable since he was not prone to giving pessimistic statements about the possibilities for the continued existence of the Lutheran Church in Russia. He had written a book on the Church's history, so he knew full well what it had faced various struggles since its origins in the 16th century. The pressure being applied to the Church now, though, was greater than anything he had ever studied or witnessed. For example, the tax charged to him as a pastor for the year 1931 had risen substantially, all the way to a figure of 3609.31 rubles! In other words, the government was now taxing him up to \$1500.00, an unheard of sum. 1932 promised a comparable tax bill, if not higher.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Olga Striks, "Последняя Конфирмация в Московской Общине Святого Петра" ["The Last Confirmation in the Moscow Congregation of St. Peters"], *Наша Церковь* 3–5 [*Our Church*], (1996), 70–71; Dmitri Lotov to Matthew Heise, March 2014. Olga Striks passed away in the spring of 2017, three months shy of her 100th birthday.

¹¹⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 7, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Similarly, whereas the annual cost for heating, light and water for a pastor or bishop was often negligible, the past year's charges had reached 1200 rubles (approximately \$600.00). To add insult to injury, the church secretary had been ill for close to eight months in 1931 and therefore could expect no help from the state given his employment at the church. This forced the secretary to take on other work despite his bad health. Furthermore, according to the emergency regulations of the Deutsche Bank, the High Church Council was now limited to taking only 200 Reichsmarks a month out of the bank. Given the current rates imposed by the Soviet state, they would need 1200 Reichsmarks a month!¹¹⁹ Eugenie Meyer, the wife of the bishop, wrote Dr. Morehead in March about the desperate condition of the Church. Using the descriptive Russian word *lishenyets* (without privileges, rights), she explained to him that the church held no rights whatsoever in the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, she assured him of her family's sound faith, stating that they remained at their posts like soldiers in a spiritual army. God had blessed them despite these difficulties. Their youngest son, Traugott, had found work in the Austrian Embassy. The heart condition of their daughter Elizabeth was improving. She continued to work as a professor in a language institute and was editing a German-Russian dictionary. Unfortunately, Frau Meyer's 22 year-old nephew, Gustav Golde, who had been instructing the children in Pastor Helmut Hansen's crafts program, had been among those arrested. He had even inhabited a cell with Friedrich Wacker, but had now been transported to a Siberian concentration camp for a period of three years. Since Gustav was her widowed sister's sole support, his arrest was a real hardship for the family. Frau Meyer hoped that with time served Gustav would be released within a few months. Her hope remained in "God the Lord,"

¹¹⁹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 7, 1932.

whose Easter blessings she wished upon the good Dr. Morehead, who had done so much for them.¹²⁰

As the seventh year of the seminary wound down, Bishop Malmgren struggled to keep a positive outlook given the conditions. The cost of running the seminary was once again rising. The reasons were not hard to fathom. First, the collectivization of farming had so thoroughly impoverished Lutheran parishioners that very little money could be set aside for gifts to the seminary. Parishioners who had been forced into collective farms no longer had dispensable income. They were given food from the harvest and vouchers for use in a state consumer cooperative, leaving them no actual currency to tithe to the Church. Secondly, and this occurred unexpectedly, the seminary was now being charged a tax of 1500 rubles [approximately \$750.00] by the state for the purpose of supporting “atheist culture.” And thirdly, the \$2000.00 that Morehead had sent in December 1931 could not be extracted from the bank.¹²¹

As if all of these problems weren't enough evidence for Malmgren's pessimism, the means that he had discovered for purchasing food cheaply through Torgsin was presenting its own difficulties. Although Dr. Morehead had successfully sent two payments through this special foreign currency bank, Malmgren now informed him to stop sending money in this manner. Citing “inner political reasons,” Malmgren wrote that the sending of two drafts of money through Torgsin, one upon the other, had attracted the attention of the Soviet authorities.¹²² Ashamed that the Lutheran Church of Russia had to make these constant demands upon foreign Lutherans who continued to sacrifice for them, Malmgren thanked Morehead for

¹²⁰ Eugenie Meyer to John Morehead, March 19, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²¹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 8, 1932 and May 15, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 8, 1932. Torgsin were state-run hard currency stores that operated in the USSR from 1931–1936. See Torgsin, wikipedia.us, last modified, October 18, 2017.

their patience and charity, despite the fact that he saw no end in sight to the seminary's needs. "We feel the public hostility against Christianity more and more ... we see that they are continuing to close churches forcefully, or congregations are giving them up willingly because they can't pay the exorbitant taxes. And we don't know when this hate and terror will come to an end."¹²³

Giving full vent to his frustration, Malmgren cried, "How can our congregations hold to the Faith, when they are not comforted by God's Word? Who will speak to them the Word of God, if preachers are not educated? Up to now the Lord has awakened young men who are prepared, despite all the evil and hate to become preachers."¹²⁴ Perhaps recognizing that he had bared his soul to his friend a little too deeply, Malmgren changed course and recalled, "But God is to be highly honored and praised.... I might all the more thank you, heartily and sincerely thank you, highly honored sir and brother, that you have anticipated our request and have renewed assurances to us that you will continue to help."¹²⁵ Morehead knew when his friend and colleague needed assurance, so he wrote back to Malmgren in February that since he had not heard from him most recently, he decided to send yet another gift of \$2000.00. Providing the encouragement the bishop so desperately needed, Morehead wrote, "We admire the heroic faith and courage with which the rector, professors, and students stand true to Christ and to the obligations of service within His church, that men may be trained for the ministry and that the Gospel may be preached to the people. The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! And He is a God of power and love and grace!" Reminding him of their "unceasing intercessory prayers," he repeated the firm

¹²³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 8, 1932.

¹²⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 8, 1932.

¹²⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 8, 1932.

commitment of the LWC to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia.¹²⁶

Thankfully, by the end of January, Malmgren managed to receive the \$2000.00 sent in December 1931. Unfortunately, though, other problems were now plaguing the student body of the seminary. Four students had been called to military service, which included the tasks of moving heavy stones and building roads.¹²⁷ Among them were Emil Fehler, Alfred Kochendörfer, and also the last ethnic Estonian student at the seminary. Even though as students at a seminary they were “lishentsy” [the plural of without rights], they were still obliged to fulfill their military service. As a result, they were sent to serve at hard labor near the border of Finland for a period of three years. The situation for Estonians in the Lutheran Church looked bleak as another Estonian pastor had just been deported to a Gulag labor camp in Siberia, as well as including a few Estonian temporary preachers. Taken together with the death of the Estonian bishop Albert Juergenson in 1929, the Estonian wing of the Russian Lutheran Church was practically decimated.¹²⁸

The island of calm that had temporarily reigned at the seminary now seemed disrupted beyond repair. The students still operated under the premise that they would eventually graduate and begin serving parishes, but they were no longer oblivious to the real dangers surrounding them. The fact that they could expect to become full-fledged “non-persons” upon their graduation attested to their dedication to the cause of the Gospel. And obviously there existed a very real danger that students could be called up for military service, delaying their education.¹²⁹ On occasion, students could also be called into the OGPU offices for questioning. As if to

¹²⁶ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, February 2, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 30, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹²⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, March 19, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Lel, “How They Were Trying to Destroy Us,” 17.

¹²⁹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 5, 1931, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

punctuate the fear that every student held, on January 29, 1932, Johannes Lel was called in for a “dialogue” with the OGPU. An officer named Tamm not too subtly encouraged Lel to become his informer among the students, an action that Lel acknowledged would force him to become an “enemy of his friends.” Tamm also asked whether he had attended St. Peter’s and heard the sermons of Helmut Hansen. Naturally, Lel replied in the affirmative, although most of his time had been spent at St. Anne’s. Although Lel was not ignorant of the crushing of the Hansen and Muss Sunday school program a few years previous, initially it didn’t occur to him that this was a veiled threat. The conversation had not proceeded in a threatening manner. That soon changed, though, as he was handed over to Tamm’s boss.¹³⁰

The head officer claimed that the government had educated Lel for free, but now, the time had come to “pay the bill.” Nonplussed, Lel replied, perhaps a little too cleverly, that his father had already paid his taxes to the government. The head officer exploded, losing his temper and called him a “little mutt.” Lel held his ground, saying he had no other answer. The head officer no longer displayed any pretense of playing the role of a good cop, shouting, “Get out of here! We have a different answer for you!” Lel was promptly driven over in one of the infamous Black Maria’s (sedans used by the OGPU) to the DPZ (Dom Predvarityelna Zakluchony–House of Preparatory Incarceration), the OGPU’s holding prison for the accused in Leningrad. Being placed in an isolated prison cell, it was hoped that loneliness would work on his psyche. Although there was little to stimulate him in the cell, Lel remembered poems that he had memorized, primarily Schiller, Heine, Pushkin and Lermontov. Along with the singing of hymns, these helped him spiritually and psychologically in his depressed state. Afterwards, Lel was called for two further interrogations, once again with the head officer. On these occasions

¹³⁰ Lel, “How They Were Trying to Destroy Us,” 18.

the head officer finally relaxed, conversing with Lel on abstract themes. For example, he quizzed Lel as to whether he would choose practical over scientific materialism. (Lel chose scientific). Truly perplexed about his ward, the officer confided that he didn't know what to do with him. But one thing was clear: Lel would not be allowed to finish his course work at the seminary. He was soon shipped out to a concentration camp in Kazakhstan, traveling in one of the so-called Stolypin wagons.¹³¹

His friend and classmate, Bruno Toryassan, was also brought into the OGPU offices in 1932 for questioning. Bruno was born in 1911, the son of a Lutheran pastor of Armenian heritage and a mother who was German. Bruno's school years took place in Baku, where his father, Ossip, had founded a congregation. Now a seminarian, Bruno was approaching the end of his studies when the OGPU called. He remembered an incident during his interrogation, which only in retrospect can be seen as humorous. While walking down a long corridor within their office complex, not knowing which room to enter, Bruno heard someone's voice continually repeating the words, "Next, next." Cold with fear, he expected some agent to sneak up behind him and end it all. So, prepared for the worst, Bruno walked hesitatingly past one door after another, yet saw no one. Still, the voice urged him on, "Next, next." Finally reaching the door from where the voice issued, Bruno spied an officer in the act of receiving a telegram and copying down the words as they were repeated to him. Thus, the mystery of the word "next" was solved, much to his great relief!¹³²

Unfortunately, when the time came to question Bruno, the interview was not as comical. He was asked to spy on his fellow classmates. Naturally refusing the odious request, Bruno was

¹³¹ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 18.

¹³² Tanya Ryumina, "May God Preserve You...."

then curtly informed that he had 24 hours to leave Leningrad. No doubt relieved that he had not suffered a worse fate, Bruno took the train through the Caucasus Mountains to Vladikavkaz, where his father was serving a parish. He carried with him his Bible in which classmates had written their own goodbyes. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10). “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.” (1 Cor. 16:13). “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” (Pro. 23:26). Such words would be an encouragement to him in the coming dark days, even more so because the classmates who wrote in his Bible would not survive the decade. Despite the fact that he could no longer attend seminary classes, Bruno’s theological education was far from finished. His good friend and former roommate at the seminary, Ralph Jurgens, sent Bruno weekly copies of his notes from the courses in spite of the danger that entailed. Due to Ralph’s courage and diligence in mailing these documents, Bruno was able to take his final exams in the summer of 1933.¹³³

Given the Soviet government’s increasingly overt acts of persecution, Malmgren confessed that it was also more frequently acknowledging that in the next Five Year Plan [1932–1937], the church of Christ would come to an end.¹³⁴ Morehead would read an article in the *New York Times* near the end of the year (November 24) that echoed that very same fear.¹³⁵ Naturally, Malmgren was alarmed and troubled as to what the 8th year of the seminary would bring when it began operations in the Fall. Sympathizing with his concerns, Morehead told him what he had read in a New York newspaper about the cruel beating exacted upon one of thirty Lutheran pastors languishing in a Siberian Gulag camp. (The pastor had apparently refused to inform on his fellow Lutherans). “I am satisfied that the oppression of the organized institution of religion

¹³³ Tanya Ryumina, “May God Preserve You....”

¹³⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, March 19, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁵ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 1, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

in Russia, reports of which are coming more and more into the columns of the public press of the world, will serve to isolate Russia and be of untold injury to the country along political and economic lines.... There must be a change of policy if the present government of Russia is to have the good will of civilized mankind.”¹³⁶ But Morehead was wrong. Civilized mankind was more interested in business. In that light, isolation of Russia was the farthest thing from the American government’s mind. While Morehead was expressing his righteous indignation against the actions of the Soviets, the American government was formulating its own plans to recognize the USSR.

The American government’s machinations notwithstanding, Morehead knew that he was doing right by standing unequivocally with the Lutheran Church in Russia. Malmgren admitted to Morehead that without the love and intercession of the Lutheran brothers in the world they couldn’t have persevered. Sounding eerily like St. Paul’s recording of his persecutions in 2 Corinthians chapter 6, Malmgren wrote, “It’s not so much the particular rude excesses and the crude, brutal ill treatment, of which the New York papers are reporting, that we fear. Instead it’s the moral burden which daily lies more heavily upon the soul. We are without rights, surrounded by hate and hostility, are continually set upon with bitter humiliations and must endure it; and that, which is holy to us, is covered with dirt and trampled underfoot.”¹³⁷ The Lutherans had hoped that they would only have to endure for a short time, but it had now been fifteen years since the Bolshevik Revolution and the Lord had not yet shown His hand in their hoped-for liberation. The hidden God remained cloaked to Malmgren and his fellow Lutherans. Meanwhile, the atheist state continued its steady stride forward. Malmgren confided to Morehead

¹³⁶ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, April 8, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, May 15, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

that now it appeared as if events were moving irresistibly closer to a complete collapse.¹³⁸

Despite his openness with Morehead, at times it seemed that Malmgren confided more straightforwardly about conditions with his German Lutheran supporters, perhaps because they hadn't expended the resources that Morehead had. In April, the General Secretary of the *Gustav Adolf Verein*, Dr. Geisler, received a letter from Malmgren expressing grave concerns about the seminary's future. "That I have to persevere, as long as I can be useful, is without question. But I am uncertain that I have the moral right to lead the seminary further, or whether in the end I am not duty bound to explain that I can't do it anymore because the cause appears to be hopeless."¹³⁹ Malmgren was clearly worried that if congregations couldn't support or find places for their own pastors, it would be unfair to send students out into such a predicament.¹⁴⁰ It is difficult to blame him for this concern. Even Pastor Kurt Muss, who boldly challenged the state and was arrested in 1929, had advised his student Mikhail Mudyugin to study at a seminary but to be prepared for the forcible closure of the Lutheran Church.¹⁴¹

While Bishops Meyer and Malmgren continued writing to Morehead, a break occurred in the regularity with which he wrote to them. From April to July his silence caused them serious concern, knowing of his previous health problems. Although Malmgren heard from Morehead in April, Meyer had not heard a word from him since his two letters in March. "Your extraordinary long silence makes me a little uneasy, for I am afraid that your health condition could have hindered your writing."¹⁴² Malmgren was likewise concerned since he had quickly received another

¹³⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, May 15, 1932.

¹³⁹ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 104.

¹⁴⁰ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 104.

¹⁴¹ Oleg Sevastyanov to Matthew Heise, September 2017.

¹⁴² Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, July 13, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

visa for Germany and would be leaving in late July. He expressed a desire to converse with Morehead face to face about an important question.¹⁴³

In response to their queries, Dr. Lars W. Boe of St. Olaf's College in Northfield, Minnesota contacted Bishop Malmgren on behalf of Morehead in late July. Morehead had become gravely ill, just as they had feared, and had been forced to take extensive medical leave. Morehead's importance to the LWC and the NLC was such that those filling in for him now had their hands full dealing with a situation concerning refugees from the Volga who had fled the USSR and landed in Harbin, China. The Lutherans of the world were attempting to help them immigrate to Brazil, and naturally correspondence to Morehead's contacts suffered as a result. By the time Dr. Boe wrote to Malmgren, the bishop was already on his way to Germany.¹⁴⁴ On July 19, a few days before Boe wrote Malmgren, Morehead also wrote to him from his sickbed in Los Angeles. Morehead regretted that he could not come to Germany, but wondered whether Malmgren could put off his trip until late October/early November, when the Executive Committee of the LWC would hold its meeting. It would be of the utmost benefit to speak openly with each other in a free country about issues concerning the seminary. Unfortunately, as so often happened, their letters crisscrossed each other, Malmgren already being in Germany by the time Morehead's letter arrived. At the very least, Malmgren would be able to converse with Bishop Ludwig Ihmels of the LWC. But unfortunately, he was not in a position to ask the Soviet authorities to make any concessions to delay his travels. They controlled the dispensing of all visas and answered to no one but themselves.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, July 25, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁴ L.W. Boe to Arthur Malmgren, July 23, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁵ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, July 19, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

The Seminary Graduates of 1932: “A Glimmer of Light in the Dark”

In Bishop Meyer’s July letter to him, Morehead continued to be educated on the deteriorating religious situation in the USSR. Under the unrelenting pressure of the government, Meyer reckoned that churches had been taken away or simply given up by the congregations in the smaller cities. The situation in the countryside (excepting the Ingrian regions) was worse as church life was all but destroyed due to the radical transformation that took place during collectivization. Only in the larger cities like Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev and Kharkov, could church life carry on despite the daily persecutions. Unlike the early years of Soviet rule, the authorities no longer preferred to use only direct violence against the pastors. Now they also applied subtle pressure by cutting pastors off from daily life and work, tagging them with the designation “non-persons.”

Meyer and the High Church Council were more and more of the opinion that they were fighting a losing battle, but this realization only encouraged them to rely completely upon the Lord. The bishop promised that “we will not waver nor yield, but will pray daily to the Lord of the church that He would lend us the strength to be faithful to His commands ‘to hold on to what you have.’”¹⁴⁶ To this end, he spied a “glimmer of light in the dark” in the fact that six students took their exams in early summer. Invited by Malmgren to participate in the final exams for the seminarians, Meyer was duly impressed with the products of the seminary.¹⁴⁷ Malmgren was disappointed that only about half of the class had made it through to the end of their studies, given that six students had been forced to discontinue their preparations for the ministry. Two were taken for military service (Torrosyan and Lel) while the other four were deported to

¹⁴⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, July 13, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, July 13, 1932.

concentration camps.¹⁴⁸ Two of those deported students had been connected to the Hansen-Muss Case, having taught Sunday school for the pastors in Leningrad. One, Otto Tumm, was arrested and sentenced in 1930 and was currently serving his prison term. The other, 22 year-old Conrad Gerling (also spelled “Herling” in German), was serving time in the far north. But now the sad news had reached Malmgren that Gerling had died of spotted typhus in a concentration camp off the coast of Murmansk.

The seminary had decided to give those students completing their theological education in 1932 time to conduct practical work in local Leningrad congregations. Four German language congregations were still active in the city [St. Peter’s, St. Anne’s, St. Catherine’s and St. Mary Magdalene], one Finnish [St. Mary’s], one Latvian [Christ the Savior], one Swedish [St. Katherine’s], one Estonian [St. John’s] and the Russian language congregation formerly led by Kurt Muss [Jesus Christ]. The oversight needed for students doing practical work meant that there would be no new class in the Fall, as Bishop Malmgren and his rapidly diminishing staff would be occupied with the graduating class and the remaining students at the seminary.¹⁴⁹ Given the knowledge that there were more than two million Lutherans who awaited some kind of pastoral service, and added to that the retirements of aging pastors and the losses to prison, labor camp and martyrdom, it is no wonder that Malmgren could despair at times.¹⁵⁰ The Lutheran Church needed every student he could get placed into the pastoral office and quickly. For Bishops Malmgren and Meyer, the most difficult balance was retaining pastors but also acknowledging the realities of persecution and the desire of pastors to emigrate. In 1931 the German Ministry of

¹⁴⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 30, 1932.

¹⁴⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 30 and March 19, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; P-87890, Volume 2, List 609, Archives of the FSB-St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 14, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Foreign Affairs requested and received from Soviet Foreign Minister, Maxim Litvinov, a list of 32 Evangelical Lutheran pastors under arrest in the country. But to Litvinov's surprise, the German government added yet another 25 names since through the International Red Cross and other entities [probably also the LWC] sending food and clothes, they knew the Gulag camps in Siberia where the pastors were held, including the barracks' numbers!¹⁵¹

Litvinov finally agreed to allow ten pastors to leave the USSR; included in the list were Woldemar and Eduard Seib, as well as Albert Koch. Naturally the Soviet government was not thrilled by Litvinov's action, but some pastors were more disturbed by the bishops' actions. The bishops, who were fighting a losing battle with the reduced numbers of pastors, now made clear the necessity of keeping them by any means possible, including the refusal to sign off on their emigration papers. Their actions also affected students, because in June 1932 both bishops refused to allow Konstantin Rusch to leave for Germany, arguing that he didn't have the classical theological education to serve there. Tragically, Rusch would be arrested and eventually executed in a Gulag camp in 1941.¹⁵²

Woldemar Seib of Kharkov responded to these actions bitterly, "My attempts to receive German citizenship were of course refused. Malmgren is guilty. On his last trip over the border, he refused to entertain pastors' requests for emigration (besides this, he christened them with the gentle word "deserters"). It is outrageous! The great lords sit in Petersburg, living, despite the general need, pretty well... and have no idea at all of the awful conditions of their brothers in the provinces. And although the High Church Council ponders its own dissolution, they don't call themselves deserters!"¹⁵³ Mikhail Baumann, a 1929 seminary graduate serving in the Ukraine,

¹⁵¹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 265.

¹⁵² Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 266.

¹⁵³ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 266.

added his own disappointment to the mix, writing that the High Church Council in Moscow didn't care for the pastors but only themselves, leaving us to fight for our own existence. Only a few pastors would manage to emigrate, as the conditions for emigration were extraordinarily strict. One couldn't be the subject of a current court case or could never have been arrested in order to have his case reviewed. There were virtually no pastors in the USSR that fit those parameters.¹⁵⁴ Seib, sadly, would be arrested in 1935 and perish in a labor camp in Marinsk.¹⁵⁵

These incredibly complicated circumstances provide a vivid picture of the struggles that the bishops and pastors endured. While it is difficult to blame a faithful pastor like Woldemar Seib for his understandable anger, in fairness it is not accurate to say the bishops were living in luxury. Malmgren was reduced to spartan living conditions, although it is true that life in the provinces would always be worse. Still, it had to weigh upon him when he knew that many of his pastors would be arrested and yet he couldn't just abandon the congregations. To that end, Malmgren counted among his blessings the five ordained Finnish/Ingrian pastors serving in the Leningrad region, apart from the emergency preachers and lay leaders. And now he could add to those numbers another ordained pastor, an elderly, mature Finn, who completed his exams in the Spring of 1932.¹⁵⁶ So despite the rapidly advancing darkness, there was still a glimmer of light. But it was fading rapidly.

The Territory of Ingria: A Lutheran Haven within the USSR?

While the perilous condition of German Lutheran churches in the Soviet Union would have depressed even the most optimistic advocate, the state of the Church among the Finns and Ingri-

¹⁵⁴ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 267.

¹⁵⁵ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 266, 350.

¹⁵⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, March 19, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

ans provided a rare celebratory note for Lutherans. In 1932, 32 congregations still existed with approximately 150,000 parishioners. The bad news, though, was that they had only four ordained pastors to serve them.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the statistics indicate a village life in northwest Russia that could still provide a haven from the harshness of atheist propaganda, even if the Soviets had already collectivized a good portion of Russia proper. Photographs from the early 1930s show a surprising number of confirmands and an active Church, compared to the hard-pressed German-speaking congregations. Obviously Soviet power and influence was not yet as far-reaching as the advocates of collectivization had hoped.

The Finns/Ingrians had proven to be a thorn in the side to the enterprising Soviets, who had hoped to collectivize and introduce the people to the joys of communist labor. They were primarily a people of the land, as the 1926 Soviet census attested. For instance, in the Leningrad region alone, 175,499 claimed some type of Finnish/Ingrian ethnicity. In contrast, the city of Leningrad proper counted only 12,603 of this ethnic group within its borders.¹⁵⁸ The roots of the Lutheran Church in Ingria were strong, dating back to 1611 when the first congregation was founded in Lembolovo (Moloskovitsa in Russian). Therefore the villagers still looked to the Church as its authority, much to the chagrin of the communists.¹⁵⁹ After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, communists had attempted to infiltrate these close-knit communities with their own Finnish newspaper, *Vapaus* (*Freedom*). In 1924–1925, a publishing house called *Kiryä* was founded with the aim of inundating the Finnish/Ingrian communities with Soviet

¹⁵⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *Путь Веры Длиною Встолетия Церковь Ингрии: 400 Лет Истории 40 Лет без Храмов, 4 Веки Возрождения* [*The Path of Faith through the Long Centuries of the Church of Ingria: 400 Years of History, 40 years without Churches, 4 Centuries of Rebirth*] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, 2012), 78.

¹⁵⁸ I.M. Lemetti, *Советская Ингерманландия* [*Soviet Ingria*], (Sotsigrafich Ocherk, 1931), 8.

¹⁵⁹ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 17.

propaganda. They specialized in providing the people with schoolbooks and basic grammars. On one occasion, the communist author of the book, Soviet Ingria, explained how he tried to give a copy of a grammar book to a peasant woman. Her response to this strange gift was, “Is the Lord’s Prayer printed in this book?” According to him, she at first refused to buy it until the bookseller explained to her why Soviet grammars did not print prayers. He presented his enlightenment of this primitive woman as a victory for the forces of atheism over antiquated Christianity.¹⁶⁰

But even though the Ingrian communists believed that they had been making some headway by the early 1930s, they knew that the power of the Lutheran Church still held sway with most villagers. Since the mid-1920s, Bibles, catechisms and prayers books from Finland, as well as religious radio programming, had been making their way into the hands and ears of the locals.¹⁶¹ Raisa Plotnikova, a Lutheran from Moscow, grew up in an Ingrian village in the 1930s and told the author that her family would secretly listen to Finnish Bible programs on the radio.¹⁶² The ties between what communists considered the bourgeoisie of Finland, as well as some émigrés with the Ingrians, were still quite extensive. The communists were furious that Ingrian villagers had the temerity to form Sunday schools for the children and church choirs for the adults. Furthermore, the natives clearly smelled a rat whenever the communists came around with their propaganda. Unlike the author of Soviet Ingria's propaganda, most people refused their literature.¹⁶³

Suspicion of the devices used by the communists was often spread by educated Ingrians in

¹⁶⁰ Lemetti, *Soviet Ingria*, 40.

¹⁶¹ Lemetti, *Soviet Ingria*, 32, 37.

¹⁶² Raisa Plotnikova to Matthew Heise, October 2007.

¹⁶³ Lemetti, *Soviet Ingria*, 28–29, 36–37.

the Lutheran Church. For example, a former teacher from the Lutheran preparatory school in Kolpani, Mr. Tuunni, was well known to his enemies. In fact, the communists identified him as a “kulak” leader of the anti-Soviet movement in the villages. Tuunni told the Ingrians to beware of the communists. He said that they were planning to uproot them from their villages and replace them with ethnic Russians. The Ingrians were wary of the communists, so they could not move as briskly with collectivization as they had in the German villages. They had to be patient and move slowly if they wanted to change the traditions of the villages.¹⁶⁴

That doesn't mean, however, that persecution did not exist. The treatment of the pastoral leader of the Finnish/Ingrian congregations in Russia, Selim Laurikkala, was proof of that. Driven from their comfortable home in the village of Ryapuvaa in October 1930, the Laurikkalas were forced to move to a smaller, more confined apartment on Leningrad's main thoroughfare, October 25th Prospect. The apartment was in the building of the consulate of the Finnish government and, fortunately for Laurikkala, a short 5-minute walk to St. Mary's Lutheran Church. He would also serve the Estonian and Swedish Lutherans congregations in the city when necessary, as he was fluent in those languages. One major drawback of the Laurikkala's new living conditions, though, was that the pastor was now in the center of the city and could not as easily avoid the attention of the OGPU. A tireless servant to the Ingrians, Laurikkala would travel to worship services in the countryside villages of Tuutari and Hietämäki as well.¹⁶⁵

So despite the ardent efforts of the Finnish-speaking communists to praise collectivization and attempts to stir up the youth, the young people in the Ingrian congregations were mostly unmoved by their tactics. The powerful influence of the family and Finnish-speaking church

¹⁶⁴ Lemetti, *Soviet Ingria*, 28–29, 54.

¹⁶⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 77–79.

community led them to reject state pressure to conform to the times. Confirmation classes would continue, although they might often be only intensive two-week courses. But the number of youth attending and being confirmed continued to be quite high. The time of strict collectivization and exile would come to the Ingrians in 1935. Then Mr. Tuunni would be proved correct.¹⁶⁶ Until that time, the Lutheran Church would provide a haven for Ingrian youth from the rapid growth of godlessness affecting other communities in Russia. It is all the more remarkable that Dr. Morehead had shown the foresight to press for more Finnish speaking preachers in the seminary. They would be sorely needed in the coming years as the persecution picked up in intensity.

The OGPU Pressures Malmgren and Conflicts within the Church: A Sad and Muddled Affair

By November, Morehead was able to return to New York and conduct a light schedule of work, mostly 1 or 1½ hours a day. Most importantly, his improved health allowed him to resume regular correspondence with the bishops. Writing to Bishop Meyer, Morehead advised him to publish his book, *350 Years of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia*, but only in German, not English. It would be of far greater use to the seminary in German and Bishop Ihmels could help with the publication.¹⁶⁷ Regarding his correspondence with Malmgren, Morehead's letter from July finally reached him when he returned to the USSR in late September. Malmgren was deeply sorry that he could not meet Morehead in Germany. He wanted to explain everything about the church situation and the seminary in his country and give Morehead a clear view. "But God ordained it differently."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Maria Saakonen to Matthew Heise, November 2008.

¹⁶⁷ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, November 14, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁶⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 27, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

The will to exterminate the Church was being expressed publicly more and more while the power of believers to stand against the fierce persecution was growing progressively weaker. Malmgren had discussed these important issues with Bishop Ihmels in Germany, but now he decided to broach the important question he had wanted to discuss with Morehead. “Should I on the whole be thinking about educating the younger brothers to the office of the ministry if the Church is going the way to its death and perhaps soon there will be nothing more to aid?”¹⁶⁹ Such a question no doubt knocked Morehead for a loop when he first read it. But Malmgren then confessed that when he touched upon this subject, his listeners in Germany and the USSR dissuaded him. And so he soldiered on, beginning the 8th year of the seminary in September. Two new Ingrian students were added while he waited for an Estonian student to arrive.¹⁷⁰

Of the eight graduates from the class of 1932, two were called to the South Caucasus [including Malmgren’s son-in-law, Emil Hahnefeld, to Helenendorf], one to the North Caucasus, one to the Volga, one to Odessa [Karl Vögel] and two to Leningrad. Tragically, Heinrich Maier, the student called to western Siberia and whom Malmgren had ordained on July 24th, died of pneumonia while Malmgren was in Germany. The energetic and brave Maier had personally requested to serve in the dangerous mission field of Siberia. The entire seminary community mourned his loss. After his death and that of Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr., plus the deportations of Pastors Merz and Deutschmann, western Siberia could not claim one ordained pastor.¹⁷¹ Malmgren could only fittingly express the sorrow of the Church with the words, “How unsearchable are His judgments and inscrutable His ways.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 27, 1932.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 27, 1932.

¹⁷¹ Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 342, 384.

¹⁷² Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 27, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Now as a result of governmental pressure and the extensive daily activities required of the rector, Malmgren announced that the 1932–33 school year would be his last, especially if help from foreign Lutherans failed. He was embarrassed to admit that the seminary had once again finished the year in financial debt to the tune of 3366 rubles and 40 kopecks [approximately \$1683.00]. With the tax on the seminary at 5739 rubles, the insurance for the workers at the seminary costing 1156 rubles, and the state requiring higher salaries for the housekeepers and maids up to the sum of 5434 rubles, Malmgren estimated that these costs alone would take up more than 1/3 of the seminary’s budget! It was difficult for him to ask for assistance when he was all too keenly aware of the difficulties plaguing the German and American economies, although he acknowledged that it was even worse in the USSR. Of the \$13,000.00 budget, \$9512.00 came from the NLC in America alone.¹⁷³

Morehead quickly shot off a letter to Malmgren after reading of his despair regarding the continuing operation of the seminary. Assuring him of his strong support for the seminary, Morehead firmly replied, “not in the least do I waver in the conviction which has been mine from the first that this is an absolutely necessary and fundamental work for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, its preservation, perpetuation and development.”¹⁷⁴ With the biblical quote “How can they hear without a preacher” (Rom. 10:14), words that Malmgren himself had uttered in the same context, Morehead sought to hearten the burdened rector with the knowledge that the Lutheran churches in Europe and America saw his work as “God’s work,” and that they viewed their support as a privilege and a duty to God. “God will not fail you. His grace will be sufficient

¹⁷³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 10, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁴ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 21, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA

for you.”¹⁷⁵ In May, Dr. Rendtorff of the *Gustav Adolf Verein* and Dr. Kriege of Berlin had likewise encouraged Malmgren to continue with the operation of the seminary.¹⁷⁶

Morehead’s assurances couldn’t have come at a better time for Malmgren, as he struggled with a deficit and sought means to limit the costs of the seminary as much as possible. “With grateful joy I have received your letter of October 21; it gives me the confidence that at the very least I will be able to finish this 8th year of the seminary and be able to place the senior students in parishes.”¹⁷⁷ Malmgren knew that he could not carry out his duties much longer if the pressure from the state continued, but he admitted to being strengthened by Morehead’s letter. He reiterated that it wasn’t the economic difficulties so much as it was the church policy of the Soviet state that concerned him most. Malmgren was convinced that the seminary was a “thorn in the eye,” a “foreign body” that did not fit into the ideology of Leninism.¹⁷⁸

It was evident that the strategy of the state was to hinder and complicate the work of the seminary as much as possible. For example, the seminary had been forced to maneuver around the expulsion from their former premises when the Soviet authorities simply abrogated the contract that they had signed for the dormitory rooms. The students and professors were continually being sent away into exile or labor camps under any pretext. As a result, the depletion of the ranks of professors at the seminary had placed quite a burden upon Malmgren. Of the staff that had served at the seminary in 1929, virtually all were gone. Friedrich Wacker, Arnold Frischfeld, and Helmut Hansen were serving sentences in the Gulag labor camps. Otto

¹⁷⁵ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 21, 1932.

¹⁷⁶ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 105.

¹⁷⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, November 26, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, November 26, 1932.

Wentzel, who had taken a call to serve a congregation in Helenendorf in the Transcaucasian District, had been arrested and in May 1931 transferred to a OGPU prison in Baku.¹⁷⁹ The Bishop of the Estonians in Russia, Albert Juergenson, had died in January 1929.¹⁸⁰ Paul Reichert was the only professor who remained from that time and Malmgren had suspicions that his longevity in service was no mere coincidence.

Assisting Malmgren and Reichert with the teaching were recent graduates, Pastor Eugen Bachmann of St. Anne's and Malmgren's son-in-law, Pastor Heinrich Behrendts [Hebrew professor] of St. Peter's in Leningrad. However in September 1932, Behrendts was accused by the OGPU of being involved in the theft of firewood, a necessary commodity for any institution given the harsh winters in Russia. Apparently Behrendts had unknowingly bought 12–15 cubic meters of firewood for St. Peter's that had been stolen by the directors of the Murmansk Railway. Included in the accusations were Orthodox priests, equally innocent of the 160 thousand cubic meters total that had disappeared. In a “show trial” lasting weeks, Behrendts and the others accused were placed in the prisoners' box where the public prosecutor took occasion to rudely sneer at them and insult them.¹⁸¹ Although Malmgren was not among the accused, his name was repeatedly invoked and reviled during the trial. The authorities were already well aware of his influential position in religious circles and had targeted him. For example, before the trial began in June 1932, a *Leningradskaya Pravda* article entitled “Firewood Thief” had portrayed Malmgren as a deceitful racketeer.¹⁸² Summoning up the fury of the proletariat, this

¹⁷⁹ Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 263; Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 96.

¹⁸⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 9, 1929, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸¹ Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 267; Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 97. Tschoerner says the seminary was accused of buying six cubic meters.

¹⁸² Georg Kretschmar and Heinrich Ratke, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Central Asia* (St. Petersburg, Russia: AO Satis, Der Bote, 1996), 42.

Soviet journalist inveighed against Malmgren:

The bishop of the German Lutheran Church has never received anyone in his working room. The first strange visitor was Nikolaev [one of the accused]. An extraordinarily warm handshake, a pair of warm, business words and Bishop Malmgren, rector of the Bible school, a man, who in matters of law is very knowledgeable, who knows that this concerns stolen firewood, concluded with Nikolaev a punishable arrangement to deliver firewood for his, Malmgren's, personal use, for the Bible school and for the Church. A not insubstantial role in this business was played by the pastor of St. Peter's, Behrendts, whom Nikolaev and Malmgren had been leading. . . . The proletariat court will doubtless not only bring to the profiteers their deserved sentence, but also those who bought the firewood and in this manner have stolen from the consumers of the working classes.¹⁸³

While all this was occurring, Malmgren was in Berlin with the Vice Consul of the German consulate in Leningrad, Karl Georg Pfeleiderer. Pfeleiderer recalled asking Malmgren if he would desire to remain in Germany, given the seriousness of the charges and the calumny directed against him. His reply was bold and forthright: "I'm needed in Leningrad. The worst that could happen to me is that I could be sent to compulsory labor in the Siberian mines, but at my age, I wouldn't be able to hold out for long."¹⁸⁴ Of course, this realization did cast Malmgren into a de-pression as he contemplated what to do. But duty proved stronger than his fears. He would return to the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁵

In his attempt to pit the aristocratic Malmgren against the people, this Soviet journalist had underestimated him, for Malmgren was not as helpless as he had suspected. Malmgren had always been politically astute, using his connections in the German consulate to his and the Church's advantage. The present dangerous situation was alleviated by his contacts with the German diplomat, Dr. Johannes Kriege in Berlin, and Soviet diplomat Lev Khinchuk. Kriege assured Malmgren that Khinchuk had inside information: Malmgren would be protected from the

¹⁸³ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 354.

¹⁸⁴ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 267.

¹⁸⁵ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 267.

OGPU and his son-in-law would be let off with a monetary fine. Khinchuk further heartened Malmgren by passing along a message through Kriege conferring the first and second general secretaries of the Leningrad Communist Party's respect and good wishes towards the seminary.¹⁸⁶ It is worth noting that at this time, German and Soviet diplomats could still work together in a cordial manner. But the future would pose insurmountable problems for their relationship. A former lance corporal during World War I named Adolf Hitler would come to power in Germany within a few months and change that relationship irrevocably.

On October 5, the trial ended with twenty death sentences handed out to the main defendants, although eleven had the sentence rescinded. Behrendts, however, was sentenced to three years in a concentration camp and the confiscation of all of his property.¹⁸⁷ Malmgren immediately and boldly lodged an appeal with the highest court in Moscow, simultaneously informing the German Embassy of the verdict. The appeal was successful as Behrendts' sentence was reduced to mere banishment from Leningrad, which would begin on December 31, 1932. The confiscation of his property, however, would remain in force. Despite his reprieve, Behrendts was in danger of receiving additional penalties from the law if he couldn't find a new place of employment outside Leningrad. In response he searched the Volga region in vain for a congregation that could support him and his wife. But with the death of Pastor Justus Jurgenson in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) an opening occurred, and so Behrendts and his wife made the long journey east to begin serving the congregation in March 1933.¹⁸⁸

As if this dangerous situation wasn't enough pressure for the aged Bishop Malmgren, a bit-

¹⁸⁶ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 267–68.

¹⁸⁷ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 268; Tschöerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 97.

¹⁸⁸ Kretschmar, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia*, 42.

ter conflict had been brewing for some time between him and seminary professor, Paul Reichert. This strife is one of the most mystifying controversies in the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union. In his letter to Dr. Morehead in November, Malmgren asserted in vague terms that a “powerful intervention” was taking place in the inner life of the seminary. To what could Malmgren be referring?¹⁸⁹ He didn’t really discuss his conflict with Reichert to Morehead as openly as he would with Dr. Rendtorff and the German diplomats whom he knew in Russia. The matter had come to a head in September at the first meeting of the Seminary Council for the school year. Surprisingly, Pastor Reichert put forth a proposal to close the seminary. He saw no purpose in its further operation given the precarious situation of the church in the Soviet Union, a not surprising sentiment given that it coincided with what Malmgren had privately shared with others.

But naturally, after all the blood and sweat that Malmgren had put into the life of the seminary, such a blunt proposal by Reichert without his knowledge struck him as inappropriate. The council rejected Reichert’s suggestion without further ado, causing him to announce that he would no longer cooperate with the seminary. In fact, Reichert submitted twenty-one questions to the bishop on October 28 to which he expected written replies. Malmgren refused, citing his “imper-tinent tone,” but agreed to speak to him about these issues separately. This apparently wasn’t ac-ceptable to Reichert, and so at the end of the year Malmgren fired him, leaving the seminary with no full-time professor beside himself. (Pastor Bachmann was not a regular professor).¹⁹⁰ More-head’s timely letter of encouragement to Malmgren on October 21 has to be seen in light of the conflict with Reichert and the situation involving his son-in-law. One can

¹⁸⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, November 26, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁹⁰ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 135–36.

only imagine how re-assuring it must have been to receive a letter from his American friend who urged him to keep the seminary operating at all costs and that the LWC would foot the bill.¹⁹¹

Unfortunately, though, the conflict with Paul Reichert was not going away since he did not appear to be in the mood for reconciliation. In addition, Reichert also accused Malmgren of improprieties with the money given to him by American Lutherans. In response to these presumptuous charges, Malmgren immediately authorized a thorough auditing of his financial books by the High Church Council. In November, the council did just that and found the books to be “in blameless order,” as Malmgren informed his supporters in Leipzig. Malmgren, for his part, did not allow these accusations to go unanswered. He responded in kind, accusing Reichert of close ties to the OGPU, a clear illustration of how thoroughly the atmosphere in the Church had become poisoned.¹⁹²

Malmgren’s conflict with Reichert took on an even sharper tone when he attempted to replace his son-in-law at St. Peter’s, Heinrich Behrendts, with the recent graduate Emil Hanefeld. Hanefeld just so happened to be Malmgren’s other son-in-law, the husband of his daughter Adele! Naturally, charges of nepotism were lodged, all the more, as both of his sons-in-law would have been placed at one of the largest Lutheran parishes in Russia. On January 3rd, the church council of St. Peter’s complicated matters even further by calling Paul Reichert to be their next pastor. According to Malmgren, the head of the church council had been called into the OGPU offices on January 16th and told in no uncertain terms that if the Lutherans wanted to avoid disciplinary measures, Paul Reichert would, as an “older and experienced man,” be chosen as pastor. In other words, the church would be closed if they chose Hanefeld. Reichert was then

¹⁹¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, October 21, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁹² Tschöerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 99.

subsequently chosen as pastor on January 20. Malmgren was beside himself, not only due to what he considered the blatant interference of the OGPU, but also because Reichert had not formally resigned his call from the congregation he was serving in Novosaratovka (a suburb of Leningrad).¹⁹³

In sorting out this controversy, it is important to note that much of the information that we possess comes from witnesses close to Malmgren, including Malmgren himself. Fortunately, German historians with access to documents addressing the conflict have attempted to present a more balanced picture. They have gathered information from witnesses sympathetic to Malmgren who acknowledged his tendency towards an authoritarian style of administration. For example, historian Wilhelm Kahle cites the German General Consul in Leningrad, Richard Sommer, who tried to understand the conflict from both sides. Sommer acknowledged that the parishioners supporting Reichert were not simply stooges of the OGPU, but that the majority truly sympathized with his predicament. While the Lutheran parishioners did acknowledge Malmgren's manifold contributions to the Church and seminary, his strict authoritative manner in conducting affairs was not particularly well received. Sommer judged that Malmgren had ruled autocratically and acted in a high-handed manner, accepting no opinion but his own. In fact, it appears that the majority of the pastors in Leningrad and a majority of the students came down on the side of Reichert in this conflict.¹⁹⁴ Further complicating matters, it should be noted that Bruno Reichert, Paul's son, was a student at the seminary, too. Historian Helmut Tschoerner seems to get at the crux of the problem by comparing the backgrounds of the two men. Arthur

¹⁹³ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 136; Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 98.

¹⁹⁴ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 136–137; Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 100.

Malmgren was raised in the educated middle class [bourgeoisie] in the Baltics, afterwards spending long years as a pastor in a prominent congregation in the capital [St. Petersburg] of the Russian Empire. With an aristocratic bearing and accustomed, as a high official in the Church, to having his word accepted as law, Malmgren couldn't have been happy that Reichert so rudely challenged his authority.

In contrast to Malmgren, Reichert grew up as a son of the colonies on the Volga River. Although, he, too, had matriculated at Yuryev University in Dorpat, he spent close to twenty years serving a congregation in the village of Balzer near the Volga, and afterwards, in Novosaratovka, 10–15 kilometers outside Leningrad. Eugen Bachmann served with both Malmgren and Reichert at the seminary and even succeeded Malmgren at St. Anne's. He described Reichert as an "arch-conservative theologian," who nevertheless gave good practical advice to his students from his long years of service in the church. It's not quite certain what Bachmann meant by "arch-conservative," since Malmgren was described by others in a similar manner.¹⁹⁵ Generally an arch conservative would advocate more rather than less authority in the hands of the bishop.

The backgrounds of the men were representative, too, of the cultural conflict between classes in the Soviet Union. One doesn't have to accept the Marxist notion of perpetual hostility between the classes to understand that real differences existed within the Church. The expulsion of Pastor Eduard Luft in 1925 and Jakob Fritzler's attempts to take over Lutheran congregations because the old patterns of episcopal authority were not to be accepted in the "new Russia," rep-

¹⁹⁵ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 98–99. Edith Müthel, daughter of Pastor Emil Pfeiffer, remembers her father's vicarage under Reichert. Although a little girl, roughly about five years old, she remembers even into her nineties that Reichert would often let her ride on his back while he played horse with her. Somehow, one finds it difficult to imagine Malmgren acting in the same way, perhaps illustrating the two different cultures and characters of the men. See Edith Müthel to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

resent genuine differences between conservative and more liberal elements within the Church.¹⁹⁶ Bishops Meyer and Malmgren fought against these Congregationalist tendencies that were encouraged by the communists due to their more “socially democratic” nature. Dr. Morehead came down upon the side of the bishops, because he, too, believed that the Church needed a sound, hierarchical order.

While it’s true that Reichert had also been educated at Yuryev University in Dorpat where the hierarchical system of ecclesiology had been taught, he represented a different strain of pastor who did not accept the rigidly authoritative, no-questions-asked manner of the bishop. Even younger, respected pastors like Arthur Kluck were not always enamored with the old forms of leadership, although he was always respectful of the office of the bishop. The manner in which Reichert was elected against Bishop Malmgren’s wishes showed how impossible it was to command the Lutheran Church in the USSR in the 1930s as one had in the past. Malmgren indeed complained to Rendtorff in a January 18 letter that all of his “ecclesiastical functions exist in name only.”¹⁹⁷

While General Consul Sommer believed that neither side was free from blame in this affair, he concluded that the parishioners were more to blame than Malmgren because they knowingly used the OGPU to bring Malmgren down in stature. “Every means appeared right to them, if it brought them nearer to their expressed goal to throw the bishop out of the saddle and make it impossible for him to carry out any church activity.”¹⁹⁸ In fact, on September 19, 1934, even pastors from Leningrad would address a letter of complaint to the *Gustav Adolf Verein* about

¹⁹⁶ *Unsere Kirche*, No. 3,(1928). In a 1926/27 article entitled, “The Heritage of Luther,” Luft attacked the leadership of the Lutheran Church in the German Communist journal, *Das Neue Dorf*. See Heinrich Roemmich, “Die Ev. Luth. Kirche in Russland unter der Sowjetherrschaft,” 92.

¹⁹⁷ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 101.

¹⁹⁸ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 136–37.

Malmgren, stating that Malmgren was operating in close association with the OGPU! Subjecting Malmgren to the devices of the OGPU by sending the letter through the ordinary postal system was an act Sommer found simply appalling. In his private conversation with Reichert, Sommer received no answer for why this had been done. His fear, justifiably so, was that the OGPU censors would read the letter and it would not bode well for Malmgren's authority in religious matters.¹⁹⁹

With Malmgren licking his wounds from this battle, he now tried to find a replacement for his son-in-law, Behrendts, at the seminary. Yet every time he asked someone, he received the same response: the individual had been forbidden to teach at the seminary. Obviously frustrated, Malmgren now used his connections at the German consulate to have them spy on Reichert. In March 1933, Vice Consul Pfeiderer of the German consulate admitted that Reichert was conducting himself appropriately in his office at St. Peter's and no one in the congregation seemed to be complaining. Since Malmgren was giving bad grades to his son, Bruno, Paul Reichert brought him into St. Peter's as the second pastor and ordained Bruno himself in April 1933.

On April 26 Pfeiderer submitted a final report for his records, echoing Sommer in his explanation that Malmgren and Reichert "internally belong to different worlds." Discussing their personal enmity towards each other, Pfeiderer stated, "One reason is that the son-in-law of Malmgren did not receive Reichert's position. . . . On the relationship of Reichert with the local Soviet authorities, which the bishop has sketched very clearly, we can only offer suspicion. Although the victory in the election of the pastor, like the ordination of his son, could hardly have been possible without the cooperation of the organs [authorities]. . . . I met with the pastor per-

¹⁹⁹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 272; Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 136–37.

sonally... the conversation was cordial, but not open, because when the pastor spoke about how the peasants lived well on the collective farms I thought that the opinion of the bishop was in some measure well founded.”²⁰⁰ Of course, it is possible that Reichert was only exercising caution with Pfeleiderer, trying to appear as a respectful citizen. And yet, anyone who spoke approvingly of collectivization given what it had done to the parishioners would certainly have to be looked upon with some degree of skepticism, at the very least.

The mystery and suspicions will most likely remain, because the Reicherts’ congregation of St. Peter’s would be the last one to be closed in Leningrad and they would be the last pastors executed in 1938. It doesn’t take an active imagination to question how they had avoided imprisonment all of those years. The personal animosity that drove the relationship between Malmgren and Reichert had developed and festered without intervention for too many years. Suspicions could even be traced back to the Volga in 1922 when Commissar David Schultz tried to form an independent Lutheran Church under Communist control. When Pastor Friedrich Wacker blanched at his effrontery, he was kicked off the Volga region church council for insubordination to the communists. Regional church council member, Pastor Alexander Streck, was even threatened with prison. Wacker’s place would then be taken by—Paul Reichert.²⁰¹ In coming to conclusions in this sad and muddled affair, it is important not to commit the sin of tying all of those loose threads together too tightly. Many parishioners and pastors had taken the lesson of the Hansen-Muss case to heart and tried to lay low and keep the Lutheran Church alive by not angering the authorities. Julius Zahlit was just such an example. The Reicherts’ were another. The Reicherts’ would suffer persecution and eventually be executed for their faith.

²⁰⁰ Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 272.

²⁰¹ Alexander Streck to A.C. Ernst, May 6, 1922, NLC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

There is no evidence whatever from the files that they appealed for clemency to the OGPU/NKVD as their former masters. It would have been easy to do so, as other spies had often made just such an appeal. The Reicherts' would not, making it extremely unlikely and in fact, slanderous, to declare that they had been in league with their executors. Instead, the Reicherts' would keep their congregation alive and active Lutherans would join them in worshiping the Lord until the church was forced into extinction. Unfortunately the bitterness between the two Lutheran professors would do little to enhance the solidarity needed to preserve the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in its most difficult hour.

CHAPTER FIVE

1933–1935: TAXED AND PERSECUTED OUT OF EXISTENCE? THE SEMINARY'S DEMISE

How difficult it must have been for an American like Dr. Morehead to understand the nature of the Soviet Union and Stalin's cold-blooded rationale for building communism and propagating atheism in Russia. As 1932 ended, he quizzically commented upon the communists' desire to eradicate Christianity by the end of the second Five Year Plan: "Is not freedom of religion guaranteed in the constitution and organic law of the present government of the USSR?"¹ The people of the world, he said, were of the opinion that seminaries and churches could function legally in the Soviet Union. It was all so confusing. Citing the work of ARA under Herbert Hoover and the one million dollars spent by the NLC during the famine years, Morehead reminded Malmgren that 70 million Lutherans around the world were intensely interested in the fate of Lutheranism in the Soviet Union. While not interested in engaging in political activities, Morehead nonetheless queried Malmgren as to what they could do to help him and his fellow Lutherans.²

In February 1933, Malmgren responded to Morehead, acknowledging that the current Law on Religious Associations (April 1929) did allow for the registration and operation of seminaries. However, the state only reluctantly tolerated them, preferring instead to see them closed. In reality, the atheistic-materialistic worldview allowed room for only one ideology in Soviet

¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 30, 1932, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

² John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, December 30, 1932.

Russia. Explaining the goal of the communists, and finally sharing with Morehead what he had previously related to his German supporters, Malmgren admitted it would be “unspeakably difficult” to continue to operate the seminary. His conundrum was that soon those “without rights” would not be able to live in a large city, while at the same time a seminary was only allowed to exist in large cities.³ The Soviet Union thrived on such contradictions as they worked to destroy an institution like the village farm or the church.

In the meantime, the taxes levied upon the seminary were becoming more and more burdensome. In 1931, the ground rent and building tax totaled 259 rubles together. In 1932, the two taxes combined for a total of 2174 rubles. Now in 1933, it was announced that the seminary’s tax would be 5097 rubles! At this rate, the Soviet government would simply tax the seminary out of existence. In response Malmgren lamented, “One thing is certain. As far as I can see it today, our institution will not be directly shut down or forbidden by the government.”⁴ But Malmgren intimated that through chicanery and constant pressure, the government would simply force the Lutherans to give up. And so, Malmgren informed Morehead that by the summer, a decision had to be made on whether to close the seminary or not.⁵ At present there were only eleven students remaining. Six planned to graduate in the summer, so only five would be left. There were no current plans to add new students.⁶

Despite his previous differences with Bishop Malmgren, Bishop Meyer agreed with him about the Christian church’s current state, especially after the Soviet authorities turned up the heat against the church in 1929. With regard to the future of the Lutheran Church and seminary,

³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 17, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 17, 1933.

⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, February 17, 1933.

⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 7, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

he was in accord with Malmgren. In answer to Morehead's question whether there was a plan in Stalin's second Five Year Plan to close churches, Meyer, like Malmgren, offered a nuanced perspective. It was his conviction that the state would never publicly declare a resolution to that effect. They were too smart for that. But in the end, there was no doubt that they were fully committed to the Church's destruction. In one of the clearest statements about the state's relationship to the Church in 1933, Meyer explained the situation to Morehead from the perspective of the state. His words are worth quoting in their entirety because we get a reasoned assessment of the conclusions to which this well-informed bishop had come:

We recognize no religion, in whatever form it expresses itself, and can only in the best case endure it and in no case give it privileges or the possibility to contradict our ideology among the masses, or to discredit our economic reorganization and agitate against it. We prohibit no one from recognizing a religion or to observe its instructions; but we see religiosity as an antiquated, backward, Enlightenment-contradicting mentality, holding such people as inferior and placing them in no responsible post. The work of persons, those occupying themselves with the maintenance and dissemination of religion, the activity of spiritual persons, we hold for socially unnecessary, aiming at nothing profitable. Therefore we treat these persons like all others who do not live from their own profitable work but who illegally enrich themselves at the expense of the working class. We will make life as difficult as possible for all of these elements, above all through higher taxes and other disadvantages in satisfying their life needs. We come from the viewpoint that generally educated people cannot be convinced of the truth of religion. We contend that those whose profession is spiritual to the greatest extent earn easy income, and we will not allow people to live this kind of easy lifestyle in our state. If this spiritual worker takes all the burdens that we place upon him and continues to serve, then he is a fanatical or fanciful martyr. If we pursue our present policies on this question to their full consequence in the course of the next five years, we will come to the important moment when the youth will not only be educated to be non-religious but anti-religious [emphasis mine]. Then we will need to take no legal measures because religion will be as good as rejected from the life of the people; because it is clear that in order to organize the life of over 100 million people on a socialist basis with the rigorous regulation of the life of each person, then the practice of religion among these people must be given a death blow. We should not deceive ourselves when we accept that on these grounds spirituality is an enemy of our socialist economic institutions. So the necessity lies before us to remove them from their profession. For these reasons no one can reproach us that we are deviating from the prescriptions of religious freedom laid out in the Constitution. On the contrary, the law that every disruption of the practice of religion is punishable still stands. We only mean that in

respect to our state's influence upon the people, religion will be deprived but without direct, violent measures.⁷

It has to be remembered that Meyer was not simply “blowing smoke.” His perspective was formed through his interactions and conversations with representatives of the Kremlin. He knew them well, including President Kalinin, and recognized their plan to gradually erode the religious faith of youth. Since the future was to be communist and atheist, then it was only a question of time before Christianity would be destroyed. With respect to Morehead's offer to speak up on behalf of persecuted believers in the public sphere, Meyer foresaw no help coming on this front. He felt that the Prime Minister of France, Eduard Herriot, summed up the European perspective quite well. Meyer quoted him as saying that whatever happened internally in the USSR was immaterial, because that nation had unlimited opportunities for commerce. Therefore, Herriot's goal was for France to try and befriend the USSR. In other words, the Soviets were good for business and companies worldwide were lining up for access to its markets. Even though America had not as yet recognized the Soviet Union, Meyer had already noticed that there were hundreds if not thousands of American engineers working in the Soviet Union. Prime Minister Herriot's cautious diplomacy towards the USSR was no doubt driven by the fact that Citroen and Peugeot were already in Russia.⁸ In 1929, Henry Ford made his own splash into the Russian market, negotiating a 40 million dollar contract to construct a Ford auto plant in Nizhniy Novgorod. Unemployed Detroiters by the scores would make the journey to this strange land, some never to return, swallowed up in the vast reaches of the Gulag as suspicious foreigners. They would become victims of Stalin's Great Terror (1937–1938), to their horror the

⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

implications of their move only being revealed after it was too late. But for now, jobs were abundant and for business, there were profits to be made. No other company in the world would conduct as much business with Stalin as would Henry Ford from 1929–1936.⁹

An American Negro named Robert Robinson was a good example of those who found the Soviet Union to be a beacon for unemployed workers during the Great Depression. Robinson made the journey to Russia from Detroit in the early 1930s to find work in the burgeoning factory scene. Not only did he find work, his Soviet employers reminded him that racial discrimination did not exist in the USSR. Further opportunities for job advancement and education were also provided to Robinson. He even became a member of the Moscow City Council. So it was certainly not surprising that people throughout the world would come to see the USSR as the vanguard of world history while Western countries were floundering in an economic crisis that threatened to dismantle the capitalist system.¹⁰

But while most workers were sympathetic or indifferent to the Soviet experiment, Robinson believed in God and was always uncomfortable with the atheist indoctrination he received. He even attended services at the Catholic Church of St. Louis, right down the street from OGPU headquarters and a few blocks from Bishop Meyer's St. Peter and Paul Lutheran. It didn't take long for him to become disillusioned with communism, but he was trapped, being held against his will as a shining example of racial harmony in the USSR. Robinson would survive a total of 44 years in the USSR before escaping in 1974 to Uganda. A paraphrase of Joshua 1:9 would be on his lips every day: "Never fear anymore, for the Lord was and is with me."¹¹

⁹ Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia* (London: Penguin Press, 2008), Kindle, 30–34.

¹⁰ Robert Robinson, with Jonathan Slevin, *Black on Red: My 44 Years Inside the Soviet Union* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1988), 75–79, 107.

¹¹ Robert Robinson, with Jonathan Slevin, *Black on Red: My 44 Years Inside the Soviet Union*, 73, 251, 397.

Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union was mastering the art of propaganda among the nations while getting their companies to help him industrialize his nation. Given the changed climate in regard to international business, Bishop Meyer predicted that it wouldn't be long before the United States would recognize the Soviet Union. Meyer was therefore in full agreement with Malmgren that the Soviet state was becoming more and more powerful and there was little that the Davids of the church could do in facing this Goliath-like state. As far as the future of the seminary was concerned, he, too, felt that the status quo could not continue. Malmgren was the only regular professor where previously there had been six to eight lecturers working full-time. Moreover, no help could be expected from abroad. It stood to reason that foreign professors would not be given visas to help a seminary that the state had consigned to death. Meyer also recognized that the social position of the students was so precarious that "the few young people who announce that they will study for the pastorate are straight away considered to be martyrs."¹² In the end, Meyer also agreed with Malmgren that the seminary would not be forcibly closed but that the conditions for its further existence were as unfavorable as they could possibly be.¹³ And the West, for the most part, would remain silent and do business with Stalin.

A Harvest of Sorrow: Return of Famine?

If the troubles of the seminary were not enough to concern the bishops, the Soviet Union now looked to be on the verge of another famine that could potentially dwarf the previous one of ten years ago. Only Bishop Malmgren answered Dr. Morehead's direct question as to whether a famine was in the making and did so in rather extensive detail.¹⁴ Bishop Malmgren reiterated that

¹² Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1933.

¹³ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, February 3, 1933.

¹⁴ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer and Arthur Malmgren, March 23, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

there was a private censoring of letters going on, so he needed to be cautious in his answer. Officially, of course, he said that there was no famine because this would contradict the current agrarian policy. But he forced Morehead to think about it. "I will answer your question in the following way: We are experiencing a famine now for the third time since the great revolution. The first two had occurred due to forces of nature. [For example], the harvest had been insufficient due to drought, hailstorms, locusts and mice. This time it is different. The harvest overall was good, in some places very good. ... God had blessed our land with early rains, late rains and sunshine."¹⁵ In the Fall, though, the government's commissars took away from most of the uncollectivized farmers what they had harvested. Very little was left to survive until the next harvest. After the commissars' extortion, village communists came and took by force most of what had been left by the commissars. Apparently now throwing caution to the wind about his fears of what the censors might read, Malmgren could no longer help himself. He straightforwardly told Morehead that hunger was prevalent in the north of the Caucasus, on the coast of Murmansk, in the forests of the Urals, on the Volga and on the coasts of the Black Sea all the way to Siberia. In other words, in virtually the entire Soviet Union! Farmers were fleeing from the villages to the cities, only to be forcibly returned to their homes where their stomachs swelled up from malnutrition. As a result, they were literally dying in the streets. "Guilt for this misery is not due to failure of the crops or a bad harvest. The agrarian system alone carries the guilt and its enforcement by narrow-minded communists."¹⁶ Such words had spelled trouble for Kurt Muss ten years ago.

In reply to Morehead's question about humanitarian aid, all Soviet citizens needed help but

¹⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 30, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 30, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

precautions must be taken, Malmgren warned, so that the village communists would not come out the winner in any aid coming from abroad.¹⁷ The so-called “harvest of sorrow,” as historian Robert Conquest has termed it, was of enormous breadth even though it struck primarily in the region of the Ukraine. How had Morehead become aware of a famine that was not easily reported upon in the Soviet Union where the state controlled the press? As in all places where journalists seek out a story, there were men of conscience working alongside others who relished being among the powerful and duly reported what was expected of them. In short, there were heroes and villains.

British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, sympathetic enough to communism when he arrived in Moscow that he considered giving up his British citizenship and applying for the same in the Soviet Union, was one of the heroes. He was stunned and sickened by what he had seen in the Ukraine. His epiphany was all the more convincing given that he held impressive socialist credentials. After all, his father was a noted Socialist while his wife was the niece of the infamous Stalin apologists, Sidney and Beatrice Webb.¹⁸ Eluding supervision in Moscow, Muggeridge traveled throughout the north Caucasus and the Ukraine, and echoing Bishop Malmgren, witnessed a famine that “...was planned and deliberate; not due to any natural catastrophe like failure of rain, or cyclone, or flooding. An administrative famine brought about by the forced collectivization of agriculture ... supported by strong-arm squads from the military and the police.”¹⁹

Other journalists of a Socialist bent like Arthur Koestler, future author of the classic

¹⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, April 30, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁸ S.J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty, The New York Time's Man in Moscow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 200.

¹⁹ Malcolm Muggeridge, *Winter in Moscow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), xx–xxi.

critique of Stalinism, *Darkness at Noon*, wrote honestly about what they had seen. Koestler recalled the bodies of dead children, looking like “embryos out of alcohol bottles.”²⁰ Eugene Lyons, an American communist fellow traveler, had the shackles fall from his eyes when he saw what was happening in the Ukraine. Appalled by what he had witnessed and knowing that the Soviet censors would delete what he wrote, Lyons made sure that his articles were smuggled out to the West, much to the Soviets alarm.²¹ The Soviets were able, though, to have the famine basically downplayed or ignored in the West due to the gullibility of those who had not seen or could imagine the evil forces arrayed against the people and the church, especially during the past few years. Soviet propaganda was also served by journalists who valued worldly acclaim and praise above listening to one’s conscience.

Walter Duranty was the most infamous of these journalists, a *New York Times* writer who notoriously labeled the famine, “mostly bunk.”²² Although he eventually had to admit there had been great loss of life, Duranty often retreated to his favorite phrase, “You can’t make an omelet without breaking eggs.”²³ Of utmost importance to Duranty in 1933 was an agreement being forged between the Americans and Soviets—official recognition of the Soviet Union. His glowingly optimistic report of Stalin’s Five Year Plan won him a Pulitzer Prize in 1932, gaining for himself a certain popularity among the fashionable elite in society.²⁴ Muggeridge and other less-famous journalists who simply reported the truth of the famine weren’t accorded much of a hearing in contrast to those like Duranty, who were feted in the field of public opinion. Years

²⁰ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 202.

²¹ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 168.

²² Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 210.

²³ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 222.

²⁴ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 223–24.

later, when Muggeridge was asked whether his future prospects had suffered on account of his reports, he expressed surprise at such a question after the horrors he had witnessed: “*Me?* What happened to *me?* Oh yes. I couldn’t get work.”²⁵ (Emphasis mine).

Bishop Meyer’s Warning: “[The Government] is the Antichrist, Be on Your Guard!”

Bishop Meyer must have known that his health was beginning to fail him in 1933. There was a long pause in his correspondence with Dr. Morehead, from the beginning of February to the end of October, with the interlude of a brief message of Easter greetings in April. According to an unnamed female member of the *dvatsatka* at Sts. Peter and Paul, Meyer had come to the conclusion that it was time to prepare his fellow Lutherans for what he believed would become the church’s future in a state irredeemably hostile to Christianity. She recalled that the church was often full when he had the opportunity to preach, and now his previously cautious demeanor gave way to a boldness that matched the seriousness of the times. In fact, she said that his sermons were of such a sharp nature that she feared the government would come for him any night and take him away for good. Only the hand of God was protecting him from the authorities.

Bishop Meyer called the government the Antichrist in his sermons, warning the parishioners to be on their guard.²⁶ Surely the government had watched him for some time, and perhaps now because of the danger to the church or the fact that he was advanced enough in age, he decided to become more direct in his criticism. Gathering together nine of the parishioners (four men and five women), he prepared them for the worst. This female parishioner remembered him saying, “Of the pastors only one remains [Alexander Streck] and soon the time

²⁵ Taylor, *Stalin’s Apologist*, 206.

²⁶ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 148.

will come when there will be no one, also no more church building; so each of you must, like the first Christians, baptize, conduct weddings, come together for communion, teach the youth, bury the dead and do everything, so that the faith that you received from your fathers will remain.... What you do, do in full faith that it is just as good as if a servant of God has done it in a church building.”²⁷

Meyer further instructed them that they should learn the baptismal and wedding services by heart, asking the godparents whether they believed in God, and if so, that in this difficult time they would recognize God required them to take responsibility for the souls of their godchildren. Additionally, these selected parishioners were told to teach the children the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the basics of the Faith. Meyer predicted that soon there would be no more Bibles. They would be thrown away and burned. His words must have rung like alarm bells in the ears of these parishioners: “Pray, pray and believe. . . . It is all the same, whether man or woman, only believe in what you are doing. Soon, soon will come the time when all this will be necessary and God will demand it of you.”²⁸

This recollection described a bishop who was now utterly convinced that the old church structures would soon be eradicated. Meyer’s words, echoing those of Helmut Hansen and Julius Zahlit in 1929 about returning to the days of the Early church, accurately describe what was happening to the Christian faith in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. It was no longer easy for believers to compartmentalize their citizenship in the Soviet state and still publicly confess Christianity. Lutherans would need to be prepared for a day, a day coming soon, when the seminary and the churches would be closed. Meyer and his colleague, Bishop Malmgren, were completely

²⁷ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 149.

²⁸ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 149.

convinced of this state of affairs. They both seemed to understand that the task now set before them was to fight for the preservation of the Christian faith for future generations. As such, they tried to inform as many pastors and parishioners as possible to prepare for the day when the church would be forced to go underground.

In light of his concern for the future pastoral leadership of the Lutheran Church, Bishop Meyer ordained Bruno Toryassan and Ralph Jurgens in late August of 1933 at Sts. Peter and Paul in Moscow. Both would subsequently be sent to serve short-term vicarages in the northern Cau-casus region under the tutelage of Bruno's father, Ossip. Despite Meyer's intentions, in November Bruno would be forcibly inducted into the army where he would serve until 1937. In reality, though, his life was actually spared due to the fact that his army service coincided with the most dangerous period of persecution for servants of the church. Bruno would live a full life and see the restoration of the Lutheran Church in the 1990s, finally being able to serve as a pastor in his old age. He passed away in Vyborg at the age of 97 in 2009, a powerful witness to the hopes of Bishops Meyer and Malmgren for the preservation of the Church. Ralph, however, would not survive the 1930s, dying of tuberculosis in a Gulag camp.²⁹

While the bishops were preparing for the worst, those convicted in the Hansen-Muss Case were now completing their sentences. A good number of them had been forced to work on the White Sea Canal, an undertaking symbolic of the gargantuan projects associated with Stalin's plan to rapidly industrialize the Soviet Union. By all accounts, the conditions were indescribable and the cold and hunger frightful for those who had experienced it. Worse yet, the death rate (approximately 25,000 by most estimates) was horrific but justified in Stalin's mind so long as it helped build him a modern nation as quickly as possible. Included among those sentenced to the

²⁹ Tanya Ryumina, "May God Preserve You...."

far north and forced to participate in the building of the canal were the three Freifeldt sisters (Magdalina, Marta and Elsa), Margo Jurgens [freed August 4, 1933], Erna Hansen and Benita Kossetti.³⁰ Maxim Gorky, the Soviets' favorite apologist in the artistic community, lauded the canal's construction in the preface and conclusion to his book entitled *The Canal Named for Stalin*. One of the themes trumpeted by the regime was the transformation of former enemies of the state who now saw the light through honest, hard work. Of course, the tools used to build the canal were makeshift at best. Dull pickaxes tied to wooden staves with leather or string, hammers employed instead of dynamite to break up large rocks, wheelbarrows and scaffolding made by hand were some examples of the primitive technology utilized to, as propaganda would have it, "change nature." The construction was a fabulous success but at great human cost, completed in August 1933, a little less than two years time.³¹

Despite the hardships, the Sunday school teachers of pastors Hansen and Muss all seemed to have survived their three-year stints in the Gulag camps. Some were even released early. For example, Luisa Muss is known to have begun working as a nurse as early as September 1932 in Leningrad. She married Otto Tumm that year, the seminary student who was arrested along with her and sentenced in September 1930.³² The relationship between Luisa and Otto is illustrative of a certain bonding that occurred between many of the men and women who suffered for their faith in the Hansen-Muss Case. Apparently in these trying circumstances, they found spouses of like

³⁰ Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 63–65; P-6790, List 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, 361–362; Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph;" St. Petersburg Martyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church; Евангелическо-Лютеранский Приход Святого Михаила (г. Санкт-Петербург) [Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Michael's (City of St. Petersburg)] Музей-Прихожане-Женщины [Museum-Female Parishioners]; P-6790, List 13, 30, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³¹ Applebaum, *Gulag*, 64, 67–71.

³² Muss-Tumm Family Photo and Letter Collection.

mind and faith. For example, Elsa Freifeldt, the daughter of the late Bishop Conrad Freifeldt, married Gustav Golde, a crafts' teacher for Kurt Muss' Busy Bees and a nephew of Bishop Theophil Meyer.³³ Parishioners of Jesus Christ Lutheran Church, Elsa Golubovskaya (Friedenberg) and Konstantin Andrievsky, a lawyer, also wed.³⁴ Even the youngest among them, Mikhail Mudyugin and Dagmara Schreiber, were married in August 1932 after both had been released in October 1930 with time served due to their youth.³⁵

Upon his release, Mudyugin decided to pursue a secular education. After he married Dagmara in 1932, he completed evening classes at the Institute of Foreign Languages. Due to his prison record, he wasn't able to receive a passport (now required) to live in Leningrad, forcing him and his wife to depart for the Ural Mountains region. There he found work as a chemistry and German teacher. Mudyugin never gave up the desire to return to his beloved Leningrad, but upon his homecoming he was denied residency. Again he and Dagmara moved, this time to Novgorod where he worked as a heating technician at the factory "Krasny Farforist" (Red Porcelain). He kept trying to regain residency papers for Leningrad, but it would be many years before he was allowed to return.³⁶

Given the confusion between Dr. Morehead and Bishop Malmgren on the state of the seminary, Malmgren thought it imperative that they meet somehow in Germany during the summer. Malmgren had read that Morehead would support the seminary at all costs, yet understood

³³ St. Petersburg Martyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church.

³⁴ P-34994, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁵ Евангелическо-Лютеранский Приход Святого Михаила (г. Санкт-Петербург) [Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Michael's (City of St. Petersburg)] Музей-Прихожане-Женщины [Museum-Female Parishioners].

³⁶ НГ-Религии [NG Religion], "Крутой маршрут архиепископа: Михаил Мудьюгин прошел путь от инженера до архиерея" ["Cool Journey of the Archbishop: Mikhail Mudyugin Path from Engineer to Bishop"], by Архимандрит Августин (Никитин) [Archimandrite Augustine (Nikitin)], March 2, 2005.

that Morehead thought there might be no alternative but to close it. Only with a face-to-face meeting could they come to some firm conclusions on the future of the seminary, especially since the LWC was its primary means of support [and the American NLC was the LWC's major funder]. Reading that he might be in Europe near the end of July, Malmgren proposed meeting somewhere in Germany. Until that time, he would do what he could to acquire a visa.³⁷ In August, Morehead wrote to Malmgren to assure him that what he had "read between the lines" of his previous letters was not true. He would instead do everything in his power to keep the seminary open, at least as much as it depended upon him and the LWC. Morehead had only broached the question about closing the seminary because he had heard from European friends that Malmgren was seriously considering it. He only wanted the truth of the real situation in the Soviet Union, which he could only get from the bishops. Given that their communications at times consisted of rumors and secondhand information, a personal meeting could only clear up any misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Prefacing his remarks along the lines of Romans 10:1, Morehead assured Malmgren: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the people of Soviet Russia has been and is that they might be saved."³⁸ Morehead reminded him that his conviction had always been that he wanted to do whatever possible to keep the Lutheran Church alive in Russia so that when the day of freedom arrived, God would give them the chance to witness "to the full Gospel of Jesus Christ among your people." Returning to the theme of Romans 10, Morehead echoed St. Paul, "But how can they hear without a preacher?"³⁹ The seminary always occupied an essential position in any hopes that that Morehead held for the Lutheran Church in Russia. The seminary would preserve

³⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, June 24, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁸ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 4, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

³⁹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 4, 1933.

the Lutheran Church and prepare it for the “day of opportunity” to advance Christ’s kingdom. Ultimately, though, Morehead acknowledged that only the authorities of the Lutheran Church in Russia and the seminary could intelligently decide whether to close the seminary or not. But the LWC, for its part, would stand ready to support them until the end.⁴⁰ Appealing to history, Morehead did not want it to be said “by any future church historian” that the seminary had been closed for economic reasons.⁴¹ As a matter of fact, Morehead wanted the odium for any closing of the seminary to rest with “... the use of force by the anti-Christian agencies within Soviet Russia.”⁴² Morehead and his supporters were committed to being their brother’s keeper.

Unfortunately, their hoped-for meeting would not take place in 1933. Morehead expressed his deep regret that the Executive Committee of the LWC could not get a quorum for the summer and now planned to meet in November. He, too, had longed to finally meet Bishop Malmgren, but it couldn’t be helped. The Vice President of the LWC and good personal friend of both men, Bishop Ludwig Ihmels of Leipzig, had recently died. Dr. Perhsson would now take over his position and Bishop Malmgren could communicate any concerns to Morehead directly through him.⁴³ Of course, as the sole full-time professor at the seminary, Bishop Malmgren could not attend any session of the Executive Committee of the LWC in November since the school year would be in session. Malmgren would actually get a visa for Germany in August and travel at that time to Wiesbaden for his health. Nonetheless, Malmgren was thrilled that the LWC was still on board with continuing its support for the seminary. Morehead’s ability to lift Malmgren’s spirits was much appreciated, because he had again despaired and come to the conclusion that

⁴⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 4, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, September 4, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴² John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, September 5, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴³ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, September 4, 1933.

the work was hopeless. But once again, he had overcome it so long as God gave him grace to continue carrying on His work. “How much longer?” Malmgren pondered.”I don’t know, only God knows. I will soon be 73 years old. I’m not a youngster anymore; nonetheless my body and spirit are still able to do the work. And if God the Lord can still use me, I’ll let Him use me. But you, highly honored dear brother, have also given me joy from your August 4 letter. I heartily thank you.”⁴⁴ Thus encouraged, Bishop Malmgren began the ninth and final year of the seminary.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, though, the problems of higher and higher taxes on the seminary and correspondingly smaller income would not go away. For example, the *Gustav Adolf Verein* had covered the deficit of the 1930/1931 and 1931/1932 school years. But in the past year, the LWC, which had basically covered the operating costs of the seminary in the past, only covered 1/3 of the costs, forcing the Verein to pick up most of the rest. The state now gobbled up almost half of the budget through taxes (10, 622 rubles out of 25, 951). As a consequence of these impossible demands from the state, the seminary would actually begin the school year of 1933–1934 with a total of 3 rubles, 15 kopecks in its bank account! Could they really continue at that rate, given that the OGPU was also haranguing and frightening away students and lecturers? And after all these complications, where could Bishop Malmgren possibly place his students? In these complex times, the congregations earnestly desired pastors but could neither provide housing nor financial support.⁴⁶

Morehead seemed a little mystified by the issue of deficits, apparently not privy to the

⁴⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 22, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁴⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, August 22, 1933.

⁴⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, November 1, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

exact statistical imbalance. “But, my dear brother, while you refer to deficits, you do not state definitely the present total indebtedness of the Seminary, due to such deficits.”⁴⁷ Reassuring him that the LWC would provide financial cover, Morehead asked for definite information as to the total of the deficit. He immediately sent out \$1500.00 from the LWC in early September and wrote to Dr. Ulmer of the Lutheran Gotteskasten in Erlangen. Since Ulmer’s organization worked with the LWC, they could provide even more funds to make up the deficit. The inability to arrange face-to-face meetings was complicating cooperation between the two friends in the life and death struggle for the seminary and Church.⁴⁸

The Soviet Union and American Demands for Religious Freedom

In the fall of 1933, while Bishop Malmgren and Dr. Morehead concerned themselves with the operation of the seminary, serious negotiations leading towards official recognition were taking place between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the process of their discussions, American and Russian negotiators haggled over what kind of religious freedom agreement could be forged between the two countries. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt placed the issue of religious freedom for American citizens working in the Soviet Union high on the agenda. The Soviet’s negotiator, Maxim Litvinov, was genuinely perplexed by the president’s interest in religion. He was prepared to discuss repayment of former debts, the use of Soviet propaganda in America, but religious freedom? “No Americans have ever complained against religious restriction while in Russia.” Apparently he concluded that Roosevelt was absorbed with a nonexistent problem to the detriment of solving the more important economic issues that were of

⁴⁷ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, September 5, 1933.

⁴⁸ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, September 5, 1933.

interest to the Soviets.⁴⁹

On this topic there was a genuine disconnect between the two men. The president took religious freedom seriously and felt that this right had to be guaranteed for Americans in Russia first before the other topics could be discussed. Roosevelt even chuckled when he remembered telling Litvinov that he was willing to bet that five minutes before he died, he would want to make peace with God.⁵⁰ A shrewd politician, Roosevelt was aware that influential religious leaders in America like Dr. John Morehead had been very concerned with the treatment of religious believers in Russia. It seems that the president even requested that Monsignor Michael Keegan and Cardinal Patrick Hayes of New York draw up some bulletin points for discussion. Roosevelt wanted not only religious rights for Americans in the Soviet Union but ultimately hoped that such rights might be secured for the Soviet people. Freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, the release of religious believers from the Gulag camps, cessation of propaganda against God in the USSR: these were issues of importance to him.⁵¹ Given his purposeful actions directed against Christians since 1929, these requests must have occasioned a cynical guffaw from Stalin.

Whatever Stalin and Litvinov's concerns, Roosevelt knew that he would need to placate religious Americans if he was going to succeed in pushing through recognition of the USSR. The ACRRM certainly loomed large in his thoughts given the influence of its members. If an embassy were to be opened in the Soviet Union, it was important to Roosevelt that the personnel

⁴⁹ John Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union: The Decision to Recognize* (Raleigh, NC: Camberleigh and Hall, 1980), 134, 160.

⁵⁰ Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union*, 140.

⁵¹ Michael Cassella-Blackburn, *The Donkey, the Carrot, and the Club: William C. Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations, 1917–1948* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 97.

have the right to teach their children the Christian faith. Catholics of America, while divided over recognition, gave Roosevelt kudos for showing that a capitalist power was not simply focused upon the profit margins but took spiritual matters seriously. And in fairness to the president, his concern for religious freedom by all accounts appears to have been genuine.⁵²

Even though the Soviet leadership remained skeptical, the Foreign Commissariat prepared a statistical memo (only one) about how many churches, cathedrals and monasteries existed in the Soviet Union. They also listed the religious schools and to which denomination they belonged, along with how many religious groups existed before and after the Bolshevik Revolution. But had the Roosevelt Administration done its homework, it would have reviewed the memos on persecution of Christians prepared by the U.S. Legation in Riga over the past several years, as well as speak to religious leaders in the know like Fr. Edmund Walsh of Georgetown or Dr. Morehead himself. In the past, those leaders had written upon just this very topic to President Hoover. Surely President Roosevelt could have at least consulted with the previous administration? Given that the president took pains to address an issue of little interest to those clamoring for recognition of the USSR, it is mystifying that he would ultimately put little pressure upon Stalin, who refused to allow any interpretation of religious and civil rights that contradicted his own 1929 Law on Religious Associations.⁵³

The Roosevelt Administration was at least successful in securing religious rights for its citizens in the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ But as to how extensive those rights would be defended, only the future would reveal. Meanwhile on the evening of November 16, the agreement was officially signed and the United States recognized the Soviet Union. As the din from the toasts subsided

⁵² Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union*, 156, 159–61.

⁵³ Cassella-Blackburn, *The Donkey, the Carrot and the Club*, 100, 102.

⁵⁴ Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union*, 163.

and the celebration wound down in Washington, DC that night, the Undersecretary of State, William Phillips, remembered Roosevelt saying to Litvinov: “There is one other thing. You must tell Stalin that the anti-religious program is wrong; God will punish you Russians if you go on persecuting the church.”⁵⁵ Baffled to the end by Roosevelt’s persistent pronouncements of religious faith and thinking it of no diplomatic import, a mystified Litvinov asked, “Does he really believe in God?”⁵⁶ The Riga Legation, including a young diplomat by the name of George Kennan (who would go on to great fame as a Sovietologist), was suitably disappointed in the final agreement. Cognizant of the lack of freedom existing in the Soviet Union, the diplomats knew that Soviet assurances regarding basic human rights were of little value.⁵⁷ Events would prove them to be correct in their assumptions. But for his part, Bishop Meyer turned out to be a true prophet. The United States had recognized the Soviet Union by the end of 1933, just as he had said it would.

Regardless of the American government’s naiveté on matters of religion in the Soviet Union, the number of Lutheran pastors was dwindling fast by the end of 1933. Meyer now confided to Morehead that there were only 45 pastors serving the Lutheran Church in Russia, including “adjuncts” (kuesters) while excluding the two bishops. In Leningrad and its surrounding region there were 9; in Moscow, 2; in the Volga region, 8; in the Ukraine, 12; in the Crimea, 3; in the north Caucasus, 6; in Tashkent, there was one pastor (Malmgren’s son-in-law, Heinrich Behrendts), and in Baku and Vladivostok, also one. There were still two candidates in Leningrad who had as yet not been ordained, and three young pastors who had been diverted into a work

⁵⁵ Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union*, 152.

⁵⁶ Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union*, 152.

⁵⁷ Richman, *The United States and the Soviet Union*, 158–59.

detail for the military (including Johannes Lel and Bruno Toryassan). Furthermore, 26 pastors had been deported to concentration camps where five had died and three had been released, but had not yet returned to pastoral service.⁵⁸

In the economic sphere, the poverty of Lutheran parishioners was as bad as it had ever been. Writing to Morehead at the end of October, Meyer announced that only 300 rubles had been sent from parishioners to support the High Church Council and its officials for the year of 1933! The Council's finances had been exhausted and when the next round of state taxes would be levied at the start of 1934, Meyer knew that the 1000 rubles in the treasury would not cover the expected 3800 ruble tax. As a result, Meyer feared that his private property, house and clothing would be forcibly seized and sold. While he knew that the Great Depression was impoverishing Americans, he pleaded with Morehead not to "leave us in a stitch." Not wanting to appear too demanding, though, Meyer soothed him by reminding him that Russian Lutherans all knew his name and held it in honor because "through brotherly love you have saved us."⁵⁹

But even with all of the Church's troubles, nothing prepared Meyer and his family for the heartbreaking news that would stun them that September. Describing this event as "the most difficult time of my life," Meyer learned that his youngest son, Traugott, had been arrested at the Austrian Embassy where he was employed. The government had seized the most valuable objects he owned along with more than \$100.00 in cash. The family could not see or speak with him, only being allowed to send him small sums of money from time to time. Meyer's daughter Elisabeth now had to provide for all of the family and her health had only just recovered. "In times like these," Meyer reflected, "believing Christians can only seek their refuge with the

⁵⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 29, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁵⁹ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 29, 1933.

Father in heaven, who has promised that not a hair from our head will fall without His will.”⁶⁰

Dr. Morehead sought to console his good friend in his anguish, assuring him of “...my sincere and deep sympathy for you in all your affliction and of my intercessory prayer on your behalf that God may mercifully grant you all that sufficiency of grace which will enable you to bear every trial and sorrow in patient and true faith, and that in His own good time He may deliver you safely and happily out of all your troubles to the praise of His goodness and mercy and grace. Amen!”⁶¹ Morehead was attempting to see what he might be able to accomplish in securing Traugott’s release through diplomatic channels, but he was also concerned that he not do anything that might cause more harm. In regard to Meyer’s request for something on the order of a “Hilfsaktion” for Russian Lutherans suffering from the effects of famine, Morehead feared that there was little that could be done. When the famine of the early 1920s occurred, Americans had been invited to the country by the regime-friendly Maxim Gorky and been allowed a certain freedom to conduct famine relief. None of those stipulations applied this time. First, Americans were more concerned with their own citizens suffering from hunger and want during the Great Depression; but secondly, the Soviet state was no longer interested in allowing foreigners the opportunity to roam freely throughout their land. Although American Lutherans remained sympathetic to do whatever they could for their suffering brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union, conditions had changed for the worse even while politicians congratulated one another that it was new day.⁶²

⁶⁰ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, October 29, 1933.

⁶¹ John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, December 5, 1933, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶² John Morehead to Theophil Meyer, December 5, 1933.

1934 — Holding out Hope: “The Lord of the Church Can and Will Help Us, When His Time Comes”

Naturally, the New Year did not bring with it a lessening of the burdens for those serving as pastors in the Lutheran Church. The LWC had been able to send a Christmas package with food items through Torgsin, but this was only a temporary measure and would soon run out.⁶³ Nevertheless, pastors’ families had already learned to survive with less. As the daughter of a pastor, Edith Müthel had learned to love lentils because they were cheap and could be eaten or used in soups.⁶⁴ Still, what money Morehead could send was greatly appreciated by Bishop Meyer. After all, he confessed, “When one is so abandoned and lives in such distressing conditions as we do in this present time in our land, then every sign of brotherly love has great worth, and above all when it comes from so faithful and proven a friend as you have been for such a long time.”⁶⁵ For those pastors who still defied the law and traveled to other towns to conduct services, no transportation assistance was forthcoming. The younger pastors often traveled on foot, even during the winter. And to add insult to injury, almost all of these pastors were suffering under an extraordinary tax burden. It was especially difficult for those pastors who had schoolchildren. The children were not allowed to attend public schools, and the old church schools were either converted to public use or no longer existed since they were against the law.⁶⁶ For that reason, Edith Müthel was very surprised when in the fall of 1931 she and her sister Gretchen were allowed to attend the local public school. Her father had irregularly homeschooled the children, so she remembered the joy that she and her sister experienced in

⁶³ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 26, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁶⁴ Edith Müthel to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

⁶⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 26, 1934.

⁶⁶ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 26, 1934.

finally being allowed to attend the local school.⁶⁷

In keeping with the increasing utilization of communist principles in the schools, groups of students were formed with one individual giving the answers for the group and the group being graded on that student's ability to answer the homework assignment. Müthel remembered that she was the brigade leader for nine students while her sister Gretchen was the leader of her own brigade. Edith felt comfortable in the school and she and Gretchen got along well with their classmates. One month passed uneventfully until suddenly her status as the child of a pastor was made public. One day all the classes were called into the courtyard by the school's principal. All the teachers were present, but no one seemed to know what the gathering was all about. In front of the entire school, Gretchen and Edith were now accused of being "class enemies" who had appeared among the ranks of Soviet schoolchildren. This was wholly unexpected since it was suggested that they should study at the school. Their fellow classmates were equally perplexed. Edith especially remembered two teachers, Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Konradi, who spoke with unbridled arrogance in their accusations, cursing them before their classmates. The result: Gretchen and Edith were expelled.⁶⁸

Edith never forgot this humiliating moment. In the late 1980s she read in the Soviet German language newspaper, *Neues Leben*, about the "meritorious teachers" named Schmidt and Konradi who were celebrating their 50-year teaching anniversary. Although she acknowledged that they were good teachers, she wondered if they had commiserated with her and Gretchen when they themselves were sent to the "labor army," the fate of those of German ethnicity who were deported in 1941 to Siberia and placed in barbed wire settlements. Did they remember two

⁶⁷ Müthel, *An Gottes Hand*, 45.

⁶⁸ Müthel, *An Gottes Hand*, 46.

little girls whom they had insulted and expelled before the entire school, labeling them the “greatest of criminals?” “That was inhuman. That we could never forget.”⁶⁹ But these were the circumstances under which pastors and their children lived. Lacking financial means, subject to the calumnies of the press and community, driven from their homes. It is a truly a wonder that so many pastors remained faithfully at their posts. These were those for whom Meyer, Malmgren and Morehead prayed and sought support even to the detriment of their own health and safety.

Early in the year, Bishop Malmgren provided some context from the Church’s past in answer to Morehead’s request for information on the number of pastors. When the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in 1917, he recalled, there were 183 pastors serving the Lutheran Church and 8 students preparing for ordination. As of January 1934, from these 191, there were only 17 left in the pastoral office with one still being held in prison. Of the other 171 [sic.—should be 173], Malmgren said that they had emigrated, retired, died or been “corrupted” in some manner. Given the declining number of parishioners and the hardships that pastors had to face just to carry out their ministry, Malmgren was seeing less and less reason for the seminary’s continuation. With the prospects for future service in the Church extremely dire, very few were applying to enter the seminary.⁷⁰

But Malmgren never gave up easily. He decided to send out a letter to the district presidents of the Church, asking them whether there were any prospective students for 1934–1935. Nothing less than the future of the seminary would depend upon the answers he received. He was

⁶⁹ Mützel, *An Gottes Hand*, 46; Edith Mützel, *Я Помню: Из Петрограда в Петербург через Поволжье и Сибирь—Судьба Дочери Пастора* [*I Remember: From Petrograd to Petersburg through the Volga and Siberia—The Fate of the Daughter of a Lutheran Pastor*] (St. Petersburg, Russia: Tsentralizovannaya Religioznaya Organizatsiya-Evangelicheskaya Luteranskaya Tserkov, 2015), 82–84.

⁷⁰ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 20, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

hoping that with Friedrich Wacker's and Heinrich Behrendts' potential return from concentration camp and exile, he might secure their services as professors for the seminary.⁷¹ He apparently was in contact with Wacker, who, due to the successful intervention of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had been released from his Siberian prison camp in 1933. Wacker was now living in Malaya Vishera, approximately 100 kilometers outside of Leningrad, which is the distance by law he was required to live from a major city. Wacker had obtained his freedom with the stipulation that he refrain from "preaching activities," but the game former dean couldn't abandon his students no matter the danger.⁷² Malmgren had also come to an agreement just before Christmas with a graduate from the seminary in 1929, Woldemar Wagner, who was serving the congregation of St. Catherine's just outside Leningrad. Wagner had been one of those Volga region kuesters who had coordinated relief with Pastor A.C. Ernst and the NLC back in the days of the famine. Now he would assist the seminary in the Practical Theology Department. With Wagner on board and the potential of returning professors from internment, Malmgren forced himself to hope for an extension of the seminary's existence.⁷³

But while Malmgren was in Berlin in the summer of 1934, a meeting with Soviet diplomat, Lev Khinchuk, quickly discouraged him about returning his son-in-law, Heinrich Behrendts, to the staff of the seminary. Khinchuk had encouraged Malmgren back in 1932 when Behrendts was arrested, assuring him that his son-in-law would not be sent to a concentration camp and that his own person would be protected. But it was now 1934 and with the Nazis having come to

⁷¹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 20, 1934.

⁷² Mikhail Shkarovsky, "Новомученик Пропст Фридрих Ваккер," ["New Martyr, District President Friedrich Wacker], accessed April 8, 2016.

⁷³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, January 20, 1934; Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 338; "Открытый список": Вольдемар Богданович Вагнер [Open List: Woldemar Bogdanovich Wagner], accessed December 11, 2017.

power in Germany, German influence in the Soviet Union had been marginalized. Even though Khinchuk had told Malmgren to come to him if he had any problems, the ambassador did not think it wise to even bring Behrendts back to serve at St. Peter's. The Hitler regime was clearly having an adverse effect upon the state's view of German Lutherans in the Soviet Union. In fact, in the near future Lutherans of German ethnicity would frequently be accused of serving as spies for Nazi Germany. In light of the changed environment, Behrendts remained in Tashkent, serving a Lutheran congregation of German speakers.⁷⁴

While both bishops worried about the circumstances in which their own pastors lived, Bishop Meyer could not forget that his own son, Traugott, had now been incarcerated in a Moscow prison for four months. He and his family had not been able to see or speak with him, although they were allowed to continue sending small sums of money to him every month. Meyer had received word that Traugott's trial was coming in a few weeks, and he feared that his son would be sent to a labor camp far away.⁷⁵ Unbeknownst to him, though, Morehead had been accumulating more information on Traugott's situation. The old NLC employee, Pastor Scheduling, had learned that Meyer's elder son had defected many years ago from the Soviet Union. Although he had served in the White Army, the elder son eventually joined the Red Army as a pilot after the Bolshevik Revolution. Apparently this son had then escaped from the Soviet Union, flying his plane to Romania. According to Scheduling's information gleaned from a Soviet official, the Soviets had always wanted to get information on the son and the Meyer family had suffered as a result. Bishop Meyer had been questioned on this matter many times and admitted to Scheduling that his son had escaped with the plane, but he didn't know where he was hiding.

⁷⁴ Mikhail Shkarovsky, "Епископ Артур Малмгрен" ["Bishop Arthur Malmgren"], accessed April 15, 2013.

⁷⁵ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, January 26, 1934.

Scheding speculated that Traugott was being punished for his brother's actions, but ultimately no one really knew. It is just as likely that the OGPU could have been attacking the bishop by imprisoning his son.⁷⁶ In reality there was no shortage of reasons for persecuting the family of the representative of an archaic institution that Stalin would just as soon see disappear.

Although he had yet to meet the new ambassador to the Soviet Union, William Bullitt, knowing Morehead's connections, Meyer wondered if he might not be able to interest him in Traugott's case, as well as those of the banned pastors of the Lutheran Church. Perhaps Morehead's introduction might make it easier for Meyer to make Bullitt's acquaintance? Whatever the case, Meyer stood firm in his faith, proclaiming, "Whether men can or want to help us, we don't know. But we certainly know that the Lord of the church can and will help us, when His time comes."⁷⁷ Before that time would come, though, the Lutheran Church would suffer additional losses. In the meantime, two more pastors serving in the Ukraine had been arrested. In Zhitomir, Gustav Uhle had been arrested and deported for three years to Kazakhstan. Pastor Peter Withol, who had graduated from Malmgren's preachers' course with the Pfeiffer brothers in 1925, had been arrested in Lugansk. Added to all of these alarming events was the latest sad tidings that Pastor Heinrich Becker, who graduated from the seminary in 1929, had died of typhus on January 10th in the Volga River city of Engels. He left behind a wife and three small children. Despite these sad tidings, Meyer did not forget to enquire after the health of Dr. Morehead. It was a measure of the man and his character. Unfortunately, this sorrowful letter would be the last letter that Bishop Meyer would ever write to Dr. Morehead.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ W.L. Scheding to John Morehead, March 25, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁷⁷ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, Jan 26, 1934.

⁷⁸ Theophil Meyer to John Morehead, Jan 26, 1934; Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 333, 341, 384.

Struggling to acquire as much information as he could from the bishops, Morehead believed that the reduction in support from Americans was not solely due to the Great Depression, but was occasioned by a lack of concrete information from the Lutheran Church in Russia. He mildly reprimanded Malmgren that he received “so little definite information from you about the Seminary” that it was difficult to praise the work of the seminary to American Lutherans.⁷⁹ In Malmgren’s defense, he did give information but was very cautious about what he included in a letter that would likely be subject to the prying eyes of the OGPU. That is why he had longed for a personal meeting with Morehead, so that he could speak frankly with him, unafraid. Morehead guessed that censorship had to be the reason that Malmgren was less forthcoming on details about the seminary, as he related to Dr. Ralph Long in a letter in March.⁸⁰ (Long was the new director of the National Lutheran Council in America). But these sporadic, self-censored letters occasioned by Soviet power made it difficult for Lutherans to communicate with one another across the ocean.

The Tragedy of the Meyers: Martyrs to the Cause

As an example of how closely the OGPU kept an eye on the bishop, Morehead told Ralph Long that the last letter received from Bishop Meyer in Germany had obviously been “opened, handled ruthlessly and forwarded in a wretched condition.” Morehead speculated that the Soviets were trying to get some compromising information on Meyer that might be used to arrest him.⁸¹ Morehead, still endeavoring to do his utmost for the suffering Lutherans in Russia, visited the State Department in Washington, D.C. with Ralph Long on April 5th. There they met with E.L.

⁷⁹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, February 14, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸⁰ John Morehead to Ralph Long, March 1, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸¹ John Morehead to Ralph Long, March 1, 1934.

Packer in the offices of the Division of Eastern European Affairs and made the bold request that the State Department instruct the U.S. embassy in Moscow to compile information on the conditions of the Lutheran Church in Russia. Packer was disinclined to do this, rightfully suspecting that it would only cause trouble for the Lutherans. Upon reflection, Morehead and Long agreed.⁸²

Nonetheless Morehead was still interested in the possibility of sending an American Lutheran representative to the USSR to assist the Church spiritually in its downtrodden condition. This was an issue that he had raised with Bishop Malmgren in the past, too. While Packer did not discourage Morehead from taking up the topic with the Soviet embassy, he did say that the State Department couldn't help them with it. They would have to do it on their own. To give them some insight on his position, though, he allowed Morehead and Long to peruse the correspondence between Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov and President Roosevelt. Morehead's intentions for the representative also became apparent when he shared with Packer the hope that such a person might be able to secure the release of Lutherans exiled to the farthest reaches of Siberia. Packer, guessing the response of the Soviets, answered Morehead in the negative, thinking it "...highly inadvisable for any foreigner to interfere in internal affairs in that country."⁸³ Morehead's desperation in the face of renewed persecution of Lutherans in Russia is evident in Packer's record of their conversation, as Packer informed the State Department about the Leningrad Seminary and Morehead's efforts to keep it open. Packer concluded his discussion with Morehead and Long by agreeing that due to Morehead's participation in an international protest a few years ago (Arthur Brown's ACRRM) concerning the Soviet Union's policies on religion, it

⁸² E.L. Packer, April 6, 1934, RG 59, 861.404/380, National Archives II.

⁸³ E.L. Packer, April 6, 1934.

would be better for Long to go to the Soviet embassy alone and conduct exploratory discussions for a Lutheran representative to enter the USSR. ⁸⁴

Whatever the Soviet's state's ultimate intentions were towards Bishop Meyer, God in His mercy spared him from any further pain and harassment. Shortly after Easter, on Saturday, April 28, Morehead received a radiogram from Eugenie Meyer that her husband had passed away earlier that day. In a memorial tribute to the bishop, Morehead reminisced, "Those who know the facts about Bishop Meyer's nervous and energetic temperament and his suffering from a weak heart cannot but feel that in his care of all the churches, in his selfless gift of time and strength, and especially in his journeys for the visitation of congregations throughout Southeastern Russia as well as in the missionary journey to Central Asia, he gave his life for his Lord and Church and was really a martyr to the cause."⁸⁵

The sorrowful news was made even more disturbing when Dr. Morehead learned from Elisabeth Meyer that the Soviet government on April 19 had condemned to death and executed Traugott Meyer. The charge against him was the soon-to-be frequent refrain of the OGPU towards its enemies, real or imagined: "espionage for a capitalist state." Elisabeth received the awful report three weeks after Traugott's execution, but withheld the true cause of death from her mother. Eugenie would be led to believe that Traugott had died of typhus. Elisabeth was convinced that knowledge of how Traugott had died would have driven her to the grave, and "now she is the only thing in the world I have left." Asking for his intercessory prayer, Elisabeth feared that she and her mother "would not have the strength to bear these inhuman difficulties."⁸⁶ She

⁸⁴ E.L. Packer, April 6, 1934.

⁸⁵ John Morehead, "In Memory of Bishop Meyer of Moscow, Russia," 1934.

⁸⁶ Elisabeth Meyer to John Morehead, May 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

wrote to Morehead knowing that he was praying for them and that he would help them bear the tragedy.⁸⁷

Of course in Traugott's case, the sentence was a fantastic presumption and Pastor Scheduling was convinced, no doubt accurately, that the bishop "...only escaped the bullet by his natural death."⁸⁸ That Bishop Meyer had often been protected, as had Bishop Malmgren, by his ties with the German embassy, leads to the inescapable conclusion that the changed political situation in Germany had generated nothing but ill will for the Lutheran Church hierarchy. When Adolf Hitler came to power as chancellor in 1933 and then further solidified that power through the Enabling Act, the Soviet Union's relationship towards Germany changed dramatically. The alliance that the two countries had formed to evade the Versailles Treaty restrictions on rearmament back in the 1920s had cemented relationships, giving the German embassy freedom to place the bishops under their protective care. But that protection had already been crumbling and Traugott's death and the increased surveillance of Bishop Meyer's letters probably reflected this new reality.⁸⁹

Elisabeth was deeply thankful to God that the news about Traugott was not given to her father before he died. Convinced that their "future was black," she began to plan their escape from the Soviet Union. Elisabeth thought that they might immigrate to their relatives in Riga or Germany where a professor of Teutonic languages would have no trouble finding work. But to acquire a passport for foreign travel was pricy, a fee of 500 rubles in gold! She was also concerned about a pension for her mother for which Bishop Malmgren had promised to

⁸⁷ Elisabeth Meyer to John Morehead, May 1934.

⁸⁸ W.L. Scheduling to Ralph Long, August 7, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁸⁹ Stephan Lorant, *Sieg Heil: An Illustrated History of Germany from Bismarck to Hitler* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1979), 104–5, 211–12, 220–21.

intercede. Fully aware of how the Soviets thought and operated, she figured it highly doubtful that she would retain her position as a professor after her brother's execution. The reality was that she would now be labeled by relation an "enemy of the people." When she wrote to Morehead, Elisabeth cautioned him against publicizing any details of Traugott's death in the foreign press or of the Meyers' plans to emigrate. He could send any correspondence through the courier mail to a Dr. Stelzer, the German embassy secretary in Moscow. She begged Morehead to offer them words of comfort, for which he was renowned. Elisabeth valued his advice, especially concerning the next steps that they should take. She even sent him the report of her father's last hours, in the words of St. Peter and Paul's longtime Sunday school teacher, the sister of the bishop, Tilly Meyer.⁹⁰

Tilly had long taught the children at St. Peter and Paul and admired her brother for his dedication to the Lord and the Lutheran Church. The bishop's health had been failing since the previous summer, six years after his heart attack. For the last three years his personal secretary had eased his work burden, which he still tried to fulfill despite his fragile health. The bishop even helped preside over the most recent Christmas services in 1933. The first of several heart attacks, though, struck him on March 9. However, he did manage to sit up at a table and enjoy the Easter festival with his family on April 1. The second heart attack hit him on April 7, but he managed to get back up again and enjoy the first warm spring days, even sitting on the bench in the garden on the day before his death. Tilly found special meaning in the last family devotion he had led almost a week before his death. The text that he expounded upon, John 16:22, was slated for Jubilate Sunday: "So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice." Bishop Meyer was not one given to expressing his emotions, his behavior often charac-

⁹⁰ Elisabeth Meyer to John Morehead, May 1934.

terized by an old traditional German stoicism. But this time, perhaps moved by this text and sensing the end was near, he gave them a glimpse into his inner feelings.

At 2:30 a.m., April 28, the last heart attack brought about his death one half hour later, his wife at his bedside. His last work, a sermon on the text “Comfort, comfort my people,” lay on his desk. Bishop Malmgren immediately boarded a train in Leningrad so that he could be there for Bishop Meyer’s funeral. Despite initial misgivings, these two giants of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia had truly come to respect each other. Tilly treasured a comment Malmgren had made at the time of Meyer’s first heart attack in 1927: “Any day in the life of your brother is a very special gift of God.” The almost 74-year-old Malmgren arrived in time later that afternoon of the 28th to lead a short prayer service at Meyer’s home after he was placed in the coffin. Tilly fondly remembered the comforting words that Malmgren shared with Pastor Streck and the grief-stricken family: “See, the Shepherd of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” These were words that parents often spoke over their children as they climbed into bed for the night. But so often in life, the parents couldn’t always protect their children. Continuing with his thoughts, Malmgren said:

And our dear departed, with whom we will no longer walk and with whom we must let go, we give them over to the Shepherd of Israel—the Shepherd of Israel who preserves the soul. The outward appearance is unimportant in contrast to the life of the soul. The evil before which the Shepherd of Israel preserves us—it’s the stain, the sin that clings to all of us. He preserves us in our going out and coming in, until the time when God Himself greets us on the threshold of eternity.⁹¹

Tilly thought it was almost as if Malmgren was holding “a quiet, holy dialogue” with her brother. As the coffin was brought to Sts. Peter and Paul that Saturday evening, many of the parishioners came to pay their respects. The following day, a Sunday, was a normal work day for many. Nevertheless, there was a large gathering of the faithful who came to a rare morning service with

⁹¹ “Tilly Meyer’s Report on Her Brother’s Death,” May 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

the funeral following at 1 p.m. The coffin was opened so that the parishioners and family could take their final leave from the bishop before the service. As the people bid an emotional farewell, the choir sang *Homeland, Homeland, Oh, How Lovely You Are!* (*Heimatland, Heimatland, O Wie Schön Bist Du!*). Bishop Malmgren now approached the pulpit and preached on the verse, “Be faithful unto death.” Remembering the old Baltic homeland of Meyer, from which he also descended, Malmgren looked back fondly upon the long service that Meyer had given to his Lord and the Lutheran Church. Pastor Alexander Streck followed him with a homily on the theme from the Epistle to the Hebrews, “Remember your teachers.” The funeral service concluded, the participants took the long journey from the center of the city to the old Lutheran cemetery located in the northeast of Moscow. There all the pastors, Malmgren, Streck and Woldemar Rüger of St. Michaels–Moscow, sprinkled bits of earth over the coffin of Bishop Meyer.⁹² The Lutheran Church was now forced to move on without this tireless defender of the Faith.

The tributes to Bishop Meyer continued to pour in as Dr. Morehead added his thoughts in a memorial article in honor of his friend and colleague during these turbulent years. Morehead recalled their years together during the famine, the first Lutheran Synod in Russian history, the founding of the seminary, all in which Meyer played a vital role.⁹³ But who would now take his place? So many of the promising young pastors had been sent to the Gulag: Kurt Muss, Helmut Hansen, and Arthur Kluck. Even the venerable senior pastors like Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr. were no longer among the living. Bishop Malmgren was the only one who had the experience and trust of most of the Church, the Leningrad supporters of Pastor Paul Reichert

⁹² “Tilly Meyer’s Report on Her Brother’s Death,” May 1934.

⁹³ John Morehead, “In Memory of Bishop Meyer of Moscow, Russia,” May 1934.

notwithstanding.

Morehead was especially concerned about Malmgren's strong sense of duty. He feared that the last remaining bishop would take on too many responsibilities for his age, given that he remained the rector of the seminary, too. How could he add the burden of Bishop Meyer's responsibilities as President of the High Church Council? Would a synod be needed in order to choose a new bishop? Despite his concerns, Morehead didn't know the other members of the High Church Council, so he temporarily sent the information about support for the pastors and the Church to Malmgren.⁹⁴ Others in the Church would soon come to the same conclusion. Who else could lead the Church but Bishop Arthur Malmgren?

According to Article 56 of the Church Constitution, in case of the death of the President of the High Church Council, the clerical member would take over the duties of the presidency until the next General Synod of the Church. Being the only clerical member on the council meant that Bishop Malmgren would now become acting president. Furthermore, he could be expected to perform this duty for some time, as the Church had not held a General Synod since 1928 due to government intransigence. Adding to the complicated situation for Malmgren, only one district president was left in the Lutheran Church since the remainder had been arrested and banished. But that last district president still remaining free, 62 year-old Woldemar Jurgens of the North Caucasus, would be arrested in a few years as well.⁹⁵ He was the father of Ralph Jurgens, who

⁹⁴ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, May 28, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

⁹⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, July 3, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 392. The Church needed government permission to hold a church convention and perhaps now sensing the disarray among Lutherans after Bishop Meyer's death, the government refused to allow a convention to elect a new bishop. See Arthur Bliss Lane to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, May 13, 1937, RG 59, 861.404/414, National Archives II.

had been one of the last students ordained by Bishop Meyer in 1933.⁹⁶ Ralph, too, would be arrested along with his father in 1936.⁹⁷

Of the older pastors who had served in the time of the Czars, only ten were left in office, and they were widely scattered throughout the country so as to preclude anyone's participation in the High Church Council in Moscow. Malmgren himself sounded physically and emotionally tired. "How long I myself may yet be able to stick to the work is problematical. In the struggles and worries of the past 20 years I have become a lonely man, who in these days will complete his 74th year. Up to now God has kept me well in body and spirit, but in view of the daily increasing need and apparently hopeless future of the Lutheran Church in Russia, I have become weary and long for the time that God takes me to His rest."⁹⁸ However, despite his evident weariness the bishop wasn't through yet. Malmgren still planned on graduating seven students of the seminary in the Fall. He did, however, despair of taking on other students for whom he could not find places of service and who he felt would simply be setting themselves forward as candidates for martyrdom. Malmgren's words were not an exaggeration. He admitted that there now existed no Lutheran congregation in the "entire Northwest territory of European Russia." Archangel, Olonyets, Vologda, Yaroslavl, Nizhniy Novgorod, Vyatka, Kazan, Simbirsk, Tula, Smolensk, Minsk, Orel and Kursk had no public worship life whatsoever. In the Crimea, where there had been seven pastors, only Johannes Seidlitz remained in Theodosia. The German and Estonian congregations of Ferdinand Hörschelmann's day had been closed. In Siberia, only Woldemar Reichwald continued serving in distant Vladivostok.

Despite the fact hundreds of thousands of German, Finnish, Latvian and Estonian Lu-

⁹⁶ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 19.

⁹⁷ Tanya Ryumina, "May God Preserve You...."

⁹⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, July 3, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

therans remained in Siberia, they couldn't provide housing or financial support for any pastor. Where could Malmgren send the graduating students? At the very least, though, he set Morehead's mind at ease about Eugenie Meyer. After the death of the bishop, the *Gustav Adolf Verein* had agreed to give her a pension.⁹⁹ When Morehead replied in late August, he urged Malmgren to refrain from overwork, although he understood why the Church would place its trust in an experienced leader like him. He prayed that God would renew his strength "like the eagles" so that he could continue on with his important service to the Church.¹⁰⁰

While the Church was busy contemplating how it would function after the death of Bishop Meyer, the toll of persecution on the families of pastors showed no signs of abating. On June 30th, Arthur Kluck's wife, Bertha, wrote an appeal to Dr. Morehead in rather clear English. She explained that after her husband's arrest and deportation, all of their property had been confiscated. She and the three children fled to Astrakhan where her father, Rev. Liborius Behning, a friend of Dr. Morehead from the days of the famine, had lived after his release from prison until his death in March 1933. Now her mother and children were back with her in Saratov where she taught music. She filled Morehead in on the details of Arthur's life since his arrest in 1929. From 1930, her husband had been held under harsh conditions in a prison cell in Samara. Later in 1931, he was transferred to a hard labor camp in the far north. Having been an academic for most of his life, physical labor had proven to be quite difficult. In 1932 he was moved yet again, this time to exile in a Siberian village where there was no work for him. At the age of 42, his one desire was to return to pastoral work even if it might be for only a short time. Bertha, however, was convinced that it was becoming virtually impossible to serve as a pastor in the Lutheran

⁹⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, July 3, 1934; Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 600.

¹⁰⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 22, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

Church in Stalin's Soviet Union. Therefore, like so many others, she had petitioned the government in Moscow back in 1932 if her family might take up German citizenship. Her request being refused, she was now hoping that Dr. Morehead might be able to pull some strings and help the family immigrate to Germany or America.¹⁰¹

As Morehead continued gathering information on the persecution of the Church from various sources, he realized that Malmgren's fears of the Church's impending demise were well founded. Some in the Swedish and Western European press were actually reporting that the Lutheran Church was completely destroyed, a fact Morehead knew couldn't be true given Malmgren's reports. He asked Malmgren for accurate reports in order to refute premature claims of Lutheranism's death in the Soviet Union, so that Americans and Western Europeans would still consider the urgent need to support the Church. Being an optimistic American Christian, Morehead wondered whether the LWC could cooperate with the Church in supporting young pastors who could be placed in strategic vacancies. Morehead's idea was that the local congregation could provide what support it could while the LWC temporarily assisted a pastor and his family so they could live and serve in the USSR. Morehead also remembered that the late Bishop Meyer had informed him of a special treasury fund that once existed in the Church. What was its status, he wondered?¹⁰²

Malmgren appreciated his friend's determination to do whatever lay within his power to strengthen the Church, for the situation was grave. He confessed that there were many congregations in the Volga and Ukraine who desperately wanted a pastor but they simply could not provide housing. If any person took the pastor and his family under his roof, he would be accused of

¹⁰¹ Bertha Kluck to John Morehead, June 30, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Gisela Kluck-Detterer to Matthew Heise, July 2015.

¹⁰² John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, August 22, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

harboring a counter-revolutionary and be treated as such. Added to this accusation, a heavy tax would be levied upon the parishioner. So even if he were willing to house the pastor, the parishioner could ultimately suffer the indignity of being kicked out of his own home. These threats were the primary reason for not being able to place seminary graduates and a major reason why church life was dying. In the past year, the Crimea had seen no Lutheran worship services. Malmgren had sent one graduate there just to scout out the situation and see if there was even a modest room in a large village that he could rent. The young man returned, as Malmgren said, “like the dove that Noah sent out of the ark (Genesis 8:9), but he found no place to rest his foot.”¹⁰³

In answer to Morehead’s query about the treasury fund that the Evangelical Lutheran Church had utilized before the revolution, Malmgren assured him that the millions that the Church had possessed were confiscated long ago. Since the Law Separating Church and State in 1918, the Church possessed no rights as a juridical person. Due to its precarious legal situation, the Church could not develop a treasury fund again as long as the Soviets were in power. As concerned the reports in the Swedish and Western European press, Malmgren believed it was not so much exaggeration that was at fault as it was confusion. The newspaper reports claimed that 40 Lutheran pastors had been arrested, but Malmgren said the 40 were actually Russian Orthodox priests. Since January and February, a renewed wave of persecution had sprung up again in the land. Arrests and martyrdom were carried out against pastors and laity in all of the denominations still existing in the Soviet Union.

At the moment, the Russian Orthodox Church was suffering more grievously than other

¹⁰³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 25, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

denominations.¹⁰⁴ After the arrest of those forty priests earlier in the year, forty additional priests were arrested in Leningrad on the church festival of *Pokrovsky* (meaning “patron”) held on October 14.¹⁰⁵ The Lutherans, too, had been affected in the early months of the year when the OGPU carried out its latest raid upon the ministry. Julius Zahlit, the Latvian pastor at Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Leningrad, had been arrested on January 20.¹⁰⁶ Pastor Eugen Bachmann, Malmgren’s replacement at St. Anne’s and sometime teacher at the seminary, had also been arrested in January (the 22th). He was accused of espionage, his correspondence with Germany being cited as evidence against him.¹⁰⁷

Bachmann’s case is an example of how the Soviets twisted innocuous meetings in church life to imply something sinister. As the faithful pastor at a Lutheran church in Leningrad which German citizens attended, it was inevitable that Bachmann would have interaction with them. Richard Asche, a German citizen and engineer who happened to be a relative of parishioner Maria Waldman, had been invited to Bachmann’s apartment as a guest in the summer of 1931 or 1932. The Bachmann’s had thrown a party for Waldman in honor of her impending departure to the south of Russia. The party lasted until midnight and included musical entertainment in which Asche apparently participated. Bachmann had first made Asche’s acquaintance in 1931 when he baptized the child of the German family Ernitz. But now, just before Christmas in 1933, Bachmann’s wife heard from Evgeniya Ernitz, from whom she took singing lessons, that Asche wanted to play the violin for the Christmas services. Bachmann was torn. He knew that such

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 25, 1934.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, October 18, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁰⁶ P-35162, Volume 2, List 3, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁷ P-92125, Volume 2, List 64, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

close contact with a German citizen, and it must be remembered that this was shortly after Hitler had been elevated to power in Germany, would create misunderstandings with the Soviet government. But given the choir's poor preparation for the Christmas services, Bachmann relented.¹⁰⁸ At one of the choir practices, Asche made the comment that he had sent his wife or an acquaintance in Germany a letter talking about the prices of goods in Soviet stores. More than likely it was just his curiosity getting the better of him, but the times were not normal since Germany's relationship to the USSR was no longer friendly. When German Vice Consul Velk discovered what Asche had written, he naturally was quite displeased. After the New Year's Eve service, Asche thanked Bachmann for the opportunity to play the violin and he reciprocated the thanks. Bachmann thought little more of it until he heard from his wife shortly thereafter that Asche had been arrested.¹⁰⁹

That wasn't all. As a member of the board for the German Almshouse located in the Summer Gardens in central Leningrad, Bachmann met on December 17 with fellow board members Bishop Malmgren, Pastor Paul Reichert, Pastor Woldemar Wagner and a member of St. Anne's *dvatsatka*, Vladimir Brandt. German Consul, Richard Sommer, and the Vice Consul Velk also attended. Supposedly the German embassy officials asked for confirmation of the Aryan origins of some of the parishioners (of the accuracy of this accusation, opinions may vary, although it is possible). But more damning for Bachmann was the statement that he handed over to the German consulate lists of needy parishioners and their relatives in the south so that they could receive aid from Germany. Unfortunately for Bachmann, facilitating aid for Soviet citizens from abroad was no longer perceived in humanitarian terms as it was back in the days of ARA.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ P-92125, Volume 2, List 70–71, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁹ P-92125, Volume 2, List 70–71, 74, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹¹⁰ P-92125, Volume 2, List 71, 74–75, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

From Bachmann's perspective, he had no illusions about Soviet power and the depths to which it could sink. His mother's family members had received food aid during the famine from relatives in North Dakota. The Bolsheviks poisoned the food and an entire family had died because of it. A haunting picture exists of neighbors sitting next to the coffins of the family after this tragedy.¹¹¹

Bachmann was also accused of a "veiled form" of anti-Soviet propaganda in his sermons, implying that spies must have infiltrated the worship services and were writing down every word that he preached. Since Bachmann eventually appealed for rehabilitation from Nikita Khrushchev on April 5, 1960, the FSB (Federal Security Bureau) Archives retain a rare description in his own words of the truth surrounding these accusations:

In June 1934 an abstract of the protocol of the meeting of the colleagues of the OGPU was read to me.... There was no trial because during the interrogation I only saw the interrogator. They accused me of allegedly, in veiled form, agitating against Soviet power in my sermons. But the formulaic word "veiled" speaks to the fact that the interrogator didn't find any "facts" confirming such an accusation. It was even shown to me how in one sermon I, allegedly, under the phrase "Kingdom of God," implied the "Kingdom of Hitler!" This is plainly a distortion of the truth and an arbitrary interpretation of my words and expressions!¹¹²

Bachmann went on to make it unmistakably clear that he had no sympathy for Hitler, who had already killed tens of ministers and confined thousands to concentration camps. (Bachmann mentions by name the future martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and well-known pastors like Martin Niemöller and Heinrich Grüber). Calling the interrogator's charge a "dirty accusation in the most vague form," Bachmann concluded his appeal by denying that he created in his sermons "favorable soil for espionage among the ethnic German population of Leningrad." "I preached the

¹¹¹ Stanely Rall Document Collection, North Dakota University.

¹¹² P-92125, Volume 3, List 68, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Word of God and never touched on questions of politics in my sermons. Yes, and the interrogator could not find one fact in confirmation of this accusation! ... Because it is absolutely unfounded!”¹¹³

Julius Zahlit had likewise been a thorn in the side of the OGPU for effectively carrying out his ministry among ethnic Latvians in Russia. In 1929, when Stalin’s campaign to close churches had gathered steam, there was a proposal by Latvian communists to close Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Leningrad. Zahlit succeeded in scuttling the plan, although a government official said that all the churches will be closed in five years anyway.¹¹⁴ Well, it was now five years later and it was a new day in the Soviet Union. This time the OGPU would resort to different tactics and would not allow mere signatures on a piece of paper to thwart its will. In fact, their ire was raised against Zahlit because he would not accept that Christ the Savior Lutheran had been closed by the local government, again, in 1933. As before, Zahlit made the journey to Moscow, and actually met with the President of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Kalinin. Zahlit appealed to the president to allow the church to remain open, and Kalinin rescinded the ruling of the Leningrad Regional Communist Party, much to its dismay. Even though they couldn’t very well overrule the popular president of the Soviet Union, nevertheless the OGPU was waiting for Zahlit when he returned. In fact, the agent informed him that because he went to Kalinin with his complaint, they would prevent him from ever seeing Moscow or Leningrad again and would disappear him without a trace. “We’re fighting to close the church and for the complete liquidation of religion, and you are getting in our way!”¹¹⁵

Zahlit’s interrogations began on January 24. The brave pastor must have been treated

¹¹³ P-92125, Volume 3, List 68–69, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹¹⁴ P-35162, Volume 1, List 55, 63–74, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹¹⁵ P-35162, Volume 2, List 340, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

poorly under confinement, because he signed the OGPU document claiming that beginning in 1923 he was drinking regularly to the point of intoxication with members of his *dvatsatka*, either at his apartment or at the bar in the Znamenskaya Hotel. Furthermore, he engaged in monetary speculation, using money from the church treasury. He also engaged in sexual relations with one (Anna, a doctor) of the late Pastor Lapping's two daughters while drinking often with both of them. The accusation of monetary speculation was explained by the OGPU this way: Zahlit supposedly had parishioners pay in food products for weddings and confirmations which were then traded for money on the market. More damaging to him, the OGPU accused Zahlit of Latvian espionage since he had visited his elderly parents in 1927, realizing that he might not ever see them again due to their advanced age.¹¹⁶

As with the allegations against Bachmann, though, there was no truth to the charges. The independent spirit of the Latvian Lutheran community was the primary reason for the OGPU's concern. A church that supported itself and paid for building repairs despite government pressure exerted through excessive taxation and the refusal to grant food cards to the pastors testified to a vibrant worshipping community in the heart of a city named after the Bolsheviks' hero. Pastor Zahlit's continued successful attempts to acquire religious literature from Latvia could not have amused those who were committed to advancing atheist indoctrination among the population, either. No doubt the courageous leadership of Pastor Julius Zahlit was a beacon to Latvian Lutherans. His 85 year-old father, Peter, had long resided in Latvia since 1905 with a decent amount of property. His mother, sisters and relatives also lived there, making it evident that he could have just as easily taken up residence in Latvia, all the more since he had studied there as a child. But instead he continued his studies in Russia and remained there after the Bolshevik Rev-

¹¹⁶ P-35162, Volume 1, List 10–12, 15, 39–45, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

olution. Working as an inspector of education in the northern city of Komi, a visit by a Latvian Lutheran pastor, Mikhail Lapping, had convinced him to take up the Bible courses offered by Malmgren. Lapping ordained Zahlit in 1924 and since that time he had served the Latvian-language church, Christ the Savior Lutheran in Leningrad. Upon Lapping's death in 1932, Zahlit would make occasional visits to Moscow to serve Latvians like Olga Striks' family.¹¹⁷

From the witness of Latvian General Consul Eduard Krasts, there was little doubt that Zahlit and his parishioners' actions to save their church in 1929 had stuck in the craw of the Soviet government. As a result, Bishop Karlis Irbe in Latvia had feared sending monetary assistance to the congregation, concerned that it would harm Zahlit and the Latvian Lutherans in the eyes of the Soviet state. Yet Zahlit urged him to continue gathering religious literature as long as the Latvian Lutheran Church in Russia remained open, and since Krasts was connected to the Latvian publishing house, Brekis, he attempted to do so.¹¹⁸ But now on January 20th not only was Zahlit taken from his congregation, the organist and head of the youth choir, Robert Lapping was arrested, too. Gathering with the faithful believers on January 21 and now learning from Zahlit's wife, Bertha Zupan, about the pastor's arrest, a furious Anna Lapping took a hymnbook and chose hymn 580 that either she, but most likely the OGPU, (since we only have "their" written record), described as "anti-Soviet."¹¹⁹ The 100-person strong choir must have sung these lyrics boldly and with great emotion:

A small crowd armed with courage
Should not be intimidated by the anger of its foes
They seek the means to ruin you
But do not fear their threats

¹¹⁷ P-35162, Volume 1, List 2, 17– 19, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹¹⁸ P-35162, Volume 1, List 4, 17, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹¹⁹ P-35162, Volume 2, List 222–224, 230, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

God will save us from the danger
They won't be able to rampage for long
For soon they will utterly perish
And God will receive the honor and glory.¹²⁰

But the OGPU did not fear a God they did not know, and soon other arrests followed, including Anna and Marta Lapping along with Bertha Zupan. On February 7, the former secretary for the Latvian Church Council of the Novgorod region, Ivan Kandel, was added to the list of the arrested just because he gathered a monetary offering for “martyrs of the Faith.” The OGPU wanted to strike fear into anyone who would dare stand against the power of the government, especially if that person took any action to advocate for the rights of believers. Zahlit was sentenced to a draconian term of ten years, a conviction that was harsh even by the standards of the mid-1930s. Others were sentenced, too. The brave Anna Lapping was sent to a labor camp, along with the pastor's wife, for three years.¹²¹ By God's grace, though, Zahlit survived and was released into exile in 1945. Working as an accountant in exile in the Komi Republic, we get his perspective on events of his past because he wrote twice (1953, 1956) to Kliment Voroshilov, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Denying any guilt to the last, on March 27, 1956, Zahlit appealed to Voroshilov for his freedom: “The Constitution of the USSR offers citizens full freedom of religion and belief...” and so he begged Voroshilov to rehabilitate him, “...and in his elder years free him finally from further deprivations in his life.”¹²² He was soon rehabilitated because in the last record in which the KGB details his

¹²⁰ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 118.

¹²¹ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 118.

¹²² P-35162, Volume 2, List 340–341, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

activities, he is participating in the blessing of a restored church in the colony of Korpovas, Novgorod region in 1957.¹²³ Zahlit would manage to immigrate to Latvia and spend the remainder of his life there.¹²⁴

After being held for five months with no legal process, on June 1 Bachmann finally received his sentence of five years to a Gulag labor camp.¹²⁵ The testimony in which he signed the accusations made against him actually includes the reason why he did so— and that is rare. “Due to being held in an isolation chamber for months and in a continual state of hunger, my will was weakened and I was prepared to sign anything in order to quickly end the interrogation.”¹²⁶ The OGPU made certain to include the additional statement that Bachmann admitted “no physical actions were take against him during the interrogations” (re: torture). However, holding him incommunicado and in a condition of perpetual hunger could certainly qualify as a form of torture, even if he wasn’t physically attacked. (And who could say if he wasn’t, ultimately?). The German citizen, Richard Asche, was simply deported from the Soviet Union.¹²⁷

Bachmann’s imprisonment included the strenuous forestry work that felled many an inmate in a Gulag labor camp. Miraculously, he encountered his old seminary classmate, Konstantin Rusch, who had been in this camp for several years. Rusch interceded with his boss who, when he found that Bachmann knew Latin, moved him into the pharmacy. That work may very well have saved Bachmann’s life. Unfortunately, though, he was now lost to the Lutheran

¹²³ P-35162, Volume 2, List 435, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹²⁴ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 119.

¹²⁵ P-92125, Volume 1, List 129, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹²⁶ P-92125, Volume 3, List 105, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹²⁷ P-92125, Volume 3, List 106 and Volume 1, List 129, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Church.¹²⁸ In Malmgren's estimation, actions like these were evidence that the Church was in nothing less than a catastrophic situation, as the Soviets picked off his pastors, one by one.¹²⁹

While Morehead was receiving this bad news from Malmgren, Ralph Long of the NLC was relaying to him a report from an American Lutheran pastor named Hermann, who had just returned from the Soviet Union. Having traveled primarily in the southern region, most likely including the Ukraine, Pastor Hermann estimated six million people had died in total from the famine. How he came to this conclusion is uncertain, but future historians would estimate numbers not very far off Hermann's calculations. Apparently it wasn't only Malcolm Muggeridge and Arthur Koestler who were observing and reporting honestly on the brutal nature of Stalin's collectivization campaign. Hermann also heard that the seminary would be closed, which Bishop Malmgren was already in the process of acknowledging to Morehead. Even worse, the Lutheran Church itself was to be closed in 1935. Several pastors and teachers confirmed this suspicion to Hermann, admitting that the final closure was already being put into effect. How then could the NLC help, Long asked him? Hermann offered two responses: the first, naturally, was to pray for the Church. Secondly, he also thought that individual pastors could be supported via gifts of money that could be used for food purchases at Torgsin.¹³⁰ Of course, the Soviet Union would not allow visitors like Hermann to take extensive time to survey the situation of the Church as Morehead had once hoped. The state's reflexive anti-foreigner stance had only hardened in the past few years.

Nevertheless, Pastor Hermann was somewhat encouraged. Whenever German citizens attempted to send money to their relatives for use in Torgsin, the Soviet government would char-

¹²⁸ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 216.

¹²⁹ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, September 25, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁰ Ralph Long to John Morehead, September 22, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

acterize it as propaganda of the Hitler regime, as the subsequent arrests of Lutheran pastors would illustrate. Therefore, Hermann was of the opinion that gifts from the United States would not be viewed in such a negative light, perhaps because the Americans had only recently opened their embassy and the relationship was still in the honeymoon stage. All in all, though, Long's information to Morehead portrayed a nation that appeared to be moving to a point where Christianity would become a vestige of the past. The youth and the future were headed in an atheistic direction, just as Long and Morehead had feared. Something needed to be done, and done quickly, in order to save the Lutheran witness in Russia.¹³¹

As the year drew to a close, on December 2, Pastor Emil Pfeiffer was arrested while on his way to conduct a church service at Saratov's St. Mary's Lutheran Church. His daughter, Edith, remembered that the house was turned upside down as the NKVD (the new name for the OGPU) searched for incriminating evidence of any kind. Word of his arrest went through the city like wildfire because those adults who had the day off work had gone to the church and realized that something had happened to their pastor. Arrests were taking place in the city all the time now as many of Edith's friends had seen their parents taken into custody, too. In fact, her uncle, Pastor Arthur Pfeiffer, was arrested on the same day as he went to conduct a church service in the Volga River village of Yagodnaya Polyana. Emil Pfeiffer would be kept in prison until June 1935, after which he was exiled to Almaty (Kazakhstan) for a period of five years. His daughter Gretchen was allowed to travel with him to Kazakhstan, and he soon found work in a Bacteriology Institute where he taught German and English. But despite contact via mail, Edith would never see him again.¹³²

¹³¹ Ralph Long to John Morehead, September 22, 1934.

¹³² Müthel, *An Gottes Hand*, 55; Müthel, *I Remember*, 105–6.

As he had promised before the year ended, Bishop Malmgren wrote a long, detailed letter to Dr. Morehead about the situation in his country. He had delayed the letter and his reason for that was telling: he had hoped to immigrate to Germany and thus speak to Morehead in person. But since the Soviet government refused to allow him to leave, he now decided to make as clear a statement as he could about the state of the Lutheran Church. “Speaking very plainly... the Lutheran Church of Russia, as a church, is very close to complete collapse.”¹³³ Malmgren went on to give a succinct description of the theology of the cross and how it must have appeared in a church under severe persecution: “Even an organized church has no guarantee of perpetual existence here on earth, but is subject to the same law of change and decay which governs nature and history.”¹³⁴ There was a time when both bishops seemed to think that the Lutheran Church would persevere, persecuted, yes, but still continuing its existence. Morehead himself seemed to be of the opinion that they just had to wait it out, doing whatever they could to keep the Church alive until a political change took place in the country.

Malmgren was now admitting that there would be no change. The Soviet Union was only becoming stronger and bolder under Stalin. Children were growing up without the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Nevertheless, Malmgren assured him, “The Gospel will remain, of course; it will not perish, even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. But the organized Lutheran Church will not continue much longer; the hour of death is nigh at hand. Let there be no illusion on this point.”¹³⁵ Malmgren went on to relate the history of the Church after the Bolshevik Revolution, when there had been some hope that they might be able to carve out a reasonable

¹³³ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 20, 1934, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³⁴ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 20, 1934.

¹³⁵ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 20, 1934.

form of existence within the Soviet Union. But the year of 1929 was truly was the bellwether. As he related it to Morehead, “And then came the year of 1929 — the crisis.”¹³⁶ Malmgren especially remembered the Christmas attack upon the seminary and the Hansen-Muss Case. Five professors and four students had been arrested and eventually exiled. Several professors resigned out of fear and the number of prospective students applying to the seminary began its steady decline. It could not be denied that 1929 was a turning point in the life of the Lutheran Church, and for that matter, all Christian churches.

Stalin was determined to exterminate religion, Malmgren explained, because he and his allies saw it as nothing more than superstition which was hindering the Soviet Union on its march toward a materialistic future. The task was originally to have been accomplished in the first Five Year Plan, so now there was no turning back. If Malmgren had been wary about what he wrote in letters in the past, he seemed beyond caring now. The truth had to be told to Morehead, who had expended so much blood and sweat for the Lutherans of Russia. Continuing his litany of woes, Malmgren said that after that first wave of repression in 1929, they didn't give up because they thought the persecution might abate. The Lutheran Church had never acted in a hostile manner towards the Bolsheviks, as Pastor Scheduling had tried to persuade his contacts in the Kremlin in the 1920s. Yet despite their obedience to the governing authorities, the seminary students had been forced to move to Martyschkino in 1930, well beyond the borders of Leningrad. Still, the seminary survived and soon the students returned to Leningrad after Malmgren had found suitable housing.

But then the last of the teachers were arrested and exiled, leaving only Malmgren. Many of his students were arrested, too, or called up for military duty. Despite all this, Malmgren reit-

¹³⁶ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 20, 1934.

erated to Morehead that he hadn't given up. But the dogged persistence of the Soviets was working against them. The government held all the cards and they could change the rules upon a whim. Malmgren simply could not place any of the seven fall graduates in parishes because no one could find a place for them to serve or to provide for their physical needs. In total, 57 students had completed their education since 1925 and had been ordained. But of those 57, only 16 remained in office by the end of 1934.¹³⁷ Malmgren admitted that to the eye, 16 students might seem meager. But if one put matters into perspective, there were also seven more students available, the recent graduates, who couldn't find work in a parish at the moment.

Having been the bearer of a litany of bad tidings, Malmgren felt compelled to end this letter of his reflections with thanks to Morehead. "I must not conclude this letter – so replete with bitter reflections—without once more expressing to you my sincere gratitude for all the unwavering faithfulness which you have shown us during the past nine and one-half years, and for the love offerings which you have so unceasingly transmitted to us. May our Father in heaven bless you, my highly respected brother in Christ, and all the other members of the Executive Committee [of the LWC] and all the dear friends who have contributed toward the support of our Leningrad seminary."¹³⁸

If Malmgren's letter was not an indication that the seminary would no longer be in operation, then one other recollection would have made it abundantly clear had Morehead known. When former Leningrad Seminary student Johannes Lel attended a Synod of the reconstituted Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in 1998, he sat next to an older gentlemen who told him an amazing story. This man had put in an application for the seminary—in 1934! Given

¹³⁷ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 20, 1934.

¹³⁸ Arthur Malmgren to John Morehead, December 20, 1934.

Malmgren's report, it was obvious that there were not enough students for a new class. But just because this man had publicly announced his intention to enter the seminary and his name appeared on a list of prospective students, he was arrested and sent to prison for a few years—all because he intended to study theology!¹³⁹ No, there was no longer any doubt that the doors were firmly shut to the seminary and that they would not open again for decades.

1935—The Pulse of the Church Grows Weaker: The Most Difficult Year for the Church Since 1929

In early 1935, Dr. Morehead wrote an article introducing Bishop Malmgren to the American and European Lutheran public, desiring to share with them the facts surrounding the life of this extraordinary churchman. Ironically, Malmgren's letter of December 20 was on his desk, so he knew that Malmgren was probably preparing his exit from the Soviet Union. Still, Morehead expressed his profound gratitude to the bishop, lauding him for his work and expressing his "profound sympathy" for all that this good man of faith had endured for the cause of the Gospel and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Despite the severe trials of the moment, Morehead sought to assure Malmgren that their efforts had not been in vain. There had been many young students who had been educated and despite threats to their person, would still be strong witnesses for Christ in their lives, come what may. Both men had come to a profound understanding of the theology of the cross, Morehead agreeing with Malmgren that God had promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church. But the promise was that the church as a whole would last into perpetuity, not necessarily individual churches. However, Morehead assured him, "Our God is able out of the planting of this seed of human lives consecrated in faith to Him of the Gospel of His Son to bring forth in His own good time a new harvest of believing souls who

¹³⁹ LeI, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 19.

may be organized when the hour of Christ and His church in Russia comes into a newly organized Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia which in His providence shall stand for the restoration and development of organized true Christianity in your country.”¹⁴⁰

Despite his recognition of Malmgren’s impossible situation, Morehead was not ready to give up entirely even yet. If the Leningrad Seminary was no longer a possibility, and there were no students left at the moment, then would private instruction be an option as it was in Bishop Freifeldt’s time? Could students possibly be educated in Western Europe, which is exactly what the Roman Catholic Church was doing at that time? While Morehead asked Malmgren for his candid views on the Church, though, this was the first time that a letter was written without news of funds sent for the seminary.¹⁴¹ It seemed self-explanatory that no instruction was taking place anymore and that Malmgren was focused primarily on his duties as the President of the High Church Council. But Morehead still seemed to be in a bit of denial. Writing to the LWC in February, Morehead shared the contents of Malmgren’s December 20, 1934 letter, remarking that in comparison with the late Bishop Meyer, “Bishop Malmgren is naturally disposed to take the gloomy view.”¹⁴² While Morehead’s central point was that surely something remained of the Lutheran Church, his criticism of Malmgren was not entirely fair. Malmgren’s state of mind reflected a man beaten down by the continual pressure of the Soviets more than it displayed a penchant for pessimism.¹⁴³

But Morehead felt compelled to redouble his efforts for the persecuted pastors and laymen in the Church, because news soon reached him through the German General Consul in New

¹⁴⁰ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, February 6, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴¹ John Morehead to Arthur Malmgren, February 6, 1935.

¹⁴² John Morehead to LWC, February 15, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴³ John Morehead to LWC, February 15, 1935.

York, Dr. Borchers, that death sentences had been given to a pastor, Wilhelm Lohrer [1928 seminary graduate] and three parishioners (Messrs. Dreier, Hoffman and Wolter) of the Lutheran Church in Omsk, Siberia. Illustrating the caution with which they sent messages, Borchers had received this message in code from Bishop Marahrens in Germany through the German Foreign Office. Marahrens, apparently wary of publicly petitioning for German Lutherans of Russia inside a country that was ruled by Hitler, asked Morehead instead to intercede with Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov.¹⁴⁴ Morehead quickly dashed off a cablegram to Litvinov, copying the Russian Ambassador to America, Alexander Troyanovsky: “As President of the Lutheran World Conference, I appeal to Your Excellency on ground you [sic.] well-known statements in Geneva to intercede in behalf of Lutheran pastor and his three church members sentenced to death in Omsk. Stop. Execution of innocent victims would cause worldwide resentment; their release, profound appreciation. Stop. During famine nineteen twenty-two was member of the ARA Moscow. John A. Morehead.”¹⁴⁵

The ability of the German embassy to intervene for Lutherans in Russia had indeed grown weaker since Hitler’s coming to power. A Soviet diplomat to Germany, Lev Khinchuk, had alerted Bishop Malmgren to that reality one year ago when the bishop had asked Khinchuk to

¹⁴⁴ John Morehead to C.C. Hein, May 1, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Martin Luther Bund to John Morehead, 1935?, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Litzemberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 328. Marahrens initially greeted Hitler’s accession to power with approval. However, he eventually became alarmed by Hitler’s attempt to merge all churches into one state church. Ultimately his thinking was informed by theological considerations, not political. As a confessional Lutheran, he could not acquiesce in allowing state power to usurp the Lutheran Confessions that had guided his regional church in Hannover. As a result of his stand, the Third Reich’s bishop, Ludwig Müller, led a concerted effort in the fall of 1934 to remove him from office. Not only did the Hannoverian land’s court refuse to remove Marahrens, though, but on March 5, 1935, the legality of his position in the church was reaffirmed by the Superior Court in Celle. Hitler had lost this battle, and Marahrens would remain in office until the end of the Nazi regime. Unfortunately, that did not mean his position was strong enough to willingly thumb his nose at Hitler and the state church. His decision to go through Borchers in New York to convey the message about the Russian Lutherans to Dr. Morehead may have reflected his caution. See Lowell C. Green, *Lutherans against Hitler: The Untold Story*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 300–8.

¹⁴⁵ John Morehead to Maxim Litvinov, Feb 18, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

help expedite his son-in-law's return to Leningrad from exile. Now the Counselor of the Legation in the German embassy in Moscow, Gustav Hilger, apprised American Charge de Affaires, John Wiley, as to the serious repression taking place against the Lutherans in Russia. In Wiley's February 8 letter to U.S. Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, he quoted Hilger as saying that the past two months had been the most hostile toward the Lutheran Church since the early Revolutionary period. While there had been 66 Lutheran pastors in the Soviet Union as of December 1, 1934, now there were only 24 left at liberty. Acknowledging the role of the German embassy in the past as informal "protector" of the Lutheran Church, Hilger said that the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs no longer accepted interventions for Lutherans as they had previously. As a result, the Second Secretary of the embassy, a Mr. Steltzer, was being transferred from Moscow. His role had been that of Cultural Attache, but due to the cessation of cultural cooperation between the Soviet and German governments, this role was no longer necessary. Included in his functions had been "protection of religion."¹⁴⁶

Given the imminent danger to the Lutherans in Omsk, Morehead fired off a telegram to Ambassador William Bullitt, who was ill and currently recuperating in the States. He pleaded with Bullitt for his intervention in this case since the accused were only guilty of practicing their Christian faith.¹⁴⁷ Ambassador Bullitt had been a strong advocate for normalizing relations with Russia, so at first it might seem that such a request would fall on deaf ears. But Bullitt was becoming increasingly disillusioned with Soviet intransigence on the matter of debt repayment. And that wasn't his only concern.¹⁴⁸ In fact, within a few months, Bullitt would write to Presi-

¹⁴⁶ John Wiley to Cordell Hull, February 8, 1935, RG 59, 861.404/389, National Archives II.

¹⁴⁷ John Morehead to William Bullitt, February 18, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁸ Will Brownell and Richard N. Billings, *So Close to Greatness: A Biography of William C. Bullitt* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 146.

dent Roosevelt about a terror that was enveloping Moscow to the extent that Russians of all stations were refusing to have any contact with foreigners.¹⁴⁹

The terror had begun in December 1934 after the murder of Leningrad Communist party boss, Sergey Kirov.¹⁵⁰ Although the events in Omsk were not precipitated directly by Kirov's murder, in Leningrad and throughout the country a purge was beginning to take affect in party circles and beyond. Morehead received news in March that 1074 persons of the bourgeois class in Leningrad had been deported by the NKVD to Central Asia in connection with the Kirov murder. Two hundred of the deported were of German heritage, very likely Lutheran, and had been long-time residents of Leningrad. The arrested encompassed a wide variety of people, including: (1) those who were part of the old ruling classes in Czarist times; (2) those who had ethnic ties to foreign countries, especially Poland or Germany; (3) those who had received help from Torgsin through the German charitable organization "Brother in Need" [*Bruder im Not*]; and (4) those communists tied to the former opposition leaders, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev.¹⁵¹ In fact, St. Anne's pastor, Samuel Wohl, admitted that many in his congregation were exiled while the *dvatsatka* was practically decimated by the arrests.¹⁵² Gustav Hilger had acknowledged as much to the American embassy in Moscow in his concern for the fate of Lutherans in the USSR.¹⁵³

The Kirov Terror had been precipitated by the party boss' murder on December 1, 1934, at 4:30 P.M. in the hallway outside his office. Kirov's office was located in the fashionable

¹⁴⁹ Dennis J. Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin: America's Ambassadors to Moscow* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 47.

¹⁵⁰ Dennis J. Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 47.

¹⁵¹ Kirov Terror Document, April 1935?, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁵² P-80626, Volume 1, List 83, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁵³ Other historians cite a total numbering between 60,000 and 100,000 individuals being deported from Leningrad for having some vague connection to the Kirov assassination. See Gary Kern, *A Death in Washington: Walter G. Krivitsky and the Stalin Terror* (New York, Enigma, 2004), 83.

building along the Neva River in Leningrad known as Smolny, a former educational institute for young women. All signs pointed to a lone gunman, a former Smolny office worker by the name of Leonid Nikolaev. There were a variety of motives offered for the crime, but the fact that Nikolaev had lost his job and was nearly expelled from the Communist Party were said to have made him resentful of the party hierarchy. Kirov's position as the party leader in Leningrad would have made him a natural target for Nikolaev.¹⁵⁴ It is after this point, though, that the reasons behind this crime become murkier. Historians have long debated whether Stalin engineered the murder or not, but the latest research culled from the Soviet archives by historian Matthew Lenoe seems to point in the direction of Nikolaev as a "lone wolf."

Whether Nikolaev acted alone or not, though, historians are generally in agreement that Stalin quickly decided to use the Kirov murder to create a martyr to the Communist cause. In doing so, Stalin launched a witch-hunt against his enemies, real or imagined. The more realistic enemies, although they were almost certainly not guilty of this murder, were the sidelined, out-of-favor Old Bolsheviks, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev. Stalin purged many Party members and allies of these two (as well as allies of Trotsky) and claimed that they had been in league with foreign enemies. Not content to attack only his enemies in the Party, Stalin expanded the scope of his reach to include those with suspicious ties to foreigners like Finns, Germans and those of Baltic ancestry.¹⁵⁵ The large number of German Lutherans in Russia had often appealed to their fellow Lutherans in Germany for aid, even if it was only to receive assistance for the Church. Such actions now brought them under government suspicion.

In February and March 1935, the NKVD conducted massive raids to arrest Leningrad

¹⁵⁴ Matthew Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* [Annals of Communism Series] (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), Kindle, Location 3275, 3292, 3737.

¹⁵⁵ Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder*, Location 5455, 5535, 5679, 5695, 5760, 5776, 5829, 5893, 5986, 6308.

residents on their list of suspected traitors. The so-called “former people” (Czarist aristocrats, merchants and police officers) were prominent among the more than 11,000 on the list, but there were also 585 priests not serving in active churches. Mass expulsions of Orthodox clergy from Leningrad began in March, and by June Leningrad officials started to close Orthodox parishes. It is not likely that everyone on this list of 11,000 was Orthodox since we know that attacks against the Lutheran Church intensified after Kirov’s murder. Stalin approved the plan to conduct mass arrests in Leningrad, but told NKVD chief, Genrikh Yagoda, to spread them out over a few months in order to minimize the international outcry. Once the terror began, however, it would prove difficult to stop.¹⁵⁶

Down south in Kiev, ethnic Germans with foreign connections were also being arrested. For example, Pastor Johannes Göhring, a 1929 Leningrad seminary graduate who had conducted evangelistic outreach to Jews in Odessa before his studies at the seminary, was arrested in Kiev where he served as a pastor. Göhring was originally sentenced to be shot, but the sentence was eventually reduced to ten years of imprisonment. He would eventually die of hunger in the Gulag labor camps.¹⁵⁷ A German female parishioner who had taken over services in Kiev, conducting a “Lesegottesdienst (Reading Divine Service) in the absence of the pastor, was subsequently arrested. Over in Soviet Georgia, the ethnic German wine growers also had their wine fields collectivized, including the wine growers’ cooperative known as “Concordia.” The Lutheran congregation in Helenendorf, where former seminary professor Otto Wentzel served as pastor, was levied the outrageous tax of 30,000 rubles. Naturally the congregation couldn’t pay the tax, thus forcing its closure. Pastor Wentzel still gathered his parishioners for worship in the local

¹⁵⁶ Lenoë, *The Kirov Murder*, Location 9586, 9618, 9633; Roslof, *Red Priests*, 188.

¹⁵⁷ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 345.

cemetery even though he and the three women remaining on his church council were publicly defamed in the basest manner imaginable in the Communist press. The pressure had already begun in December 1934 when Wentzel's former student, Emil Hanefeld, the son-in-law of Bishop Malmgren, was arrested in Tbilisi.¹⁵⁸

That was not the only bad news in Georgia. Pastor Wilhelm Zimmer, a 1932 graduate of the Leningrad seminary and pastor in Alexeevka (modern day Azerbaijan), was arrested in Baku on January 8, 1935, and thereafter exiled for five years. Five additional years would soon be added to his sentence.¹⁵⁹ The attacks, of course, were not only leveled against the pastors but also the parishioners of the Lutheran Church. In the German colonies located in Azerbaijan, 70 ethnic German families, comprising about 300 parishioners in the villages of Eigenfeld, Gruenfeld, Alexevka, Annenfeld, Georgsfeld and even Georgia's Helenendorf, were deported to the north of Russia in April 1935. No one knew the final destination of their fellow believers. The NKVD showed no regard for human weakness, even forcing women who had just given birth to make the journey.

In order to divert suspicion from themselves, the Soviets often employed the tactic of setting one ethnic group against another. For instance, the Armenian population in the Caucasus took out their vengeance against the German Lutherans. In Helenendorf, virtually all of the German homes were taken over by the Armenians. The agitation threatened to destroy what the German Lutherans had built in the past century when they had made their exodus from Württemberg to Georgia and Azerbaijan.¹⁶⁰ The Lutheran Church in Tbilisi was already reeling since it lost its 63 year-old pastor, Richard Mayer, to martyrdom in 1933. Now the Soviets took what

¹⁵⁸ Kirov Terror Document, April 1935?

¹⁵⁹ Litzenger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 387.

¹⁶⁰ Kirov Terror Document, April 1935?

had remained: a hospital, a kindergarten, and an aid association. The worst insult was throwing 28 ethnic Germans over the age of 65 out of a home for invalids. Because of these actions, the Lutheran heritage was rapidly disappearing from the Caucasus region.¹⁶¹

1935 was proving to be the most difficult year for the Lutheran Church and in reality, all Christian churches in general, since the year of Stalin's initial clampdown in 1929. Dr. Morehead sought to inform Dr. C.C. Hein, President of the American Lutheran Church, about the persecution of the Lutheran Church and its pastors/parishioners by sharing the contents of Bishop Malmgren's December 20 letter from the previous year. Unfortunately he soon had additional evidence. Eugenie Meyer shared with Morehead that her daughter, Dr. Elisabeth Meyer, had now been arrested. Morehead was all too aware of how powerless the Americans were in being able to secure her freedom, but he knew that Eugenie expected them to make inquiries. Of course, at any rate, he would have done nothing less for the Meyers,' after all they had done for him when he traveled in Russia and given all that they had suffered.¹⁶²

Elisabeth was accused of heading up a conspiracy of philologists and academicians through her contacts to the German embassy in Moscow. Due to her position as a professor at the Moscow Institute of New Languages (MINL), she served as the main editor of the first edition of the Large German-Russian Dictionary. Moreover, her fellow academics at GAKHN (Government Academy of Arts and Sciences) often came to her apartment at the church on Starosadsky Pereolok [Lane] to work on the project. Unfortunately for Elisabeth, the timing of the Kirov as-

¹⁶¹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 365–366. Mayer's death was shrouded in mystery as the German embassy had arranged for him to immigrate to Germany and join his seven children, who had lived there since 1924 thanks to the intervention of the Association of Aid to Germans Beyond Borders. The Soviet government, though, revealed that he had signed a document refusing to leave the USSR. His children believed that he had been forced to sign such a declaration against his own will. The Soviets claimed that Pastor Mayer died of old age in February 1933. See Litzenberger, 366.

¹⁶² John Morehead to C.C. Hein, May 1, 1935.

sassination played right into the hands of the NKVD, because they now “discovered” evidence that many of these academicians were involved in espionage. 141 people were arrested in this case, and Elisabeth fit the profile of one that they could tar with organizing espionage due to her extensive Germanic associations.¹⁶³ First, her late father was a bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia whose congregation in Moscow was well-known as the “German embassy church.” Secondly, her brothers had been considered enemies of the people, one escaping to Romania with a Soviet aircraft and her younger brother, Traugott, having been executed the previous year as an enemy of the people. Thirdly, she had studied at Leipzig University in Germany. It was all too convenient for the NKVD who was searching for enemies, and she fit their parameters precisely. One of her former students at Moscow State University, Nina Monich, had followed Meyer to MINL and had also been interrogated in Lubyanka. Monich, who survived well into the 1990s (1994), confirmed many years later that she felt that she and others were called in and/or arrested because of their ties to the Meyer family.¹⁶⁴

In regard to the arrest of the philologists, it is not as if the secret police in the USSR had no experience in such matters. Back in 1930 the OGPU had acted in similar fashion when Pastors Kurt Muss and Helmut Hansen were tied to the Academic Affair, supposedly headed up by famed ethnographer, Alfred Mervart. This time the German ties of Elisabeth Meyer proved irresistible as well because of Hitler’s rise in Nazi Germany. She was also tied to a noted Slavic expert in Germany, Max Fasmer, to whom she had sent an etymological dictionary. This action, of

¹⁶³ Международный Мемориал: Проект “Уроки истории” [International Memorial: Project “Lessons in History”], “Ученые ГАХН дома и на следствии / Доклад Марины Акимовой на семинаре ‘Москва. Места памяти’” [“Academics of the GAKHN House and Its Investigation/ The Paper of Marina Akhimova at the Seminar ‘Moscow: A Place of Memory.’”], April 1, 2015.

¹⁶⁴ “Воспоминания о ГУЛАГе и их авторы” [Memory of the Gulag and its Authors], Andrey Sakharov Center, *Второе рождение. 1941–1952 // Воля : журнал узников тоталитарных систем.* – 1995 [*Second Birth: 1941–1952// Will: Journal of Prisoners in a Totalitarian System*], 1995, Нина Дмитриевна Монич [Nina Dmitriyevna Monich].

course, was interpreted as Meyer sending information on espionage to Germany. The arrests began on the night of February 2/3 and Elisabeth was among the first to be taken. A series of arrests continued into March and May, including the academics from GAKHN, professors of German at Moscow State University, professors at MINL, employees of the Library of Foreign Literature, the publishing house Academia and German experts at the publishing house Soviet Encyclopedia. The last experts were accused of importing Fascist terms into the new dictionary that Meyer had edited. And since the meticulous Meyer naturally kept accounting records of who was working with her on the dictionary and what they were paid, the NKVD took names from the accounting ledger and arrested them.¹⁶⁵

Morehead immediately appealed to Dr. Borchers in New York for his intervention in the Elisabeth Meyer case. He was not so naïve to assume that a representative of the Nazi government would be received favorably by the Soviets, but he was evidently desperate enough to try anything for the Meyers' sake. On May 6, Morehead telephoned Borchers at the German legation in New York, following up their conversation with a letter the next day. Included in his correspondence was Eugenie Meyer's letter detailing the arrest of her daughter. Morehead appealed to Borchers' ethnic pride, explaining that German citizens working in the Soviet Union, as well as German embassy personnel, frequented the church of Elisabeth's father, the late Bishop Theophil Meyer. Explaining the bishop's contribution to the Lutheran Church in Russia, Morehead carefully described him as "particularly loyal to the German race and the Fatherland."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ "Academics of the GAKHN House and Its Investigation/ The Paper of Marina Akhimova at the Seminar 'Moscow: A Place of Memory.'"

¹⁶⁶ John Morehead to Dr. Borchers, May 7, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

It is important to stress that Morehead was not sympathetic to Nazi racial purity theories, as evidenced by his respect and friendship with Henry Hill, a black janitor at Roanoke College when he was president of the college.¹⁶⁷ But evidently Morehead was willing to allow his language to be “parsed” in order to secure freedom for Elisabeth Meyer. He did, however, warn Borchers about making public the fact that he had received this information from Mrs. Meyer. Morehead was already wise to the machinations of the NKVD, how they would punish Mrs. Meyer severely if they knew that she had informed foreigners about her daughter’s imprisonment.¹⁶⁸ It was usually better to work diplomatically behind the scenes on an individual case rather than confront the Soviets publicly.

At first glance Morehead’s efforts had little effect because Elisabeth was convicted and sentenced to 10 years on August 5th and sent out on the 28th to Camp Number 3–Morsplav in Kem, located on the White Sea and just south of the infamous Solovetsky Island camp. (This was the same camp where Kurt Muss was held). Even though the sentence was quite extreme, a few of her colleagues in this case were sentenced to death, so it is unlikely to think that the supposed ringleader of this case would receive a lesser sentence. Current Russian academics investigating this affair assumed that Meyer was executed immediately, but we know from the human rights organization Memorial that this was not the case. Perhaps Morehead’s intervention helped after all? We simply don’t know. But her aged mother, Eugenie, was punished for her daughter’s fabricated crimes, being sent 100 kilometers outside of Moscow to the village of Kashire.

¹⁶⁷ Hill told Morehead that he would be praying for him daily when he initially traveled overseas to aid in European relief. Morehead, who valued prayer very highly, never forgot Hill’s words. When he returned, he told Hill that he had felt the power of his prayers. He gave him the old Morehead family Bible as a gift, often visiting his black friend, something that not every Southern Christian would have done in that time. See Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 150.

¹⁶⁸ John Morehead to Dr. Borchers, May 7, 1935.

Eugenie was sickly and no doubt exhausted from the recent events of the previous year, having lost her son and husband. And now, she was all alone in a strange village with Elisabeth's banishment added to her woes.¹⁶⁹

Morehead learned further of the NKVD's extensive powers of oversight when Bertha Kluck, who had written to him about emigrating in 1934, was arrested in Saratov in 1935. The official court statement declared that she was condemned for five years due to "anti-Soviet agitation." Her daughter, Gisela, was seven years old when her mother was convicted of this nebulous crime. To this day, she has never known exactly why her mother was arrested, but speculates that it could have been due to the letter she sent to Morehead. It's not certain to whom Bertha handed her letter, although it is possible that it was channeled through church circles and eventually given to someone in the German embassy. We do know that the NKVD had opened Bishop Meyer's letters near the end of his life, so it is likely that the NKVD also opened Bertha's letter. Whatever the answer, now both Klucks, Arthur and his wife, were separated from their children and serving time in Gulag labor camps. Bertha's aged mother would remain as the sole caretaker of the three children for the next several years.¹⁷⁰

By now, Bishop Malmgren was becoming weary of the continual drumbeat of arrests plaguing his pastors. From March through May, six pastors were arrested from Leningrad and its surrounding area: Among the six were: (1) Oktav Simon, a 1925 Bible course graduate who had replaced Eugen Bachmann at St. Anne's after he was arrested and sent to the Gulag; (2) Samuel Wohl, a 1934 seminary graduate; (3) Woldemar Assmus, an early 1930s graduate; (4) Alfred

¹⁶⁹ Жертвы политического террора в СССР, [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR], Compact Disk, (Moscow: Звенья, [Zvenya], 3rd Edition, 2004); "Academics of the GAKHN House and Its Investigation/ The Paper of Marina Akhimoova at the Seminar 'Moscow: A Place of Memory.'"

¹⁷⁰ Arthur Kluck Family Documents; Gisela Kluck-Deterrer to Matthew Heise, March 2014.

Prieb, a 1933 graduate; (5) Woldemar Wagner, a 1929 graduate, and pastor of St. Catherine's who had helped teach at the seminary from October 1933–May 1934.¹⁷¹ The accusations leveled against the pastors concerned receiving material aid from foreign countries, in particular the funds that the LWC and German Christian organizations (*Gustav Adolf Verein, Martin Luther Bund*) were sending to them. In the case of Alfred Prieb, he had come to the attention of the OGPU back in 1931 when he wrote to his brother living in Leipzig, hoping to emigrate abroad. His subsequent application for emigration had been rejected by the Soviet government.¹⁷²

However, the NKVD was not only interested in arresting pastors but was hoping in the process to gather information about Bishop Malmgren's plans for the Lutheran Church. They were observing Malmgren closely, because right after Woldemar Assmus visited the bishop, Assmus was arrested (May 22). In his interrogation, Assmus admitted to the NKVD that Malmgren had been hoping to once again form a new class at the seminary. (Whether or not Malmgren had yet again changed his mind about closing the seminary is uncertain). Although the government had not officially closed the seminary, it was playing a deceitful game by not allowing students to sign up for courses. How exasperating it must have been for Malmgren to fight an opponent that regularly resorted to lies and deception for its weapons. But because he was worried about pastoral shortages, especially with the constant threat of arrest for the pastors, he would defend his congregations for as long as he could reasonably do so. But time and energy were running short.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Litzemberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 331, 376, 382, 338, 341.

¹⁷² Mikhail Shkarovsky and Nadezhda Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 55; "Open List": Woldemar Bogdanovich Wagner.

¹⁷³ Shkarovsky, "Bishop Arthur Malmgren."

St. Anne's pastor, Oktav Simon, was actually charged with passing along a letter to the German consulate from Malmgren, who had received it from the Mennonite preacher, Heinrich Tews. The NKVD apparently majored in retroactive accusations, because the actual transfer of the letter occurred in 1930! Simon was arrested on May 17, 1935.¹⁷⁴ His interrogations began immediately. Pastor Oktav Simon was a 41 year-old native from Riga of Baltic German ancestry whose father had moved the family to Moscow where he held several jobs with organizations as an accountant until his death in 1919. Simon had studied at Yuriyev University in Dorpat, Estonia from 1914–1918, but never completed requirements for his undergraduate degree. An ardent Christian, he had already been on the Cheka's radar due to his association with an Evangelical Christian circle in Moscow led by the famed evangelist, Vladimir Martsinovsky. In 1921, Martsinovsky was deported from the USSR and Simon along with several others were arrested and incarcerated for two weeks.

Undeterred by his imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel, he went on to study with the Pfeiffer brothers at the Leningrad Bible School under Bishop Malmgren, graduating in 1924. He initially served as pastor in Strelna and assisted Kurt Muss' old congregation in Leningrad after Muss' imprisonment until his own arrest in 1935.¹⁷⁵ Simon's interrogations focused upon the reception of financial aid from foreign countries along with the aforementioned facilitation of information to the German consulate. Delving deeply into his past, the NKVD discovered that ARA had provided food parcels to all of the Bible school students in Leningrad in the early 1920s. They now asked Simon to list all of the students who had studied with him. (Naturally, this was the aid that the NLC and Dr. Morehead had provided through ARA!).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ P-80626, Volume 1, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁷⁵ P-80626, Volume 1, List 12–13, 17–19, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁷⁶ P-80626, Volume 1, List 13–14, 20, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

A good example of the manner in which the NKVD carried out interrogations can be ascertained from Simon's interrogation on June 25. The agent wondered, "Did you appeal to German fascists for aid?" On the contrary, Simon replied, "I only appealed to religious organizations" (e.g., *Martin Luther Bund*). In the course of their investigation, they learned that Simon received aid via Torgsin and appealed for his parishioners' financial needs from a variety of sources, including Pastor Julius Fastena in Riga and the Red Cross.¹⁷⁷ Pastor Bachmann had apparently given Simon the address to contact Fastena in Riga. Having accumulated all of this information, the NKVD now began to twist the evidence and present Simon as a willing accomplice with Bishop Malmgren in the service of German fascists. For example, it was noted that Simon gave Malmgren information about the German congregations in the countryside. But from what would have been something as innocuous as sharing information about the congregations' health, the NKVD spun the evidence in another direction. They claimed that Simon had given Malmgren information about German Lutheran parishes in order to receive aid from Torgsin. In other words, it was a financial transaction accompanied by the sinister undertones of espionage.¹⁷⁸

By June 29, it was evident that the NKVD's relentless interrogations had worn Simon down. His NKVD photo shows an unshaven man with a tired and worn expression on his face. Simon is recorded as confessing to having received political directives of an "anti-Soviet spirit" from Bishop Malmgren. Admitting that Malmgren was a National Socialist by conviction, Simon

¹⁷⁷ P-80626, Volume 1, List 20, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. The 70 year-old Fastena had served in Astrakhan, Voronezh and Moscow until approximately 1922, when he immigrated to Latvia. Obviously, he had not forgotten his fellow Lutherans in Russia, still doing his best to provide aid in difficult times. See Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 384.

¹⁷⁸ P-80626, Volume 1, List 7, 21, 27, 31-34, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

now supposedly said that he had carried out these political directives among his parishioners and even during the divine service. The *Gustav Adolf Verein* was also said to have engaged in counterrevolutionary activity through the German consulate in the USSR.¹⁷⁹ In his final interrogation on October 5 before being sent to a Gulag labor camp, though, Simon suddenly rejected all of the testimony that related to Malmgren's involvement in politics and the claims that he had been a willing collaborator. Simon could not deny, however, that he had received aid from abroad, obviously through Dr. Morehead and German sources. It was enough to convict him.¹⁸⁰

St. Catherine's Woldemar Wagner, too, had been accused of extensive Germanic associations. He was arrested on March 19 while taking the train to his home in the suburbs of Leningrad in Pavlovsk. As pastor to many impoverished, elderly and handicapped Russian-Germans, he had compiled a list of 24 individuals in need of financial aid. Contacting *Brüdershilfe* and the *Martin Luther Bund*, Wagner secured the support for his needy parishioners. Wagner, though, also wrote articles for *Die Weltpost*, the American newspaper for Russian-Germans, and probably apprised them of the situation in the USSR. Combining all of these suspicious activities in the mind of the NKVD with the fact that he had worked extensively with the NLC and ARA back in the famine days was enough to bring charges against him of counterrevolutionary activities, according to Statute 58. Wagner's family would not be able to see him during the half year (until September) he was kept under lock and key in the DPZ.¹⁸¹

Samuel Wohl was yet another pastor on the NKVD's list of the accused. A recent graduate of the seminary, the 30 year-old Wohl had also been placed at St. Anne's in Leningrad and was

¹⁷⁹ P-80626, Volume 1, List 21, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁰ P-80626, Volume 1, List 34, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸¹ "Open List": Woldemar Bogdanovich Wagner.

serving there when he was arrested at Easter on April 16.¹⁸² He was charged with praising the Fascist regime in Germany and serving as an informant for Bishop Malmgren. Complicating his situation, he also was known to have received financial assistance from the German organizations like the *Gustav Adolf Verein* and the *Martin Luther Bund*.¹⁸³ Wohl had grown up in the Ukraine, more specifically in the Odessa region in a Germany colony known as Marinovo. There he had served the local congregation as a kuester and played the organ in church, even losing his voting rights back in 1926–1927 because he had been an aide for the pastor, Woldemar Seib.¹⁸⁴ Upon the recommendation of his pastor and the district president, Georg Schilling, he entered the seminary at a most auspicious time: the Fall of 1929. Collectivization was then in full swing in his native Ukraine, and his parents would be among the many German farmers who were declared kulaks by the state and sent into exile in 1930.

Wohl's studies would be interrupted from 1930–1932 since he was one of Malmgren's students who had been called up to serve in the labor army.¹⁸⁵ The NKVD accused him of trying to escape across the border into Finland when he was serving in the labor army, but Wohl categorically denied the charges. In reality, it seems that one of his classmates, Georgy Fech, had successfully escaped across the border. Wohl was offered the opportunity to have his citizenship rights restored if he would just leave the seminary permanently, but he was not easily bribed. He refused and continued to study on his own while serving in the army, eventually taking his exams privately with Bishop Malmgren in May 1934.¹⁸⁶ But now, even though he had not

¹⁸² Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 341.

¹⁸³ P-80626, Volume 1, List 83, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁴ P-80626, Volume 1, List 81–82, 95–96, 116–118, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁵ P-80626, Volume 1, List 81–82, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁶ P-80626, Volume 1, List 82, 103–104, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

completed one year in the parish, he found himself sitting across from an NKVD agent, being subjected to an intensive interrogation. During his grilling, the NKVD seized upon the fact that his passport had allowed him to reside in Leningrad only for the course of his studies. Wohl honestly admitted that he had broken the law, although given the housing shortage he couldn't have been the only one hoping to hold on to free housing. The seminary community was aware of his circumstances as well, but at first didn't force him to relocate.

Wohl must have realized that he was putting the seminary in a difficult position vis-à-vis the state, though, and the administration was eventually compelled to ask him to find alternative housing. At first he lived with acquaintances, but not having the ability to be registered in their home, he fled to the Volodarsky region, some 10 kilometers southwest of Leningrad. Since no one knew him there and because he hid his identity, he was able to slip onto a collective farm and acquire a three-year passport.¹⁸⁷ Naturally these actions looked suspicious in the eyes of the NKVD, all the more so since he was now a pastor at a historic Lutheran congregation in Leningrad. Given his association with the church, the agents asked him about his associations with the Finnish and German consulates. Why was he living in a room provided by the Finnish consulate?

Wohl informed them that the German consulate was keenly interested in his living conditions since St. Anne's was "one of the most privileged of the so-called "aristocratic congregations" in the city. So naturally, they would want the pastor to have sufficient housing.¹⁸⁸ But with the ethnic cleansing of Leningrad that occurred after the murder of Kirov, a large number of ethnic German parishioners of St. Anne's had been sent into exile. The *dvatsatka* at what Wohl called this "extremely faithful German church" was virtually destroyed in the process.¹⁸⁹ Wohl

¹⁸⁷ P-80626, Volume 1, List 82, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁸ P-80626, Volume 1, List 83, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁸⁹ P-80626, Volume 1, List 83, 107–109, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

recognized the danger to his congregation's existence, but could not refrain from performing his pastoral duty. So when it was learned that someone had been forced into exile, he boldly answered the charges of the NKVD: "When it became known to me that one or another parishioner had been exiled, during the church service I announced from the pulpit that we would be praying for this person who had to leave the city of Leningrad."¹⁹⁰ When the agent responded that such an announcement from the pulpit was tantamount to an "anti-Soviet action," Wohl simply replied that he believed it was his duty to pray for them.¹⁹¹

Probing deeper into what they considered his political convictions during a later interrogation on August 15th, Wohl straight out told the NKVD that he believed there existed a planned persecution of the church in order to finish it once and for all. Throwing caution to the wind, Wohl said that the Soviet government had promised freedom of conscience and religion but had broken its promise. He honestly acknowledged that pastors were dependent upon support from abroad and that without it, they could not continue their ministry.¹⁹² Finally, on October 5, Wohl confessed that he was guilty of praying for his repressed parishioners and acknowledged that this was considered counterrevolutionary propaganda. When the NKVD investigation concluded on October 13, Wohl made certain to clear the name of Bishop Malmgren: he had not received any political instructions from the bishop. He would stand upon his own confession.¹⁹³

On January 2, 1936, the sentence of six years for his honest assessment of Soviet lies would go into effect (beginning from the time of his incarceration). Oktav Simon would also be

¹⁹⁰ P-80626, Volume 1, List 87–88, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹¹ P-80626, Volume 1, List 87–88, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹² P-80626, Volume 1, List 105–106, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹³ P-80626, Volume 1, List 116–118, 119, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

sentenced to six years imprisonment and Woldemar Assmus to four years.¹⁹⁴ Alfred Prieb was not considered to be one of Malmgren's group of pastors (Simon, Wohl and Assmus), so while accused of counterrevolutionary activity, he was sentenced to four years exile.¹⁹⁵ Woldemar Wagner would be sentenced to a five-year term in the region of Novosibirsk.¹⁹⁶ The courageous Samuel Wohl would eventually be rearrested in a Siberian Gulag camp in Magadan, probably Kolyma, on March 13, 1938. Convicted of belonging to a counterrevolutionary insurgent organization, he was executed on April 13, 1938.¹⁹⁷

While the NKVD was busy plotting against Malmgren and his pastors and perhaps sensing the growing danger to his person, the bishop wrote to Bruno Geissler (General Secretary of the *Gustav Adolf Verein*) on March 23 requesting emigration from the Soviet Union. While he was still in the country, Malmgren would do whatever he could to keep the Church alive. But it was becoming increasingly evident that even the encouraging letters from Dr. Morehead could no longer convince him that the Lutheran Church had any future in such a rigidly, uncompromising atheist state. Accentuating Malmgren's fears of government snooping, the Interior Ministry intercepted his letter to Geisler, as well as many others. Malmgren complained about the difficult situation of the church and its pastors and evangelists. He also listed the remaining pastors in the letter, obviously of great interest to the NKVD as well as the Interior Ministry. To this day a report is held in the FSB Archives, chronicling all of Malmgren's visits to Germany and the cities he visited. It also has a list of those employees of the Moscow embassy, and the Leningrad and Kiev consulates from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Germany. The list especially cites

¹⁹⁴ P-80626, Volume 1, List 162–172, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁵ P-80626, Volume 1, List 138–139, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Skarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 56.

¹⁹⁶ "Open List": Woldemar Bogdanovich Wagner.

¹⁹⁷ Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Repression in the USSR], 2007.

those German officials who provided aid to ethnic German citizens of the USSR. It also contains a record of the funds expended for the upkeep of the Lutheran Church. In short, the Interior Ministry and NKVD were undeniably opening letters of those in the hierarchy of the Lutheran Church, not to mention accumulating evidence from interrogations of Lutheran pastors which was being gathered as evidence against Malmgren.¹⁹⁸

By the middle of 1935, it was not surprising that Malmgren's fears had finally become reality. The Lutheran Church in Leningrad was on the brink of extinction. And if the Church was facing destruction in its historic stronghold, what hope remained among the few remaining congregations scattered throughout the rest of the country? A good example of the pressures brought to bear against the city congregations can be seen in the case of the Russian-speaking, Jesus Christ Lutheran Church. After Kurt Muss' arrest in 1929, the congregation had borrowed pastors serving in Leningrad or the surrounding region (e.g., Oktav Simon and Paul Reichert) while continuing to meet at the church building of St. Michael's Lutheran on Vasily Island. (St. Michael's German-speaking congregation had united with Jesus Christ Lutheran's Russian-speaking congregation in the church building). The historical record of this congregation has been preserved by the witness of one of its parishioners, Konstantin Andrievsky. A convert from Russian Orthodoxy, Andrievsky came into the Lutheran Church on December 25, 1917 when a law was passed protecting freedom of conscience. This was the brief period of freedom before the Bolsheviks began their concerted attack upon the Church. Although a lawyer by profession, Andrievsky spoke only Russian, so Jesus Christ Lutheran was a perfect place for him to worship.¹⁹⁹ In that he

¹⁹⁸ P-30561, List 244, FSB Archives of the St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁹ P-34994, List 72, FSB Archives of the St. Petersburg Region. There was an initial congregation worshiping in Russian before Muss took over the services, led by the father-son pastoral team, Albert and Johannes Masing. They gathered in whatever building they could find. See Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 365.

was not alone, and further evidence that Kurt Muss was correct in providing worship services for Russian speakers who were not inclined to attend Russian Orthodox Church services.

Andrievsky described a welcoming yet cautious congregation in the mid-1930s that met at the historic St. Michael's Lutheran church building on Vasily Island in Leningrad. Since Andrievsky taught courses in the evening not far from the church, he would stop in for evening services or prayer meetings, the time at which the gatherings were generally held due to the altered calendar of the workweek. He remembered that the *dvatsatka* chairman and influential parishioner, Alfred Zietnick, controlled the doors so that the evening street noise would not affect the services. Andrievsky described a congregation that relied exclusively upon its parishioners to pay the rent for use of the church. This he and they did willingly. On an evening in June of 1934, Andrievsky attended his first meeting of the *dvatsatka* by Zietnick's urging, so that a lawyer would be present as discussions were held with two workers of the Cooperative of Plasterers and Painters. Along with Zietnick, *dvatsatka* member Jan Vannag and organist, Evgeny Hannicke, were present. (Since there was no full-time pastor, those who served the congregation, like Paul Reichert, did not attend the *dvatsatka* sessions). Andrievsky's advice was needed because the workers had offered to paint the roof of the church for an unheard of sum— 8 to 10 thousand rubles!! (4 to 5 thousand dollars, approximately). Naturally, the *dvatsatka* refused what was apparently another attempt to overload the congregation with debt. In response to this impossible demand, Vannag offered to paint the roof for free.²⁰⁰

This was often how congregations like Jesus Christ Lutheran responded to the state's attempts to force it into debt or non-existence. The parishioners would rally around the pastor and/or *dvatsatka* and do whatever they could to support their congregation. At times, the congre-

²⁰⁰ P-34994, List 72–74, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

gation would also rent the church building to Seventh Day Adventists or Eulogian Orthodox Christians in order to help with finances.²⁰¹ In the fall of 1934, Andrievsky was asked to attend his second *dvatsatka* meeting. This time the situation was more serious. The Finance Inspector had summarily increased the tax on the congregation after the state had forced it to take a loan to pay for the reconstruction of the church roof in the summer. Now the church treasury was empty. Hannicke outlined all of the expenses of the past few months while Andrievsky provided a comparison between energy costs in public housing and churches. Hannicke further explained that the exorbitant state tax bill continued to escalate every year while the congregation, no doubt reflecting the effects of persecution, had dwindled to 35 parishioners. Thus discussions were held to consider how the congregation could possibly pay off its debt. If not, all were agreed, the church would be forced to close. Each member contemplated how much more he could pay in order to keep the congregation afloat. Hannicke himself had accepted very little pay for his work as organist, and now refused to accept any pay so as to help the congregation reduce its debt.²⁰²

As they all walked to the tram after the meeting, Andrievsky reminded them that he had predicted four years ago that such a situation might occur if taxes continued to rise and the congregation couldn't pay. He recommended then that they not plunge parishioners into further personal debt, but simply close the church. When they gathered for his third *dvatsatka* meeting at Zietnick's apartment in April 1935, Andrievsky realized that there was no longer any discussion about paying the church's bill. It was obvious that Jesus Christ Lutheran would have to close. Hannicke was told by the regional government that all the church's property would have to be

²⁰¹ Shkarovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss." Eulogius was a Russian Orthodox bishop based in Paris, who had fled the Soviet Union. His followers managed to worship separately from the official Russian Orthodox Church in the USSR. See "Eulogius," Wikipedia, last modified September 20, 2017.

²⁰² Fond 1002, Delo 52, List 163, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

transferred over to them and that the last church service would be held in April.²⁰³

Andrievsky was not simply giving up without a fight, as extraordinary pressures had already been brought to bear upon the parishioners and members of the *dvatsatka*. A good example of the complexities of being a faithful Christian in Stalin's USSR in the mid-1930s can be illustrated in the history of the Kubilius family of Jesus Christ Lutheran church. The Kubilius' were a well-educated, intellectually curious couple in their early forties who possessed their own collection of rare paintings and a large library.²⁰⁴ They were conversant in at least four languages (German, Russian, Lithuanian, French and a knowledge of English). Mikhail worked as an electrician and manager at ZHAKT– (Housing and Leasing Cooperative Partnership).²⁰⁵ Before their marriage, his wife Erika had worked in the registration section of a machine production enterprise called Storer and Co. She was now busy raising their two daughters, Ilse [12 years old] and Gertrude [11 years old], but had been a faithful member of the St. Michael's *dvatsatka* since 1919.²⁰⁶

On March 10, their family received a severe blow. Mikhail was arrested as a “socially dangerous element” and was now being interrogated about foreign family contacts. He told the agent he had cousins in Lithuania while his wife had four brothers in Estonia. A slew of strange questions followed: “What was his opinion on the coming to power of the Fascists in Germany?” Mikhail simply mentioned that he had found out about it when he saw the swastika on the flag at the German consulary in Leningrad and read about the events in the newspapers.²⁰⁷ “Which Lu-

²⁰³ P-34994, List, 73, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁴ P-21636, List 3– 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁵ P-21636, List 8, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁶ “ЭТОТ ДЕНЬ В ИСТОРИИ ПРИХОДА СВЯТОГО МИХАИЛА [This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael's], accessed September 18, 2017; P-21636, List 3, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁷ “This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael's;” P-21636, List 1, FSB Archives of St.

therans do you have connections with?” Mikhail’s answer gives us some insight into the kindness of the Kubilius’, because the daughter of the former factory owner where he worked, Lucia German, was living with them as a dependent. [She was 73 years old].²⁰⁸ Apparently there was also a picture of the Czar’s family in his possession, which he explained was owned by an ethnic German named Klug, who had left for Revel [n.b., Tallinn]. His fiancé had left the picture with them for safekeeping until her marriage to Mr. Klug.

The NKVD took these disparate facts and wove a case full of suspicion about the Kublius’ loyalties. Mikhail Kublius was described as a political Fascist who systematically engaged in agitation, disseminating excerpts from the speeches of Hitler as he awaited the coming of German Fascism. Apparently the NKVD had also found a Browning revolver in the apartment with six cartridges, which Mikhail said he had found in the loft of the apartment when his wife was hanging up sheets to dry. Leningrad had been a dangerous city during the years of revolution, and it is not out of the realm of possibility that a revolver had been left behind by the previous occupant. But combining this with the portrait of the Czar’s family and correspondence to family members beyond the borders, the NKVD agent claimed that Kubilius was avoiding his questions and giving false testimony.²⁰⁹ He was ordered to be deported by March 20th with a five-year sentence at a labor camp in Yrgyz, Kazakhstan, his wife and their dependent, Lucia, being obliged to follow him into exile.²¹⁰

Their daughters were then taken in by an aunt who must have assisted them in writing a letter to the Soviet authorities. Shrewdly identifying themselves as “Pioneers” [a communist youth

Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁸ P-21636, List 9– 10, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁹ P-21636, List 11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁰ P-21636, List 12, 14– 15, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

group], on June 16 the girls wrote a heart-rending letter to the government pleading for their parents' return:

On March 20, 1935, our parents were sent from Leningrad to Kustanay. We beg you to please free our parents from exile and allow them to return to Leningrad or perhaps 100 kilometers from Leningrad. We are alone. We are crying a lot and are suffering without them, especially without mama, whom we love very, very much; Mama has a bad heart and she is suffering very much without us. Once again, we beg you to please hurry this process as much as possible and return our parents to us.²¹¹

One NKVD agent must have had a heart because he even wrote that their mother was not guilty of anything and should be freed. However, the girls' appeal was ultimately met with a stony response by another official—"There is no basis to free them."²¹² In 1937 Mikhail would die in the Karaganda regional labor camp, *Karlag*. Lucia would die in exile in 1939 at the age of 77 of complications from a hernia. Erika would eventually be freed from exile in 1954 and return to her daughters, surviving well into old age [81 years] and passing away in 1973.²¹³ Appealing to the Soviet authorities by letter, she succeeded in 1957 in having all three of them, herself, her husband, and Lucia German, cleared of the false charges brought against them.²¹⁴

When discussing St. Michael's *dvatsatka's* response to closure of the church, one has to factor in these troubling acts of the Soviet government, torturing an ordinary family whose only crime was being faithful members of the Lutheran Church. And yet despite arrests and threats against the congregation, it succeeded in delaying the church's closure for a little while. For when the regional government finally decided to officially close the parish on August 1, the parishioners rallied and gathered enough signatures from government officials to delay the closing until the middle of August, continuing worship services in the meantime. But the

²¹¹ P-21636, List 27, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹² P-21636, List 31, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹³ "This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael's," accessed September 18, 2017.

²¹⁴ P-21636, List 40, 48, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

congregation was in no position to make demands for the long term. The state held all the cards, and while various congregations might delay their closure, the inevitable demise of the churches was all but certain. Alfred Zietnick was forced to hand over the keys to the church on August 15, thus ending the church life of the only exclusively Russian-language Lutheran congregation in the Soviet Union.²¹⁵

Konstantin Andrievsky mourned the passing of this unique congregation, recalling that it was composed of Czechs, Swedes, Finns, Russified Germans, and ethnic Russians like himself, who had accepted the Lutheran Confessions while acknowledging that Russian was the operative language of their nation.²¹⁶ *Dvatsatka* member and organist, the 66 year-old Evgeny Hannicke was another of these unique believers who filled the pews of Jesus Christ Lutheran. A native of St. Petersburg, his family was of German Lutheran aristocratic stock. He basically grew up in the Marble Palace, a historic landmark along the banks of the Neva River located next to the Summer Park. There his father, a noted scholar of science, was employed as a teacher to the family of Duke Peter Oldenburg, the first cousin to the martyred Czar, Alexander II.²¹⁷

It would only be expected that Hannicke would have been the recipient of a privileged education, and he did not disappoint his teachers in this regard. In fact, one of Duke Oldenburg's eight children founded the Institute of Experimental Medicine and this is where Hannicke would spend his entire life working as a scientist. He also learned six languages and from his mother, he inherited his musical talent. Hannicke learned to play the cello and keyboard in his youth, and sometime later added the organ to his list of instruments. But Hannicke was not

²¹⁵ Shkarovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss."

²¹⁶ P-34994, Lists, 73, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁷ "Этот день в Истории Прихода Святого Михаила" [This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael's], accessed August 6, 2016. See also "Duke Peter Georgievich of Oldenburg," Wikipedia, last modified October 24, 2017.

only a scholar, he was also from his youth an active and engaged Christian, involving himself in the charitable activities for which the Lutheran Church was renowned in Russia. As an adult, he would serve as a board member for the Evangelical Home of Charity on Bolshoi Samsonievsky Street.²¹⁸ He eventually became the organist for Jesus Christ Lutheran and was considered by Mikhail Mudyugin to be one of the two most accomplished organists in Leningrad, the other being St. Peter's Wolf Liss.²¹⁹ When he was not actively serving as organist in the congregation of Jesus Christ Lutheran, he worked during the week alongside the famed scientist Ivan Pavlov at the institute that would be named after him, located some twelve kilometers east of Leningrad in a wooded setting very near to Koltushi's historic Lutheran church. Hannicke served as Pavlov's "right hand" for 42 years, himself authoring scores of academic articles, including one on the conditional reflexes of mice during an experiment where he utilized the sounds of the organ pipes.²²⁰ Given that he would seem to be the "poster child" for the "former people" of the Czarist regime, it seems odd that the NKVD left him alone. But whether this was due to the influence of Ivan Pavlov or not is uncertain.

As the *dvatsatka* members now reflected upon the pressures that they had endured from the Soviet government, Andrievsky reminded them that the Lutherans were not being singled out for persecution. For what it was worth, Orthodox parishes were also being forced to close "against their will." The nearby Orthodox congregation *Rozhdyestvo* (meaning "Christmas," or more literally, "The Birth"), for example, had also been forced to close because of Soviet oppression. Those honest words about the perilous situation of the Christian churches in the USSR would

²¹⁸ "This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael's," accessed August 6, 2016.

²¹⁹ Shkarovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss."

²²⁰ "This Day in the History of the Congregation of St. Michael's."

come back to haunt him in the very near future.²²¹ Lutheran parishioners in the city were not oblivious to what was occurring, either, as they noted the increasingly regular arrests of pastors. Harald Lindes, born in Petrograd in 1921, recognized even as a child that young, brave pastors would arrive and soon disappear. It seems that his mother often took her children to St. Anne's or St. Mary's, but primarily to St. Peter's. Although he admitted that he couldn't fully comprehend all that was occurring, he "...instinctively sensed and truly admired the courage of those who trod the path to Golgotha for the sake of the Faith."²²² The fear that parishioners had of participating in church functions was further emblazoned in his memory when his younger brother was baptized in the mid-1930s. His mother went to the pastor of St. Anne's for the baptism (more than likely it was Oktav Simon). When the pastor asked a male relative if he was ready to take on the responsibility of spiritual father to his godchild, the man didn't answer immediately. The pastor asked him two more times, when he, absorbed in his own ruminations finally said, "Yes, yes, yes." He apologized afterwards, telling the pastor that he was pondering where he might be sent into exile for this action, Karaganda [Kazakhstan] or yet further away! Lindes also remembered how his mother and the other parishioners of St. Peter's, when upon entering the church and finding their seat, looked around to see who was there because less and less people were attending church. He recalled her once saying, "'Thank the Lord, Emma Adolfovna is here, but... where is her husband?'" And mama was afraid to contemplate what came into her thoughts."²²³

²²¹ P-34994, List 73–74, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²²² Harald G. Lindes, "ЁЛОЧКА \ Christbaumchen," from Архангелиты — дети Немецкой слободы [Archangelites: Children of the German Quarter], accessed July 4, 2016. In his memoirs of growing up in Leningrad in the 1930s, Lindes remarked, "I was too young then to recognize the tragedy occurring, but instinctively felt it and praised the courage of those who walked the path to Golgotha for the sake of the Faith."

²²³ Lindes, "Christbaumchen."

The city of Leningrad and its oblast (region) experienced a spate of church closings in 1935, numbering 79 in total. Lutherans would not be immune from the government's watchful eye. Besides Jesus Christ Lutheran, the Estonian Lutheran congregation, St. John's, was liquidated on February 25. By late summer the number of closures reached alarming proportions. On August 1, St. Catherine's (Arnold Frischfeld's old congregation) along with St. Mary Magdalene and, on September 1, St. Anne's, were all closed for good.²²⁴ Under the guise of "community needs," the government would from August until December close eight German-speaking Lutheran congregations in Leningrad and its suburbs.²²⁵ What did "community needs" entail? A primary example of how church buildings could be utilized after their closure is illustrated by Jesus Christ Lutheran Church. When Alfred Zietnick turned the church keys over to the Soviet government after it was officially "liquidated" in August, the government initially planned to turn the spacious building into a library. They would dither with the building for a while, before finally handing it over in 1947 to a tobacco factory for use as warehouse. In the 1950s, the church building would be remodeled from a single story into a three story building, a factory named "Sport" occupying the premises, specializing in the manufacturing of volleyballs and boxing gloves.²²⁶

Mikhail Mudyugin, one of Kurt Muss' Sunday schoolteachers in 1929, remarked years later how church life in the 1930s had gradually weakened, especially since pastor after pastor

²²⁴ Fond 7384, Opis 33, Delo 51, Lists 2, 7, 9, 16–17, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²²⁵ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 56.

²²⁶ Прогулки по Санкт-Петербургу [Walks around St. Petersburg], last modified, October 26, 2017. Current Russian Vladimir Putin grew up right around the corner from St. Michael's. He would have only known the Gothic structure as a sports equipment factory. The diabolical nature of the communists was on full display as they placed each new floor right in the middle of the stained glass windows, insuring the building's demise if someone ever tried to reconvert it back into its original church design. See Sergey Tatarenko to Matthew Heise, November 2010.

was arrested and deported to the camps. Mudyugin recalled how the majority of the church youth had at first responded to the actions of the authorities in 1929 with “light irony,” although some began to fear the heightened attention of the OGPU. That attitude began to change in 1935 after the OGPU/NKVD’s massive arrests of the Leningrad intelligentsia following the Kirov assassination, especially for those of non-Russian ethnicity.²²⁷ Before the Kirov assassination, another source affirmed Mudyugin’s account of the faithfulness of the youth at Jesus Christ Lutheran. When Pastor Julius Zahlit was arrested in 1934, he noted that most congregations in Leningrad did not have youth that were as active as this congregation. After confirmation was completed in most churches, the youth would drift away from the church, no doubt influenced by the pressures from the times in which they were living. But Zahlit confirmed what Mudyugin said about the youth gathering offerings to support the church, even shoveling snow from the church grounds during the brutal winters and finding various ways to haul the snow to the Neva River (which was at least a few kilometers away). Zahlit noted that the organist [Evgeny Hannicke] would arrange for the choir to perform on church holidays while Zietnick and Vannag held the congregation together. The youth anticipated the return of Pastor Kurt Muss from the camps, a hope which we know would never be realized.²²⁸ Although interim pastors like Oktav Simon and Paul Reichert would faithfully serve at Jesus Christ Lutheran on Sundays, without the charismatic Muss at the helm many of the youth at Jesus Christ Lutheran would eventually drift away from the parish, too.²²⁹

Other youth who were not churchgoers must have also sensed the lawless spirit of the times

²²⁷ Mikhail Mudyugin, “Из воспоминаний о жизни ленинградских евангелическо- лютеранских общин перед их ликвидацией,” [“A Remembrance of Life in the Leningrad Evangelical-Lutheran Congregation until its Liquidation”], *Journal of the Church of Ingria* 3–4, (Dec. 1993), 20.

²²⁸ P-35162, Volume 1, List 55, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²²⁹ Mudyugin, “A Remembrance of Life,” 20.

and were thus emboldened, because St. Peter's parishioners noted the almost weekly occurrence of broken windows or defacing of property, like the statues of saints Peter and Paul outside the church. When parishioners complained to local officials, they were quickly dismissed with the following admonition: "The church has been given over to the *dvatsatka*, let them figure out how to protect it."²³⁰ St. Peter's was not alone as almost all Christian churches suffered from the same acts of vandalism. Ironically, though, Harald Lindes was astonished that the enormous bronze bowl that stood in the vestibule of St. Peter's and received the offerings of the parishioners was untouched. It struck him as odd because all around him in Leningrad he noticed the stealing of purses, the robbing of apartments, even murders, and the general lawlessness of the street children. And yet, no one took from the bronze bowl. He thought that perhaps there was some fear of God still remaining in the land, but church records would indicate that in 1932 festive plates, office clocks and other items, were stolen en masse from the church building.²³¹ It appears there was less and less fear of God as the preponderance of atheistic propaganda left its mark upon the disappearing conscience of the Soviet people.

With the massive church closings that had been occurring throughout the year, by the Fall of 1935 St. Peter's remained the only Lutheran Church open in all of Leningrad.²³² Having known Pastor Paul Reichert for some time, since he would occasionally preach at Jesus Christ Lutheran, Alfred Zietnick now transferred his membership over to St. Peter's. Despite the dangers he had encountered, narrowly escaping arrest in the Hansen-Muss Case in 1929 due to his advanced age, this 68 year-old pharmacist would not now abandon his faith nor his Lutheran

²³⁰ Maxim Ivanov, *The Lutheran Quarter in Petersburg*, 42.

²³¹ Harald G. Lindes, "Christbaumchen;" Maxim Ivanov, *The Lutheran Quarter in Petersburg*, 42.

²³² Kahle, *Geschichte der EvangelischLutherischen Gemeinden*, 140.

Church. The remaining members of Jesus Christ Lutheran did likewise, although the repression they experienced at Jesus Christ Lutheran would eventually follow them to St. Peter's.²³³ For Bishop Malmgren, though, that meant that the only possible church he could attend was the congregation led by Pastor Paul Reichert. Their past unresolved conflict had to weigh heavily upon his mind as he contemplated how much longer he could work effectively in the Soviet Union.

Despite Christianity's weakened state by the middle of the 1930s, St. Peter's still remained a center of activity for those who wanted to worship and hear the message of the Gospel. The former President of the United Lutheran Synod of New York and close friend of Dr. Morehead's, Dr. Samuel Trexler, traveled to the Soviet Union in late 1934. Trexler actually had the opportunity to visit the seminary building in Leningrad as well as several Lutheran congregations in Leningrad and Moscow. He had two visits with the 74 year-old Bishop Malmgren at the Ahrendt House, where he was living alone, the students having already vacated the premises. Given that there were few foreign travelers to the USSR at this point, Trexler's reflections provide an important witness to the conditions of the church at that time. The opinions that he heard on the state of the church varied, however. One pastor told him frankly that only the Revelation of St. John could explain what they had experienced. Still, others remained hopeful.²³⁴

Trexler especially noted his visit to Paul Reichert's St. Peter's in Leningrad, calling it "an oasis in the desert." When Trexler arrived, Reichert met him along with six of the younger clergy, all of them his former students at the seminary. Trexler was suitably impressed. "A nobler group of young Pastors one would not see in the church in any land. There was no

²³³ P-37251, List 37, 147–148, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 134.

²³⁴ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 98–99; Samuel Trexler, "What of the Church in Russia?", March 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

defeatism in their attitude. With such men the church can hold out until conditions change in this land of brutality.”²³⁵ Reichert told Trexler that St. Peter’s had added 500 more communicants in 1934, including increases in baptisms and marriages. Reichert even stated that the 3500-seat church had a standing room only crowd on Christmas Eve in 1934. Although admittedly the taxes on the congregation were very heavy, Reichert had managed to acquire a refund in 1934 from the 1933 tax payment. But despite the encouraging and upbeat report Trexler gave of St. Peter’s, he was not oblivious to the dangers the Lutheran Church was experiencing. He recognized the tax burden as “insuperable” and admitted: “I felt that I had been in the presence of martyrs who were ready to sacrifice all that they had for the sake of the Gospel.”²³⁶ In this instance, Trexler’s comments would prove to be prophetic, for the six pastors whom he met at St. Peter’s in late 1934 were the six who *would* be arrested in the spring of 1935 (including pastors Wohl and Simon)! Later that year on December 8th, the six would be exiled and deported to the Gulag with sentences ranging from four to six years.²³⁷

Fortunately, not all of the news was grave with regard to imprisoned pastors. Pastor Wilhelm Lohrer of Omsk, and those parishioners of his congregation who were sentenced to death, had their sentences reduced to banishment in Siberia. While Morehead acknowledged the severity of the sentence (Lohrer had been given ten years, after all!), he knew that it was a victory of sorts, nonetheless. Ever the optimist, Morehead surmised that the Lord might very well have given them an opportunity to witness to their faith while they served time in the Gulag. The benefits of foreign intervention in this case were conveyed to Morehead via the German Foreign

²³⁵ Samuel Trexler, “What of the Church in Russia?”

²³⁶ Samuel Trexler, “What of the Church in Russia?”—March 1935, John Morehead to P.O. Schallert, August 23, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²³⁷ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 331, 338, 341, 376, 382.

Office through its Consul General in New York, Dr. Borchers. He reliably informed Morehead that the “direct intercession” of the LWC had induced the Soviet government to suspend the death sentences. Naturally, they could not publicize this information; but at the very least, it did lend credence to the impression that the Soviet government took foreign opinion seriously.²³⁸

As for Trexler, he simultaneously exuded optimism similar to Morehead’s while at the same time not minimizing the dangerous plight of the church. However, in an article written in March 1935, Trexler offered his opinion that the church had already seen the worst of the persecution: “The Soviets would follow a policy of moderation from here on out,” he predicted.²³⁹ Here his prophetic skills failed him, though, for he could not have been more spectacularly wrong. By the end of 1934 there were 39 pastors serving in the Soviet Union. By the end of 1935, there would only be 15 active Lutheran pastors.²⁴⁰ Included in the list of pastors who would lose their freedom in 1935 was the independent thinker but stalwart Lutheran pastor, Woldemar Reichwald. While Reichwald had at one time composed his own Krasnoyarsk Articles while criticizing the Lutheran Church for its hierarchical structure, in the end he remained obedient to the bishops and served faithfully in the Church until his arrest. On the night and early morning of December 27 and 28, Vladivostok’s NKVD subjected Reichwald to a five-hour house search. After Reichwald’s arrest, three additional raids were conducted on his apartment. Church lists (presumably of parishioners) and documents were confiscated, along with his private correspondence. The charges of espionage were being prepared, as they were

²³⁸ John Morehead to Rev. Henry Bagger, November 14, 1935, Martin Luther Bund to John Morehead, March 1, 1936, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

²³⁹ Trexler, “What of the Church in Russia?”

²⁴⁰ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 326–27. By the author’s count, there were 15 pastors serving at the end of the year. Wilhelm Kahle says 14 and for some reason, does not include Alexander Streck in Moscow.

now becoming the most common charge leveled against anyone with German ties in the Lutheran Church. As a matter of fact, Communist and *Bezbozhnik* journalist, Boris Kandidov, would posthumously accuse Reichwald of espionage in his book, *Church and Espionage* [1940], one of the charges being that he had worked for the Czarist police before the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.²⁴¹ On the night and early morning of February 14 and 15 the following year, Reichwald's wife would also be arrested. Reichwald himself was held in harsh confinement, being denied gifts of food and forbidden the opportunity even to wash. He would die in exile in 1939.²⁴²

While news of the fate of many pastors and their last days is in short supply, occasionally, surviving witnesses carried their testimonies with them into freedom. One such story concerns Simon Kludt, a 54 year-old pastor who had served congregations in the Ukraine since 1908. Arrested for giving the exiled names of those villagers in need of food aid during the state-induced famine of 1932–33, Kludt was accused of spying for Germany. Of course, his crime of “spying” actually consisted solely of writing to German aid agencies so that they would get the addresses of the starving villagers. Kludt was imprisoned in Zaporozhye for 48 days, receiving a food package from his wife the day before he was executed. Distributing the contents to his fellow prisoners, as he had a foreboding of his death, Kludt poignantly addressed his fellow prisoners (a pastor and a parishioner): “Tell them [his wife and eight children] that I have won the crown of life.”²⁴³ Kludt's two cellmates suffered six more months of imprisonment and were then

²⁴¹ Martin Luther Bund to John Morehead, April 2, 1936, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA; Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 298; Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin, 1961), 255.

²⁴² Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 141.

²⁴³ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 358; Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 152–53.

sent to hard labor in Siberia for ten years. They ultimately survived their ordeal and were able to tell of the great faith and witness of Pastor Simon Kludt. But unless someone lived to speak of the whereabouts of condemned pastors and parishioners, their tales went to the grave with them.²⁴⁴

As the year came to a close, it was undeniable that 1935 had turned out to be the most devastating year for Lutheran pastors in the Church's almost four-century existence in Russia. Although historians J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov have unearthed statistics detailing that the NKVD actually made fewer arrests in 1935 than in any year since 1929, that information would be cold comfort for the Lutherans of Russia. In fact, those same historians acknowledge that the percentage of arrests was increasing for those dubious categories of "anti-Soviet agitation" and "counter-revolution," charges with which Lutherans often had to contend. In the wake of the Kirov assassination, "political crimes" often defined the actions of those whose beliefs ran counter to the *Zeitgeist* of Stalinism.²⁴⁵ Optimism, indeed, was something in very short supply as Russia's Lutherans greeted the New Year of 1936.

²⁴⁴ Heinrich Roemmich, "Die ev.-luth. Kirche in Russland in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart," *Volk auf dem Weg, January 1954*, 263; Martin Luther Bund to John Morehead, March 1, 1936.

²⁴⁵ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 156.

CHAPTER SIX

1936–1939: THE DEMISE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE USSR

The fifteen pastors still active on the roster by the beginning of 1936 were composed of a mixture of the nationalities serving the Lutheran Church in Russia. The names of those still serving Lutheran parishes were: Alexander Streck in Moscow; Paul and Bruno Reichert at St. Peter's in Leningrad; Ferdinand Bodungen in Peterhof, Leningrad region; Heinrich Behrendts in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; Pekka Braks in the Ingrian towns of Gubanitsa and Venjoki; Aleksanteri Korpelainen in the Ingrian villages of Haapakangas and Koltushi; Antti Jaatinen in the Ingrian village of Skouvoritsa; The Migla brothers, Alexander and Jan, who took care of the Latvian congregations in Leningrad and the Leningrad region; Leo Schulz, pastor to Estonians and serving at the oldest Ingrian congregation in Moloskovitsa (founded 1611); Selim Laurikkala, the leader of the Finnish/Ingrian congregations and pastor at St. Mary's in Leningrad; Karl Vogel at St. Paul's in Odessa, Ukraine; Ossip Toryassan in Ordzhonikidze/Vladikavkaz in the north Caucasus; Emil Reusch in Annenfeld of the Caucasus and of course, the bishop, Arthur Malmgren.¹ For these fifteen pastors and the bishop, the clock was ticking as the Second Five Year Plan to eradicate Christianity was well on its way towards completion by 1937.

The Man Who “Touched the Whole World”: Dr. John Morehead (1867–1936)

In October 1935, Dr. John Morehead attended his last event overseas, the Third Convention of the LWC in Paris. Prior to the convention, a weary Morehead announced his intention

¹ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 327, 597–601.

to step down as Chairman of the Executive Committee so that a younger, more vigorous man could take charge. He was now 68 years old and his health had been in decline for some time. Morehead still hoped to be involved indirectly in the affairs of the worldwide Lutheran Church, but his correspondence with Lutherans in the USSR now ceased.² After his return to New York, he set about to "...tell the story of unexampled and fruitful work of Christian love and mercy which God had enabled the Lutheran Church bodies in America to accomplish since the World War through the agency of the National Lutheran Council."³ Despite his modesty, he had been the God-sent messenger to Lutherans in Russia in this most turbulent time. It was a story well worth telling.

Dr. Ralph Long, the new liaison to the Russian Lutheran Church at the LWC, now introduced himself to Bishop Malmgren via letter. Long informed him that the LWC had decided to split up the correspondence, perhaps a sign that Morehead had taken on too strenuous of duties in the past. In light of his new duties, Long queried Malmgren about the state of the Lutheran Church: How many pastors were still serving? What could the LWC do to help? Was there any change in the state's attitude towards Christianity? Can we communicate with those pastors in prison or exile?⁴ Long was not aware, however, that the bishop had been called in to the NKVD headquarters in January and had himself been threatened with imprisonment and exile! Malmgren, it seemed, was now being subjected to the undivided attention of the NKVD and interrogations of other pastors would attest to that fact. Just as Bishop Meyer had been harassed in Moscow, Malmgren was now being called in for numerous chats with the NKVD.

His correspondence with foreigners and reception of funds from abroad appear to have

² John Morehead to Rev. Henry Bagger, November 14, 1935.

³ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 158.

⁴ Ralph Long to Arthur Malmgren, May 1, 1936, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

been the subject of the unpleasant interrogations, as the intercepted letter from March 20, 1935 would indicate. Although they knew the answer full well, the NKVD cynically questioned how this 76 year-old bishop was surviving without sufficient funds from the local church.⁵ Apparently his old friend Lev Khinchuk could no longer protect him, either, because on January 19 the German ambassador to the USSR, Friedrich Werner Graf von der Schulenberg, alerted Johannes Kriege in Berlin that Malmgren was in serious danger of being arrested or sent into exile.⁶ Ironically, former student Johannes Lel remembered that Malmgren once said that if the relationship of the Soviet Union to Germany ever got worse, “it would be necessary for me to buy a ticket to the next world!”⁷ The pressure upon him was now open and undisguised. Ralph Long would have to wait a few months before he received an answer to his innocent questions, because plans were now set in motion to extract Malmgren from the USSR before it was too late.

The threats from the NKVD and the complications of operating the seminary were not the only reasons that decided Malmgren upon this new course. Adding a further complication to his troubled life, Malmgren was now hospitalized with kidney trouble. He would be released from the hospital on March 12, but given that Morehead’s health issues had led to his own retirement, it must have seemed to Malmgren that he had done all that he could possibly do for the Church.⁸ The previous year, he had informed Dr. Rendtorff that the seminary had no realistic chance of operating normally and that it was time for him to leave the Soviet Union. Malmgren had already received assurances from Rendtorff that he would be given a pension in Germany. So given the

⁵ Shkarovsky, “Bishop Arthur Malmgren.”

⁶ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 140.

⁷ Lel, “How They Were Trying to Destroy Us,” 19.

⁸ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 140.

added complications from his health problems, there seemed to be little doubt that he would leave in the near future. Complicating the problem now was that the Soviets had made the rules and cost for leaving the country more difficult. While the German government worked on his exit visa, Malmgren would be forced to wait for a spell.⁹

As Bishop Malmgren was waiting for his visa, the health of Dr. Morehead's wife was declining even worse than his own. Now relocated to their beloved Virginia, both were in the last days of their lives. Surprisingly, for a man who had dedicated his life to the Church, there was apparently no real financial support for him and his wife as they neared their end. It was an almost fitting measure of the humility of the man. The pastor who had expended so much energy securing aid for Russia's Lutherans, spiritual and physical, hadn't had time to think about his own needs.¹⁰ There were many, though, who couldn't forget Morehead's deeds and sought to give him some worldly acclaim for his efforts. Before his health had declined, a movement had already begun among his friends in Germany, Sweden, Finland and Denmark to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. While European friends informed the committee in Stockholm of Morehead's potential candidacy, friends in America worked through back channels to have President Roosevelt place Morehead's name into the competition.¹¹ Since former President Herbert Hoover was a good friend of Morehead's, his European friends also asked him to write the former president with this request. Addressing Hoover in the familiar way from days gone by as "My dear 'Chief,'" Morehead sheepishly admitted that European friends Count Carl Moltke and Dr. Alfred Jorgensen wanted him to ask for Hoover's recommendation. While Hoover's nomina-

⁹ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 105.

¹⁰ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 160.

¹¹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 151.

tion in America would not carry much weight due to his unpopularity because of the Great Depression, he was still held in high regard by Europeans for so efficiently directing the feeding program for a starving continent at the end of World War I.¹²

Unfortunately, President Roosevelt and former President Hoover would not be given the pleasure of placing Morehead's name in nomination. On May 29, after having taken care of her husband's poor health for some time, Nellie Morehead herself succumbed after a short illness. Relegated to his bed because of his own health problems, Morehead was unable to attend her funeral on June 1. One of his last acts was to ask his nurse to learn from the doctor how much longer until he would join Nellie. The answer was not long in coming. Dr. John Morehead passed away on the day of Nellie's funeral. On June 4th at the College Church in Salem, Virginia, his colleague Dr. Frederick Knubel, who was now the Vice President of the LWC, fittingly eulogized Morehead with the words of St. Paul in Eph. 5:25: "Christ ... loved the Church and gave himself for it."¹³ His friend, Dr. Samuel Trexler, remembered the day poignantly: "It was in the late afternoon of a beautiful June day, and the peace which he had sought in vain, and to which he had been such an absolute stranger during the last score of years, now seemed to be his. After he had touched the whole world he was finally laid to rest amid simple surroundings in his own native Virginia."¹⁴

Tributes poured in from those whose lives he had touched. Former President Herbert Hoover declared: "Dr. Morehead was a man of great character, devotion and idealism."¹⁵ From

¹² John Morehead to Herbert Hoover, July 23, 1935, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹³ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 160–61.

¹⁴ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 162.

¹⁵ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 149.

the Germans who had worked so closely with him to save the Lutheran Church in Russia, German ambassador to the United States, Dr. Hans Luther, expressed their gratitude: “Dr. Morehead’s passing away is an irretrievable loss for the Lutheran world.”¹⁶ The president of St. Olaf College in Minnesota, Dr. Lars W. Boe, who had served with him on the Executive Committee of the NLC, added, “The Lutherans of the world have a finer understanding of Christian love and service because Dr. Morehead has lived.”¹⁷ Speaking of his impact upon institutions, Dr. Charles J. Smith reflected, “Both his seminary [Southern Theological Seminary] and his college [Roanoke] still hold much of his spirit, and through all the coming years will be grateful that a master once walked their way.”¹⁸ The accolades could never quite capture the enormous difference that Morehead had made in the lives of Russia’s Lutherans for over one decade. In its most difficult hour, he had come to their rescue with aid and spiritual sustenance. Those who met him could never quite forget him. Samuel Trexler recollected that during his visit to the Soviet Union in 1934, he once asked a pastor if he had known Dr. Morehead. He remembered the man’s reaction: “Catching his breath, he answered with deep feeling, ‘No, but I once saw him!’”¹⁹ Many Russian Lutherans were happy that they had seen him, because once they had, Morehead could never leave them without doing all in his power for them. He could not help but be deeply touched by the hardship and suffering that he had seen in the Volga region and the Ukraine during the famine of the early 1920s. This he never forgot. So, for example, when he heard in 1930 that 397 Russian German Lutherans were suffering in Siberia, he stepped in to help.²⁰

¹⁶ Chas. A. Fegley, “Tributes to Dr. Morehead: Lutheran Leaders Lay Laurel Wreaths on His Grave,” June 20, 1936, *Lutheran Companion*, 779.

¹⁷ Chas. A. Fegley, “Tributes to Dr. Morehead,” 778.

¹⁸ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 164.

¹⁹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 99.

²⁰ Wentz, *Lutherans in Concert*, 67–68.

The Lutherans, having been labeled kulaks, had been dispossessed of their farms in the Volga region and exiled to Siberia. The conditions were so intolerable that they had crossed the border over into Harbin, Manchuria, but were unable to find any kind of work. Helpless and slated to be expelled from Manchuria, Morehead responded to their situation by coordinating a fundraising campaign that collected \$56,000.00. The funds enabled them, with the administrative assistance of Dr. Long, to immigrate to Brazil in July 1932. There they were given land to farm, literally saving their lives in the process. Morehead was especially pleased that worldwide Lutheranism had stepped into the breach to help. Funds came from Lutherans in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, France, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Australia, Canada, the United States, and yes, even from young Lutheran churches in mission fields of the Orient like China.²¹

This took place at the time when the Hansen-Muss arrests were occurring, thus Morehead wrote to Dr. O.C. Kiep, a counselor at the Germany embassy in Washington, D.C. on December 5, 1930, in order to ascertain the best way to help publicize the plight of these poor refugees. Morehead was committed to saving the people of the Lutheran Church that he loved, his efforts possessing a theological dimension that included both body and soul.²² His fruits showed him to be a man of deep Christian conviction, compassion and love for humanity.

Unfortunately we have no record of what Bishop Malmgren thought upon hearing of the passing of his friend and colleague. Most likely he regretted that he had never had the chance to meet Morehead in person this side of heaven. The two, along with Bishop Meyer, had accomplished extraordinary things in the service of the church of their Lord Jesus Christ. By the grace

²¹ Trexler, *John A. Morehead*, 142–43.

²² John Morehead to O. C. Kiep, December 5, 1930, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

of God, they had been His instruments in keeping the Lutheran Church alive despite extraordinary obstacles. But now, only Malmgren remained. On June 20, the lonely, disheartened bishop finally received the exit visa for which he had long been waiting. He departed for Berlin. Regrettably he moved from one totalitarian regime to another, because his arrival took place a few weeks before the infamous Berlin Olympics where Hitler had hoped to showcase his Aryan supremacy theories through German sport. After having his health examined, Malmgren moved on to Mainz where he would live with his niece for a short time.²³ His daughters and sons-in-law would never join him, remaining in the Soviet Union until the end of their lives.

In his latter years, the *Gustav Adolf Verein* provided a pension for Malmgren and partook of his vast knowledge of the church in the Soviet Union. He was praised for his work and received some measure of comfort for all that he had done for the Lutheran Church over the last difficult decades. The 81 year-old Malmgren preached his last sermon in 1941 at the Castle Church in Darmstadt on the anniversary of the 100-year-old *Hilfsverein* that had aided poor Protestant congregations, and naturally, also those Germans who had been among the diaspora in the Soviet Union. Sadly, Malmgren's last years were to provide little respite from the sorrow and troubles that he had experienced while keeping the Lutheran church alive in the USSR. His old friends Fritz Rendtorff and Johannes Kriege died shortly after his resettlement in Mainz. In the political realm, the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact was cause for concern, as were the tragic events of the 900-day blockade of Leningrad in 1941, a city that had been a source of joy and heartbreak for him for over forty years. In the summer of 1944, a bomb attack on Mainz cost him his accommodations as well as the last of his earthly possessions. The *Gustav Adolf Verein* arranged for him to move to the so-called "student home" (*Studentenheim*) in Leipzig, a comfortable

²³ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 106.

house named after Franz Rendtorff. There he lived with his younger sister for the last few years of his life, occupying a small student dorm room.²⁴

Malmgren's final days proved to be not uneventful, for he witnessed the arrival of American troops in April 1945 but also the transfer of the city to Soviet troops in July 1945. He had indeed come full circle, having fled the USSR only to land in Nazi Germany, and now, at the end of his life, to fall under the occupation of the Soviets again. By all accounts, the communists left him alone. He remained mentally fit and was able to share his vast knowledge of Russia with the famed church historian, Heinrich Bornkamm, to whose home he was frequently invited as a guest. In the middle of a very cold winter, he passed away peacefully on February 3rd, 1947 at the age of 87. His old friend, the former director of the *Gustav Adolf Verein*, Bruno Geissler, performed the funeral. Malmgren was buried in a modest grave without any special notice. Twenty years later, the *Gustav Adolf Verein* general secretary, Dr. Paul-Wilhelm Gennrich, removed the urn with Malmgren's ashes to the South Cemetery of Leipzig, placing a large tombstone over it with the inscribed words of Geissler's funeral text: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:19).²⁵

"Then It Came": The Remnant of Pastors Dimishes Further

As the extraordinary triumvirate of church figures, Meyer, Morehead and Malmgren, passed from the scene, those pastors remaining surely had to wonder how they might continue in ministry. The press could be unrelenting in its steady drumbeat of lies, as a local newspaper in the In-grian region, *Svoboda* (*Freedom*, or *Vapaus* in Finnish), would attest. *Svoboda* labeled

²⁴ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 107–8.

²⁵ Tschoerner, *Arthur Malmgren—Theologe*, 108–9.

Koltushi's pastor, Juhana Varonen, a swindler, loafer and a plotter, among other vile epithets. (The Russian equivalents are much harsher in tone than the English translation would indicate). Along with Pastor Selim Laurikkala, the two were referred to as servants of the Finnish military, spiritual imposters and Fascist comrades. Varonen had already been arrested back in 1933 for a short spell, but now most likely decided that he could not subject his family to the pressure and abuse anymore.²⁶ As a citizen of Finland, he utilized his right to return to Finland at the end of 1935.²⁷

While it is unfair to judge harshly any pastor tested under such circumstances, there were men of strong faith who, in keeping with the spiritual stoicism of the Lutheran pastorate in the Soviet Union, continued to carry on with their duties despite the danger. The redoubtable Selim Laurikkala was just such a man. He took the abuse and yet continued to defy the Soviets with his calm determination to serve the Lord in the midst of an atheist culture that would have devoured him if it could. Certainly his Finnish citizenship still protected him to some extent, but Laurikkala conducted himself in a manner that often unnerved the communists. In this, he was cut from the same cloth as Meyer, Malmgren and Morehead. While hardly physically imposing or aggressive in nature, nevertheless Laurikkala was said to have argued for the Christian faith like a lion. It was said that he debated communists with diplomatic skill and in such an apolitical manner that they simply could not pin him down. Some communists who had infiltrated church services or his Bible classes were aware that he was speaking against them all the while, but he was so savvy in his speech that they couldn't quite make it all out.

²⁶ Johannes Junker and Reijo Arkkila, Editors, *Nacht und Neuer Morgen: Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche von Ingrien in Russland* (Gross Oesingen, Germany: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, 2001), 23.

²⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 81–4.

Despite increasing persecution, in 1936 the village church Laurikkala pastored in Tuutari decided to carry on with a planned celebration of its 100th anniversary. On such occasions, parishioners would often participate by reciting poems or special speeches. The times were such, though, that one needed special permission from the authorities to participate, and the government decided to only allow the pastor to speak. Laurikkala, like a good solider, gave the sermon, made speeches, and even recited some poetic verses. Meanwhile the communists had arranged for their own holiday to counteract the church celebration, but no one came to their celebrations. The sponsors of the communist event were ultimately forced to concede defeat and participate in the church's activities!²⁸ The villages would still be a tough battle for the forces of atheism, especially in the Ingrian region. But Stalin's preparations for stronger measures to be taken against believers were already on the horizon.

Other pastors were also resolutely remaining at their stations. In Moscow, Pastor Alexander Streck had been a particularly bold servant of the church for years. Ironically, Streck served in a congregation located only a few blocks from the dreaded NKVD headquarters, Lubyanka. Being right in the center of Moscow, one could not have asked for a more conspicuous place to carry on ministry. Yet the congregation still gathered on Sunday evenings, not as crowded as before, but all in all, still a functioning church. Streck had already been forced out of the church's apartment to the distant suburbs, yet he continued to make the long, uncomfortable trek to the church on the crowded public transportation.²⁹

The situation had certainly changed at St. Peter and Paul from even the early 1930s as persecution had dramatically reduced the number of churchgoers. Parishioner Olga Striks re-

²⁸ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 78.

²⁹ Georgiyevskaya, "Church Life in Moscow," 62–63.

membered that the Christmas tree in 1935 had been a small one, certainly in comparison with the old practice of setting up two large Christmas trees replete with candles. But Pastor Streck still conducted Christmas services, and Olga, an 18 year-old ethnic Latvian living in Moscow, attended with her family. Latvian services had mostly ceased with the death of Pastor Lapping in 1932,. No ethnic Latvian citizen would ever again be allowed to hold confirmation classes in Moscow, as Pastor Julius Zahlit had in 1932.³⁰ Despite previous restrictions on holiday trees, though, the fir tree was actually making a comeback for the New Year's celebrations of 1936. Soviet official, Pavel Postyshev, had urged bringing the tree back for the sake of the children. He believed that Christians had taken a pagan symbol and used it for their purposes, so why not, he mused, take this Christianized symbol, the Christmas tree, and use it for the purposes of the communist state? It was a brilliant ploy and the Stalinist New Year celebrations, now replete with fir trees, would succeed in replacing the Christmas tree in the future. In order to make certain that the dominant Orthodox Church didn't use the fir tree's return for their own intentions, the tree had to be lit on January 1 and the sale of fir trees would not be permitted after the New Year had commenced. (Whether Lutherans purchased them and secretly lit them on December 25 is unknown).³¹

As Soviet culture intruded more and more upon the life of the church, the female church council member who had been among those prepared for the church's closing now found that all Bishop Meyer had foretold was coming to pass. Reflecting upon those times, she wondered years later, "I often think, how did the bishop know all this? Then it came... the entire congregation

³⁰ Olga Striks to Dmitry Lotov, March 2014.

³¹ Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 86–87, 93.

buried Bishop Meyer... he lay in our German cemetery in Moscow. Only Pastor Streck remained.”³² There seems to be some confusion as to when Pastor Streck was forced to move 100 kilometers from the city center. Young parishioner Elza Leventhal claims this occurred in 1930, while Johannes Schleuning’s quote of this female church council member asserts that Streck moved after Bishop Meyer’s death in 1934.³³ Whatever the time frame in regard to Streck’s forced departure from the church apartment at St. Peter and Paul, the female church council member remembered letting him stay in her family’s small room when his work had kept him so late at the church that he couldn’t make it back to his home outside Moscow. Although she didn’t mention how many family members lived in that room, she said that they had one bed and two small chairs. Since they were elderly, it is likely only she and her husband lived in the room. It is obvious, though, that they were living in a communal apartment and taking the risk of having neighborhood spies report that the pastor had stayed the night.³⁴

Nor were Pastor Streck and the Lutherans of St. Peter and Paul the only Christians affected by the brazen measures the Soviets took against the church. Pastor Leopold Braun was an American Catholic priest called in 1934 to serve the parish of St. Louis, literally within the shadows of Lubyanka. Although the Roosevelt-Litvinov Agreement on religious freedom for Americans was presumably in effect, Braun thought one could hardly tell that there had been any accommodation made for the believers’ rights.³⁵ Braun quoted President Roosevelt that Americans in the USSR “...should enjoy in all respects the same freedom of conscience and religious liberty

³² Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 149.

³³ Schleuning, *Und siehe wir leben!*, 149–50, Georgiyevskaya, “Church Life in Moscow,” 62.

³⁴ Schleuning, *Und siehe wir leben!*, 150.

³⁵ Leopold L.S. Braun, *In Lubyanka's Shadow: The Memoirs of an American Priest in Stalin's Moscow, 1934–1945* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 57–60.

which they enjoy at home.”³⁶ But in fact, when Braun met with Ivan Poliansky (Minister of Non-Orthodox Religious Affairs) in order to discuss the freedoms that Litvinov had assured President Roosevelt existed, Poliansky informed Braun that no such change had occurred. On the contrary, Stalin’s April Law on Religious Associations 1929 was still in effect for everyone. But in diplomatic circles, Litvinov sang a different tune.³⁷

As an example of Soviet duplicity, St. Louis Catholic Church was being charged 22 times the established rate for electricity, paying 5 rubles and 50 kopecks per kilowatt compared to the average of 50 kopecks. Fortunately, limits on electricity were not imposed upon them as they were upon other churches in the city like Streck’s St. Peter and Paul, but it was not for want of trying. The Moscow Gas and Electric Supply attempted on several occasions to get Pastor Braun to agree to certain limits, but he flatly refused. Nevertheless, the church was forced to pay the excessive rate even though it not only went against the spirit of Roosevelt-Litvinov but also against the very wording of the accord.³⁸ When Braun related his situation to William Bullitt, the ambassador was indignant. He immediately offered to take the case up with Litvinov himself, but Braun and his bishop thought it best to leave it to the French embassy since St. Louis was generally considered French property.³⁹

Braun described the beggarly existence of those clergy still remaining in Moscow, lamenting the inability of the clergy to receive food or clothing cards. As a result, they were forced to pay higher rates for goods, as well as search for accommodations in any poor quarter since

³⁶ Leopold Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 62.

³⁷ Leopold Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 59, 62.

³⁸ Leopold Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 57–58.

³⁹ Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 59–60. The temperatures in St. Peter and Paul Lutheran, only a few blocks from St. Louis Catholic Church, were often no higher than 32 degrees Fahrenheit due to Soviet malice. See Dönninghaus, 518.

they were denied the basic right to housing.⁴⁰ A land and building tax was also levied against St. Louis, resulting in a \$377.00 tax bill for the year, an outrageous sum for that time. All of this, in spite of the fact that Litvinov had assured President Roosevelt that religious believers in the USSR could lease buildings for worship free of charge!!⁴¹ One way or another, the Soviets always found a way to gouge the Christians. Braun survived twelve years in Moscow and ultimately wrote a book on his experiences. Although he underwent threats and suffered deprivation for his ministry, Braun's American citizenship protected his person and his fluency in French and service to French Catholics allowed him to live unharmed in the French embassy.⁴² Most importantly, though, Braun's chronicle communicates the palpable fear that enveloped the Christian clergy as they attempted to be faithful servants to the Lord. Indeed, since St. Louis Catholic Church was located only a couple of blocks from St. Peter and Paul, Braun's portrayal of Moscow's inhospitable climate towards Christianity gives us a very real picture of the circumstances under which Alexander Streck worked.

In May 1936, the Soviet government ordered three members of St. Peter and Paul to take responsibility for the tax burden and other responsibilities of the church. If no one could be found to put his name forward, the church would be closed in August. Naturally, many parishioners feared being sent to prison if they signed their names to this document. They needed to look no further for their angst than the congregation's cantor, Ernst Hörschelmann (the son of the late Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr.), who was already in prison. Pastor Streck ended the impasse by putting his name forth and asking three other parishioners to do likewise. The female parish-

⁴⁰ Leopold Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 64–65.

⁴¹ Leopold Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 60–61.

⁴² Leopold Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 60. Braun admitted that he and the Living Church's Bishop Vvedenskii were the only clergy with a car. The other priests and pastors, like Alexander Streck, were forced to spend hours traveling back and forth on public transportation to their "suburban" lodgings. See Braun, 65.

ioner who eventually related her story to Pastor Johannes Schleuning was elderly and agreed to do so, as did a woman even older than her. The last name on the document was that of Harry Helms, an elderly widower who was not in the best of health. Pastor Streck recommended these three since they no longer had young children to raise. In June, Streck received the government document and answered the questions submitted to him, sending it to the regional police as well as the NKVD. Everything seemed to be in order as August passed and the church remained open for services.⁴³ Maybe they would survive after all?

While St. Peter and Paul was waiting with trepidation as to its future, a surprising number of American tourists were still coming to the Soviet Union. These were no ordinary visitors, though, because they were distinctly interested in the religious situation in the country and in particular, were curious as to whether the forthcoming Stalin Constitution would bring needed relief to believers. Sherwood Eddy, a former YMCA official who had been visiting the USSR for the past several summers, assembled a rather large group of 70 professors, clergymen and social workers, among others, who traveled to Moscow in August. Although Eddy himself was too ill to travel, the visitors were accorded a personal visit with Emilian Yaroslavsky, the head of the Society of the Militant Godless and a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party. They would also meet with Anna Louise Strong, a noted American communist sympathizer, and Dr. Julius Hecker, a Russian Jew who had immigrated to America when he was young, but had now returned to support the Communist government. (He would fall victim to Stalin's Great Terror in 1938 while Strong would end her days in Communist China).⁴⁴ Arriving on a separate tourist visa and clearly not interested in a Soviet propaganda

⁴³ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 150.

⁴⁴ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 18, 1936, 861.404/404, RG 59, National Archives II; LATimes.com, "Stalin-Era Secret Police Documents Detail Arrest, Execution of Americans," by Alan Cullison for

tour, was a Presbyterian minister and religious radio broadcaster from Philadelphia by the name of Donald Barnhouse. Since he gave extensive information to the U.S. Embassy about his visit, the State Department has retained documents elaborating upon what he saw and heard.

Barnhouse's keen observations give us an educated outsider's view of the conditions under which Pastor Streck and other Christian pastors and priests struggled in ministering to their flocks. Barnhouse initially visited the embassy in Moscow to ask for advice about where to find open Protestant churches. The staff referred him to two experts, Source A and Source B, who would give him pertinent information about the real situation concerning religious freedom among Lutherans and Catholics in Moscow and the USSR in general. Source A was described by the State Department's Loy Henderson as "a foreigner in Moscow who is in a position to be unusually well informed with regard to the experiences of the Lutheran Church."⁴⁵ The source's name is not given in Henderson's report to United States Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, but it almost certainly was a German national and probably one who worked at the German embassy. Such an individual would fit Henderson's description better than anyone else.

Barnhouse, as opposed to the Eddy group, was not one to be taken in by Yaroslavsky's curt dismissal of any suggestion that religious believers were persecuted. So he discussed with Source A the situation among Lutherans and other believers. Source A indicated that there were about 20 open Christian churches in Moscow, a city of 4 million. The government had closed most of the 500 Christian churches that were open before the Bolshevik Revolution, and generally found three pretexts in order to close churches: (1) Due to increasing motor traffic in the city, churches had to be torn down; (2) Taxes were raised to such a degree that the parishioners simply couldn't

the Associated Press, November 9, 1997; Anna Louise Strong, *Wikipedia*, last modified November 2, 2017.

⁴⁵ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 18, 1936.

support their congregation and pastor anymore; (3) Arbitrary repairs were ordered on the building to the extent that the congregation couldn't bear the cost of renovation. Since the government technically owned the church buildings, they could and did decide whenever they chose that repairs were needed. The case of Jesus Christ Lutheran Church in Leningrad, closed in 1935, was a primary example of this excuse utilized by the government.⁴⁶ With regard to Lutheran churches, Source A lamented that only 12 were left in existence. He listed them as follows:

2 preaching in German in Leningrad [These would be St. Peter's and St. Catherine's]

2 preaching in Finnish in Leningrad [This would include St. Mary's in the city center]

1 preaching in German in Moscow [St. Peter and Paul]

1 preaching in Latvian in Leningrad [Christ the Savior, pastored by the Migla brothers]

1 in Odessa [Pastor Karl Vogel serving]; 1 in Kharkov; [Ukrainian region]

1 preaching in German in the Transcaucasus [Ossip Toryassan, Bruno's father, was the pastor]

1 in Tashkent [Heinrich Behrendt's congregation]

1 in Tiflis [Tbilisi], although he doubted this was still open. [Most likely it was closed after Pastor Richard Mayer's martyrdom].⁴⁷

1 other congregation is mentioned, but the State Department file does not record where it was located.

While knowledgeable of the number of the remaining Lutheran congregations, Source A did not seem to be as aware of the congregations in the Ingrian countryside; but that would also lend more credence to the fact that he was probably a German. In fact, he was informed enough

⁴⁶ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 18, 1936.

⁴⁷ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 18, 1936. For a discussion of the Tbilisi congregation, see Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917-1938*, 597-601.

to tell Barnhouse that the congregation of Woldemar Reichwald in Vladivostok had been closed a few months ago, and we do know that his wife was arrested in February 1936 after he had been arrested near the end of the previous year. It is possible that his wife and the parishioners continued to gather the believers until her arrest.⁴⁸ Barnhouse now asked his source whether laymen were taking up leadership in the Church since pastors were increasingly being arrested. Source A discussed the impact of the altered workweek, explaining that only every seventh Sunday fell on a rest day. That made it virtually impossible for male parishioners to be deeply involved in church work.

Source B enlightened Barnhouse as to how the NKVD pressured the *dvatsatkas*. They would meet separately with each member and inform him/her that a meeting would be held as to whether their church would be closed or not. The agent would not fail to mention that in similar meetings, if a member chose to keep the church open he or she would be sent to Siberia for ten years. So on the day when the meeting was held, the NKVD agent would ask any member to rise if he believed his church should remain open. Most, naturally, were not ready to forfeit ten years of their life in Siberia when it was probable that they would not survive the camps. And so, the churches began to close, one by one. Despite this disheartening news about the future prospects for the Church's existence, before Barnhouse left Russia he received some good news. After speaking with several members of the Eddy group, he discovered that they, too, felt that they had not been given an honest and open representation of conditions inside the churches by the Militant Godless' Yaroslavsky. At least Barnhouse was not alone in recognizing the Soviets' duplicity.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 18, 1936; Schleuning, 140–41.

⁴⁹ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 18, 1936.

Shadows of the Great Terror: “Thousands of Seeds ... Cast to the Wind”

Not only in the church but the atmosphere in the country, if possible, was becoming more fearful than ever in the summer of 1936. In the political sphere, the first of the major political show trials commenced on August 19. Old Bolsheviks, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, stood in the dock as the main perpetrators of a plot to murder not only Sergey Kirov but also Stalin and other members of the Soviet Politburo. The trial had apparently been scripted and the accused duly carried out their roles as repentant monsters who deserved nothing less than death. Why did they submit to what history now universally deems to have been a sham trial? There is some debate as to whether they believed that their lives or only the lives of their families would be spared. What is not subject to debate is Stalin’s treachery in his dealings with them. Zinoviev and Kamenev were shot shortly after the expected August 25 verdict of guilty. Most of the immediate family of these men and others accused in the plot were executed, if not immediately, then during the historical period known as Stalin’s Great Terror (1937–1938). Olga Kameneva, the wife of Lev Kamenev and the government official who had bartered over food distribution with Dr. Morehead and Pastor Scheduling in the days of the famine, had already been imprisoned and afterwards was sent into exile. She was retried in January 1938, though, and then shot in the autumn of 1941. A total of 160 persons would be arrested and shot as a result of their connections to the accused in the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial.⁵⁰

On the whole the foreign press, while a bit uneasy about how the confessions of the accused were obtained, still did not object too strenuously because of their confusion about the fact that so many confessed to horrific crimes.⁵¹ But from the perspective of the future American

⁵⁰ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 91–105.

⁵¹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 105–6.

ambassador, Joseph Davies, who would begin his tenure in 1937, Stalin would be exonerated from all blame. Davies staunchly defended the dictator by agreeing that the Great Purge Trials (1936–1938) strengthened the Soviet Union by removing fifth columnists and traitors.⁵² Davies would be a poor replacement for the volatile but honest William Bullitt, who was finally waking up to the Janus-faced nature of Stalin. The beginning of the show trials also precipitated an increase in the terror, whose origins could be traced back to the December 1, 1934, murder of party boss Sergey Kirov. In the so-called Charter of Terror, those accused of preparing or carrying out acts of terror were now supposed to have their cases accelerated. The death sentences were to be carried out immediately after the guilty verdicts. The Great Terror would affect not only Communist Party members who had run afoul of Stalin, but also countless Christians, many of them affiliated with the Lutheran Church.⁵³

During these days of uncertainty, St. Peter and Paul continued holding church services every Sunday until the evening of November 4. In one fell swoop several parishioners along with Pastor Streck were arrested in the dead of night. The female parishioner whom Pastor Schleuning interviewed was arrested at 1:30 a.m. A thorough search was conducted of her apartment until 6 a.m., the NKVD ransacking her small room for any evidence of guilt. That night the reasons for Streck's earlier caution became apparent, as all three parishioners who had put their names forward as leaders of the congregation were arrested.⁵⁴ Elza Leventhal's 22 year-old sister, Irina, was also subjected to a search on November 5 and arrested the following day. She was accused of "terrorism," a charge Elza described as "completely absurd," speculating that Irina probably didn't even know what the phrase "terrorist act" meant. Irina was sent to Butyrki prison and

⁵² Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 79.

⁵³ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 41.

⁵⁴ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 150.

within a half year shipped out to distant Kolyma. No doubt there were others who suffered a similar fate within the congregation. Elza tried to visit the church in the days following her younger sister's arrest, but the doors were locked shut.⁵⁵ The three congregational leaders were kept in prison for nine months, whereupon the ladies were sent to the Gulag labor camps of Siberia. The older man, Harry Helms, apparently died shortly after the sentencing while the older woman survived being sent to the camps, but died in 1943. The younger woman survived this experience, eventually being freed in 1942 but remaining in exile with all of the other Russian Germans who had been deported to Siberia en masse in 1941. She worked with them in the Labor Army, which had been set aside for Russian citizens of German heritage. After the de-Stalinization period of Nikita Khrushchev in the mid-1950s, she would finally begin to gather together Lutheran believers and carry out the tasks for which Bishop Meyer had prepared her so many years ago.⁵⁶

The American embassy in Moscow was instantly made aware of Pastor Streck's arrest since he had been ministering to those of Protestant background in the embassy community. Streck had baptized the child of an embassy employee named Johnson in May and was to have conducted the wedding ceremony of employee George Minor on November 14. How long Streck had been serving the American Protestants is uncertain, but it must have been for a sufficient amount of time since Ambassador Bullitt referred to him as "...the pastor of those members of our embassy of the evangelical faith."⁵⁷ Streck's bravery is all the more evident since he was not the first one with connections to the embassy to be arrested, as diplomat George Kennan had al-

⁵⁵ Georgiyevskaya, "Church Life in Moscow," 63.

⁵⁶ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 150–51.

⁵⁷ William Bullitt to R. Walton Moore, Nov 14, 1936.

ready noted in 1935 the arrests of doctors and dentists “who are bold enough to treat us.”⁵⁸ In fact, Bullitt wrote to President Roosevelt on May 1, 1935, explaining that, “The terror, always present, has risen to such a pitch that the least of the Muscovites, as well as the greatest, is in fear. Almost no one dares have any contact with foreigners and this is not unbiased fear but a proper sense of reality.”⁵⁹ Kennan would echo the ambassador’s thoughts in 1937, admitting that his fellow Americans rarely met or visited with Russians publicly because of the danger it posed to the Russians.⁶⁰ And now with Streck’s arrest, the reasonable conclusion that a vendetta was being carried out against anyone associated with the Americans must have caused the employees of the embassy grave concern.

To further complicate matters, Ambassador Bullitt had left the Soviet Union in August for good.⁶¹ Fed up with a government where “the lie is normal and the truth abnormal,” Bullitt had metamorphosed from enthusiastic champion of the Soviet Union to its severest critic. George Kennan felt that he and fellow embassy official Charles Bohlen had convinced Bullitt of the Soviets’ unreliability, although he acknowledged that the Soviet Union’s actions had been the best testimony to its unscrupulous nature. For his part, President Roosevelt humored Bullitt, apparently attributing his 180-degree turn to his volatile temperament.⁶² But for Bullitt, the three years spent in Moscow had been an educational experience in the nature of Stalin and his regime. In March 1936 he wrote to the Assistant Secretary of State, R. Walton Moore, detailing the arrests

⁵⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), Kindle, 95.

⁵⁹ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 47.

⁶⁰ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 102.

⁶¹ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 57.

⁶² Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 51, 55–56.

and disappearances of thousands, labeling it “unbelievable.”⁶³ Moreover, he was baffled because he knew these “...persons were without question loyal to the Soviet regime.”⁶⁴ In his final letter to the State Department in April, Bullitt bluntly stated that the Soviet government and all communist parties worldwide believed in mass murder.⁶⁵

Since Ambassador-elect Joseph Davies had yet to take up his duties in Moscow, embassy charge d' affaires, Loy Henderson, telephoned Bullitt in Paris with the details of Streck's arrest. Although Bullitt was the Ambassador-elect to France, he took it upon himself to immediately contact Moore (within two hours) once he heard the news.⁶⁶ Describing the attack upon Streck's character in outraged terms, Bullitt declared, “It is my profound conviction that he could not have been involved in any way in any political activities whatsoever.” Showing his awareness of the NKVD's tactics, Bullitt continued, “I expressed to Henderson over the telephone for the benefit of the listeners-in of the Ogpu [nota bene—Bullitt uses the old term for the NKVD] my personal conviction that the arrest of Pastor Streck would produce a reaction of disgust on the part of the American government and the people of the United States. Streck is I believe technically a Soviet citizen. We cannot, therefore, intervene directly but I believe it would be most salutary if you should call in Troyanovsky and ask him if this means that the Soviet government is beginning a campaign against those who minister to members of the American Embassy in Moscow.”⁶⁷

⁶³ Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken*, 72.

⁶⁴ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 47.

⁶⁵ Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken*, 72. Journalist W.H. Chamberlain, sympathetic to the Bolshevik experiment when he arrived in Russia, was stunned by what he had observed when he, like Bullitt, left Russia in the summer of 1936. ‘I went to Russia believing that the Soviet system might represent the most hopeful answer to the problems raised by the World War and the subsequent economic crisis. I left convinced that the absolutist Soviet state ... is a power of darkness and evil with few parallels in history.’ See Tzouliadis, 73.

⁶⁶ Brownell, *So Close to Greatness*, 189; William Bullitt to R. Walton Moore, November 14, 1936.

⁶⁷ William Bullitt to R. Walton Moore, November 14, 1936.

Moore immediately took up Bullitt's suggestion and met with the Soviet ambassador to America, Alexander Troyanovsky, on November 16. While working out the details for Joseph Davies' posting in Moscow, Moore touched upon two cases, that of Pastor Streck and a Russian translator for the Americans named Malitsky. Moore, perhaps a bit too tenderly, assured Troyanovsky that the Americans weren't making a formal complaint, but simply wanted information so that they could assure Malitsky's wife as to his whereabouts. With regard to Streck, Moore said to the Soviet ambassador "he was sorry that an incident of this sort had occurred, inasmuch as both of us had always been interested in 'civilized processes.'"⁶⁸ But civilized processes were far from the reality of the legal limbo that existed in the Soviet Union. Troyanovsky was apparently nonplussed by Moore's questions and simply declared that the wedding of George Minor had taken place, so no harm had been done.⁶⁹ Moore's timid probing of a Soviet official who could summarily dismiss the arrest of the Lutheran pastor as nothing special must have been very discouraging to Bullitt. Apparently the reaction of disgust on the part of the American government that he had expected would not be forthcoming.

Indeed one of the most troubling aspects of the Streck Affair is the nonchalance with which the Roosevelt Administration responded to such brutal acts against Christians and those Soviet citizens who had served the American embassy. When Joseph Davies arrived on January 19, 1937, the embassy personnel were well informed that he prided himself on *not* being a diplomat.⁷⁰ That is to say, he was not like them! In fact, he reassured President Mikhail Kalinin that he had "an open mind," more than likely implying that Bullitt had not. Married to Marjorie Merriweather Post, one of the richest women in the world, the Davies would live like royalty,

⁶⁸ R. Walton Moore, November 16, 1936, 124.61/108, RG 59, National Archives II.

⁶⁹ R. Walton Moore, November 16, 1936.

⁷⁰ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 103.

reportedly importing 2000 pints of Birds Eye ice cream into Russia. (The ambassador apparently really liked this particular brand of ice cream, but being unaware of Soviet realities, the ice cream would spoil due to the frequent power failures).⁷¹ Needless to say, Davies encountered a virtual mutiny on his first day at work, whether he was aware of it or not. Kennan admitted, “We doubted his seriousness.... We saw every evidence that his motives in accepting the post were personal and political and ulterior to any sense of the solemnity of the task itself.”⁷² Kennan and some of the other younger officials had gathered in Loy Henderson’s room at the end of the first day to discuss whether they should resign en masse. They ultimately decided against it, but the State Department was so concerned that it sent a “trouble-shooter” to Moscow in order to sort out the difficulties. The mediator, J. Klahr Huddle, came to the conclusion that the Davies’ coddled nature didn’t help matters. Besides the importing of Birds Eye ice cream, they insisted upon being transported in private trains, had brought along an “...entourage of sixteen aides, servants and relatives,” and even found space on the Leningrad docks for Mrs. Davies’ yacht, the Sea Cloud! Huddle also observed that Davies was unwilling to admit his lack of knowledge of the Soviet Union. To the State Department employees who prided themselves on their acquired knowledge of the Soviet regime, especially Kennan, this was a damning indictment.⁷³

One incident probably best exemplified the irreconcilable differences that had quickly developed between the ambassador and his employees. When Davies began work, an embassy electrician quickly discovered that the ambassador’s office had been bugged. The staff was appalled by the effrontery of the Soviets, but Davies hushed them like one would easily excitable

⁷¹ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 73.

⁷² Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 104.

⁷³ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 104.

schoolchildren, chuckling that it was of no account. Referring to his embassy team as “youngsters,” he tried to calm them and said that they had nothing to fear. The Soviets would soon discover that we were their friends.⁷⁴ Kennan and the embassy staff had to have been amazed at Davies’ ignorance or willful blindness, as if the Soviets were interested in anything approaching a Western, civilized notion of friendship. Davies’ inability to recognize boorish, unacceptable behavior in the field of diplomacy did not bode well for his tenure in office. As a matter of fact, Davies would bypass the Russia experts at the embassy and rely upon reporters like the Stalinist sycophant, Walter Duranty, for his information and advice. When he wasn’t translating during the Purge Trials, Kennan was relegated to being Davies’ sandwich “gopher” while he recalled Davies sanctimoniously bantering with the press. Naturally this did nothing to endear Davies to a staff that already despised him. Charles Bohlen’s opinion was that Davies was “sublimely ignorant of even the most elementary realities of the Soviet system and of its ideology.”⁷⁵ While the second sequence of Purge Trials continued that winter, more seasoned Russia observers like Annaliese Kennan described the palpable fear pervading Moscow. Mrs. Kennan noted that after Davies gave a dinner for 36 Russians, six of them were thereafter executed, including the man

⁷⁴ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 75. Regarding the listening devices, in 1939 Bullitt would learn indirectly [through Loy Henderson] from a Soviet military intelligence defector, General Walter Krivitsky, that a member of Bullitt’s staff had been working for the Soviets and that the Soviets knew everything of interest occurring in the embassy. According to Krivitsky, every Soviet citizen working inside the embassy was expected to give a periodic report to the NKVD. As a matter of fact, in those early years the Americans had been sending messages uncoded through the Soviet telegraph agency. Security only worsened under Davies, who magnanimously tolerated Soviet bugs. During World War II, an American named Tyler Gatewood Kent was accused of spying for the Nazis and imprisoned for seven years. Since he had also served in the American embassy in Moscow from 1933 until 1939, historian Gary Kern speculates that he may very well have been Krivitsky’s spy. Most likely, his spying for the Soviets was related to an OGPU mistress he had at the time in Moscow. Observing Soviet behavior firsthand and being appalled, he afterwards turned towards the Nazis as a counterweight to the Soviets. Krivitsky was said to have committed suicide in Washington, D.C. but the suspicious circumstances of his death point toward murder, something which the Soviets were expert at covering up. Given the circumstances, one cannot but be impressed by the extraordinary courage of Pastor Streck, risking ministry to those who were not even his fellow citizens. See Kern, *A Death in Washington*, 159–60, 175, 285.

⁷⁵ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 73–75.

that sat next to her!⁷⁶

Davies was the perfect embodiment of the Roosevelt Administration's naiveté towards the Soviets and its aspirations towards Stalin, and that would quickly spell trouble for Pastor Streck. Whereas Bullitt was prepared to make inquiries for this good man who had served them at great risk to himself, Joseph Davies would reply in a few months [March 1937] that religious persecution was not only exaggerated in the Soviet Union but was actually diminishing!! (Streck was undergoing strenuous interrogations at this time). The ambassador believed that in reality, Stalin was serving as a buffer between the anti-religious extremists and Christians, as evidenced by the new Stalin Constitution of 1936 that allowed for freedom of worship and anti-religious propaganda.⁷⁷ Indeed, Davies quoted the wording if not the intent of the constitution accurately. President Roosevelt would not be as precise. While trying to convince Americans of the necessity of the Lend-Lease Agreement with the Soviet Union in 1941, the President had cause to cite Article 124 of the Stalin Constitution of 1936 in defense of religious freedom. Confessing that he couldn't quote it exactly, the President continued, "...but anyway: freedom of conscience... freedom of religion. Freedom equally to use propaganda against religion, which is essentially what the rule is in this country; only, we don't put it quite the same way."⁷⁸

Actually, Americans didn't put it quite the same way because it wasn't the same. President Roosevelt assumed that believers and unbelievers, the former with whom he was naturally sympathetic, had the same right to express their faith or lack of faith. But that interpretation was accurate only with regard to the original understanding of the law back in the days of Lenin. Under the April 8 Law on Religious Associations decreed in 1929, a subtle but important change

⁷⁶ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 105.

⁷⁷ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 77.

⁷⁸ Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken*, 203–4.

had been made. From that time forward, religious believers were only allowed the right to worship while atheists could exercise the right to anti-religious propaganda. That was exactly what the Stalin Constitution would reiterate in 1936. In other words, nothing had changed since 1929! Religion remained confined to the church building while atheists could proclaim their beliefs from any street corner they chose. As a matter of fact, Joseph Davies had quoted the law correctly, but was perhaps too obtuse to notice the distinction.

Had the president and ambassador to the USSR bothered to look at the translation that their own embassy personnel had provided of a *Bezbozhnik* article in July 1936, they would have discovered the nuances of the Stalinist use of language. The article admits that people can “profess” whatever religion they choose but only anti-religious people have the right to engage in propaganda.”⁷⁹ Article 124 specifically stated, “In order to guarantee to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the State and the schools from the church. The freedom to perform religious rites and the freedom of anti-religious propaganda are secured for all citizens.”⁸⁰ Again, that is an important distinction because in actuality it meant that Christians could not express their religious convictions in public. With the excessive tax rates on churches, the staggered workweek, and the persecution, arrest and execution of pastors, the right to worship inside a church building would soon become moot because eventually there would be no one left. *Bezbozhnik* confirmed that the Soviet Union would continue to struggle against “...all kinds of reactionary ideas, against religion, and for a scientific, materialistic world conception....in a country of socialism, the overcoming of religion will proceed at a still more rapid,

⁷⁹ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, Sept 28, 1936, RG 59, 861.404/403, National Archives II.

⁸⁰ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, Sept 28, 1936.

and hitherto unattained, rate.”⁸¹ While oftentimes he left the sharp statements about destroying the forces of religion to his subordinates, at other times Joseph Stalin could be quite blunt and leave nothing to the imagination. While speaking to an American delegation in 1936 about the role of the clergy, Stalin admitted, “The Party cannot remain neutral when regarding the propagators of religious prejudices, with regard to reactionary clergy poisoning the minds of laboring masses. Have we annihilated the clergy? Yes, we have annihilated it. The trouble is that it is not yet completely liquidated.”⁸² On these rare occasions, Stalin made it abundantly clear that any relaxing of measures against Christians was only a temporary retreat, just as in the early days of collectivization. He remained committed to Christianity’s destruction.

After the turmoil in the USSR and troubles within the embassy, it is no wonder that George Kennan was ready for reassignment. Davies was only eager to oblige him, feeling that he had outlived his usefulness.⁸³ However unbeknownst to Kennan, Soviet ambassador Troyanovsky had somehow purloined an internal memorandum of his and presented it to Stalin. Troyanovsky characterized Kennan’s “attacks” on Ambassador Davies as an attempt to turn President Roosevelt against the Soviets. Troyanovsky satisfactorily concluded, though, that he had failed in turning Roosevelt against them. In fact, Kennan admitted that he “could never forgive F.D.R.”

⁸¹ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, Sept 28, 1936. In May 1937, Arthur Bliss Lane of the State Department would forward translated articles from the Russian bureau to Secretary of State Hull. The October 1936 issue of a German- language journal *Osteuropa* spelled out the situation quite clearly. 99% of collectivization was said to have been completed in the Volga region, destroying the Lutheran Church in the process. Older folks were said to still gather in their homes for religious meetings. In the absence of the clergy, lay preachers and members of the *dvatstaka* conducted prayer meetings. In the Ingrian region, forced deportations to Siberia devastated the Lutheran Church while church buildings were turned into communist clubs or theaters. With collectivization mostly accomplished, it was felt that now the new Stalin Constitution could be unveiled at the end of 1936. See Arthur Bliss Lane to Cordell Hull, May 13, 1937, 861.404/414, RG 59, National Archives II.

⁸² Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken*, 205.

⁸³ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 106.

for so summarily dismissing the embassy team's analysis of the USSR.⁸⁴ When writing down his thoughts about the effects of the Bolshevik Revolution, Kennan poignantly confided to his diary: "Its victims are no more to it than the thousands of seeds which are cast to the wind, in order that one tree may grow."⁸⁵ Ambassador Davies would only spend nine of his eighteen-month term in Moscow, but would perform more effective work for Soviet propaganda in the future. He would pen a book, *Mission to Moscow*, which would eventually be turned into a Hollywood movie portraying Joseph Stalin as a genial uncle and stalwart ally of the United States. The popular actor Walter Huston would play the role of Davies in the film.⁸⁶ Kennan and his colleagues must have wondered: if only Pastor Streck had received an equal measure of Davies' respect and concern.

The NKVD Big Lie: Linking the Russian Lutheran Church to Hitler

On the same night (November 4) that Pastor Streck was arrested, the Lutheran layman from the defunct Jesus Christ Lutheran, Konstantin Andrievsky, was subjected to the unwanted attention of the NKVD and placed under arrest. The 57 year-old Andrievsky worked as a lawyer at the Leningrad Bureau of Communal Apartments in the Kirov region of Leningrad.⁸⁷ The NKVD described him as possessing a "sharp, counterrevolutionary temperament."⁸⁸ Even though he had previously been a member of Jesus Christ Lutheran Church, the NKVD only now decided to accuse him of being a member of an illegal Lutheran congregation. Andrievsky was

⁸⁴ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 107, 110–11.

⁸⁵ Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 88.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *Caught between Roosevelt & Stalin*, 87.

⁸⁷ P-34994, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁸⁸ P -34994, List 1, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

condemned for carrying out anti-Soviet agitation among his circle of believers with the goal of discrediting the activities of the Party and government.⁸⁹

But as his interrogation continued, it seemed more likely that the real target of the NKVD was Pastor Paul Reichert and his son, Bruno. From Andrievsky's NKVD file of December 28, the agent admits, "Pastor Reichert has still not been arrested."⁹⁰ In fact, the agent actually links Bishop Malmgren to Paul Reichert's "counter-revolutionary Fascist activities," news which would have no doubt amused both pastors who were not on the best of terms.⁹¹ (The agent must have been unaware of current events in the Lutheran church, too, since Bishop Malmgren had already left the USSR for good in the summer). Andrievsky's incarceration was extended because on February 28, 1937, the 3rd Department of the NKVD passed along the files relating to the Reichert's, Alfred Zietnick and yet another parishioner, Fyodor Erzen-Gleren, to the 1st Department. Clearly the NKVD had bigger fish to fry than just this city lawyer, but it appeared that it was hoping to use him to get the evidence that it needed.⁹²

Coupled with the arrest of Pastor Streck, the NKVD's preparations to build a case against the pastors of the largest Lutheran congregation in Leningrad signaled that it was now going after the mother churches of its two largest cities, Moscow and Leningrad. In 1936, the local authorities had forced St. Peter's in Leningrad to permit a large portion of its basement to be used for the storage of vegetables from the organization *Soyuzplodovosh* [Союзплодоовощ], or "Soviet Fruits and Vegetables." So it was already greedily eyeing the spacious church, and

⁸⁹ P -34994, List 1, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹⁰ P -34994, List 29, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹¹ P -34994, List 29, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹² P -34994, List 30-32, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

creating a case against the Reichert's may have been its way of securing this valuable property and attacking Christianity in the process.⁹³ But this experienced lawyer was not giving them the evidence they wanted, because during the questioning on December 16 the NKVD agent lost patience and commanded Konstantin Andrievsky to stop with his denials and name the members of his counterrevolutionary group. Naturally, Pastor Paul Reichert was named, along with Alfred Zietnick and the organist Evgeny Hannicke. (Reichert, it must be remembered, had substituted from time to time at Jesus Christ Lutheran after Kurt Muss' arrest). Parishioner Woldemar Schmidt was also mentioned. Andrievsky was quoted as saying that they had worked undercover for some time at St. Michael's (where Jesus Christ Lutheran had worshiped) and then began gathering at Zietnick's apartment in 1935 when the church was closed.⁹⁴ There they had spread slanderous rumors about the Soviet government's persecution of religion and oppression of believers. Andrievsky's previous innocent statements that the Orthodox were undergoing even greater persecution than the Lutherans now came to light.⁹⁵ Of course, to label these actions of the Soviet government as "rumors" was the height of farce.

In July or August 1935, Andrievsky was said to have claimed that a Lutheran pastor from a Fascist organization had come from Munich to initiate conversations with Reichert about forming Fascist cadres in the Lutheran congregation. Reichert supposedly told Andrievsky what the pastor from Munich had told him—Hitler had great authority among the people and the Lutheran pastors were members of the Fascist Party. The Church was transforming its Confession into a "weapon of the government in the hands of Hitler." Hitler was being presented as the leader of the German people who would save the country from Communism. Certainly

⁹³ Ivanov, *The Lutheran Quarter in Petersburg*, 42.

⁹⁴ P -34994, List 12, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹⁵ P -34994, List 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Hitler's authority among Lutheran pastors was a sore spot for future historians of the Church, as the occasional brave soul who bucked authority like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller would attest. So it is not at all impossible that a Nazi-sympathizing German pastor could have attempted to engage in espionage within the USSR, although the risks would seem to far outweigh any gains. At any rate, Reichert supposedly refused to organize the group for fear of being discovered. Andrievsky would not say what counterrevolutionary activities Reichert had performed. He did not know.⁹⁶

From Andrievsky's interrogation of April 23, 1937, though, a clearer picture of the incident between Reichert and the Fascist pastor from Munich emerges. Apparently this story was accurate to some degree, but Andrievsky took the time to explain that Reichert recognized immediately that this German pastor guest, if he was that, was a Nazi spy. He quickly told the German pastor to leave his apartment and was quite agitated by the incident. So, far from conspiring with the Nazi pastor, Reichert was in fact appalled by his insolence.⁹⁷ Why had he said something different in his previous testimony? Well, Andrievsky now rejected the testimonies he gave to the NKVD on November 15 and December 16, 1936.⁹⁸ Speaking boldly, he asserted: "The confession presented to me by the investigating organs of the political charges to what I consider strange crimes and likewise, the fictitious details in the protocols of the investigation, were signed by me under conditions of horrible torture of a psychologically violent manner (although I was not beaten physically)."⁹⁹ Concerning the incident with the Munich pastor and Paul Reichert in July 1935 and his testimony, Andrievsky noticed that the phrase "Refused to

⁹⁶ P-34994, List 14, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹⁷ P-34994, List 74, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

⁹⁸ P -34994, List 47, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Andrievsky only acknowledged the accuracy of the conversation with Pastor Paul Reichert, which he gave in his November 15 testimony.

⁹⁹ P-34994, List 69, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

sign” had been erased from the document. Instead, a signature of his somewhat lower on the document was used as if he had confirmed the previous testimony. Furthermore, this signature was only given, he confessed, to “save his mind from madness in an instinctive quest to save his own life.”¹⁰⁰ Apparently this evidence was taken from the December 1936 inquiry because Andrievsky related that after his interrogation he was put into solitary confinement with another agent from midnight until 1 p.m., December 16. “I categorically deny all of these protocols from December 16, rejecting it to be of no value. I reject the order of the material of the inquiry written as not being taken from my words, but rather imposed upon me by the agent [whose name is written here] in the absence of the protocols from November 15 and December 16 which were signed by me under similar pressure from this agent.”¹⁰¹

The remarkable nature of this preserved testimony gives us an extraordinary glimpse into the fact that not all of the arrested simply gave in to NKVD pressure, however violent. Even though the NKVD held all the cards, sometimes it bit off more than it could chew. An astute lawyer like Andrievsky was not one to be overwhelmed by the charges against him. Instead, he recognized how the NKVD was fabricating evidence and called them on it. This son of a Russian Orthodox priest may have already had one strike against him due to his ecclesiastical origins, but he knew his rights under Soviet law better than the NKVD agents who were interrogating him. The NKVD, however, was not finished with this brash lawyer who had the temerity to challenge their version of the truth. They now sought to incriminate Andrievsky primarily through the testimony of two of his acquaintances, Ivan Gusev (an apartment building manager) and Sergey

¹⁰⁰ P-34994, List 69, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰¹ P-34994, List 69–70, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Borisov, a lawyer working on Vasily Island in the city.¹⁰²

Borisov would never appear before their tribunal to be confronted by Andrievsky, always seemingly traveling on a business trip of some kind.¹⁰³ When he did give his private testimony to the NKVD, though, he accused Andrievsky of saying the following: "...slavery flourishes everywhere in the USSR, the peasants are enslaved in the collective farms and amidst the population of the USSR are many unsatisfied people."¹⁰⁴ With regard to the new Stalin Constitution, Andrievsky was denounced by Borisov for claiming that the rights it espoused existed solely on paper. For added measure, he also accused Andrievsky of being a definite anti-Semite.¹⁰⁵ Although Andrievsky would not be given the opportunity to confront Borisov and his outrageous testimony directly, he called it a lie. He never said that "Soviet power was a Satanic power." Nor did he ever say that the coming Constitution was just "dust"—on the contrary, Andrievsky thought it would raise the prestige of "our Soviet Union."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, many Christians would likewise praise the Stalin Constitution for expanded rights. But Andrievsky also cleverly pointed out the absurdities apparent in the statements of both of his accusers. For example, Andrievsky noted that Gusev in one instance must have hurriedly signed "yes" to one testimony because it actually contradicted his previous testimony! If these witnesses knew him to have been a counterrevolutionary, Andrievsky naturally wondered why they still continued to interact and work with him as a legal advisor?¹⁰⁷

But according to Andrievsky's testimony, it seems that deep down he knew they had not

¹⁰² P-34994, List 11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰³ P-34994, List 54, 65, 78, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁴ P-34994, List 20, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁵ P-34994, List 20–21, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁶ P-34994, List 79, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁷ P-34994, List 70, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

been searching for a pretext to incriminate him. He had pity on these men because he had also served as their spiritual adviser. For example, Borisov was not happy with his Orthodox faith and sought to engage Andrievsky in conversation about the Evangelical Lutheran confessions, repeatedly visiting him in his apartment to discuss religion. Since he was experiencing difficulties in his family life, Borisov was extremely thankful for Andrievsky's cheerfulness and moral support. The increasingly frustrated Andrievsky queried the NKVD agent, "What kind of witnesses are these—Gusev and Borisov, who overlooked my counterrevolution in the course of two-plus years, when both of them took so much moral and domestic advice from me? Why did they both so insistently seek out my counterrevolutionary company when they were surrounded by millions in Leningrad? ... It's obvious that I became a counterrevolutionary in their evaluation much later, perhaps at 11:30 p.m., November 3rd, 1936, when Borisov left my apartment and I was arrested one hour later!"¹⁰⁸ Despite the slanderous accusation of counterrevolutionary activity, Andrievsky affirmed that both men were orderly and honest men in their affairs, not guilty of counterrevolution. And one might naturally conclude, neither was he!¹⁰⁹ But rational conclusions were sorely lacking among the agents of the NKVD, and Andrievsky would stew in prison until the middle of 1937 when he would receive his sentence.¹¹⁰

The Stalin Constitution of 1936: Revival of Hope or False Portent?

Despite the very real danger that every pastor experienced for simply preaching the Gospel and parishioners encountered for being associated with the church, Lutherans still tried to balance confessing their faith while simultaneously living as respectful citizens of the state. In

¹⁰⁸ P-34994, List 70, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁰⁹ P-34994, List 71, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹¹⁰ P-34994, List 80, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

that light, some of the remaining Lutheran preachers in Leningrad and its region were said to be exhorting their parishioners to "...become Stakhanovites of our religion." It is quite possible that Pastor Paul Reichert was among those advocating a vigorous Christianity along the lines of the Stakhanovite movement, especially as he had always tried to balance genuine faith and dutiful citizenship in the Soviet Union. These appeals to the Stakhanovites were a shrewd call to a movement started in 1935 when a Donbass miner (Alexey Stakhanov) over-fulfilled his quota by 1400%. Although workers were wary and just a bit skeptical of the Stakhanovites, especially since these shock workers were given material perks because of their efforts, the government praised the movement. The few remaining Lutheran congregations that had weathered most of the persecution could very well have thought this was an effective means of illustrating that Lutherans were not a danger to the Soviet state.¹¹¹

For them a revival of hope arrived with the adoption of the Stalin Constitution in 1936. On December 5, the new constitution was ratified to great acclaim although many communists felt betrayed. Obviously the Communist Party felt comfortable enough in its unquestioned authority to write such a generous constitution at the time, but atheists were frightened by this action, worrying that they might lose ground to the forces of religion which they considered by no means to be dead. As if confirming their fears, clergy and believers received the news with glee, many writing to Stalin with congratulations for his magnanimity.¹¹² Priests in the Vyazma diocese praised Stalin, calling his constitution "the immortal historical document" while 500 believers in the Mordovan region of central Russia came together to pray and thank God for Article 124. Other priests suggested that they could rally support for the constitution from their

¹¹¹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 277.

¹¹² Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 187.

pulpits!¹¹³ Joseph Davies, ever inclined to give Stalin the benefit of the doubt, informed embassy employees that he had heard Stalin was defending the more liberal clauses regarding religious practice in the Constitution. Stalin was reported as saying if there was a danger to the Communist Party in this new constitutional language, it would have to overcome it.¹¹⁴

What specifically was the content of Article 124? Loy Henderson spelled it out for U.S. Secretary of State Hull: “In order to guarantee to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the State and the schools from the church. The freedom to perform religious rites and the freedom of anti-religious propaganda are secured for all citizens.”¹¹⁵ Since Article 124 cleverly claimed to guarantee freedom to perform religious rites, Orthodox believers used the popularity of the measure to pressure the government to reopen churches. Clergy who formerly could not own property were now allowed the right to vote again, the right to work, as well as the opportunity to run for public office.¹¹⁶ Since that was quite a leap in freedom for the oft-condemned clergy, the atheists feared the potential consequences. It was reported by the journal *Socialist Agriculture* that in the western Russian regions, people who had hidden their faith were now more open about being believers. The people in that region wanted to nominate a priest named Araviski, described as an eloquent, well-read citizen who knew Soviet law well.¹¹⁷ In essence, on paper everyone but lunatics and convicted criminals were given the right to vote.¹¹⁸ Likewise, the children of open believers and pastors could once again attend

¹¹³ Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous*, 186.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Davies to Cordell Hull, March 17, 1937, 861.404/412, RG 59, National Archives II.

¹¹⁵ Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 28, 1936.

¹¹⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Kindle, 179; Edgar Charles Duin, *Lutheranism under the Tsars*, 761.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Davies to Cordell Hull, March 17, 1937.

¹¹⁸ Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolaiy Ezhov, 1895–*

schools, join collective farms, and even receive food ration cards.¹¹⁹

Some believers went so far as attribute to Stalin a nod to the Gospel, citing article 12 which admonished “he who does not work shall not eat.” Evidently acknowledging Romans 13, one Baptist said that he respected Stalin because the Lord had put him in a position of leadership. But the real battle for the constitution’s interpretation was going to take place in the villages between local officials and the newly encouraged believers. Orthodox Christians began to make use of the new freedoms by requesting worship processions or for the local village soviet to reopen their church. In one instance, the parishioners would not go to work on the collective farm after local authorities refused to reopen their church.¹²⁰ In the Kuibyshev region, a citizen interpreted the constitution as denying the village soviet the right to manage the church. Another citizen, a bookkeeper in Zel’man area, said that priests could now assemble believers freely without the village soviet’s approval. In the Muslim region of Dagestan even bolder readings of the constitution would threaten the forces of atheism. Citizens mistranslated the “freedom of anti-religious propaganda” clearly spelled out in the text to proclaim instead “freedom of religious propaganda!”¹²¹ Atheists certainly had reason to fear the opening of this Pandora’s box, so initially at least, the mood of believers was upbeat. After the long years of persecution perhaps a door was opening again?

But what about those clergy already imprisoned, like Pastor Alexander Streck? If there was a true change in practice, might they be released? Loy Henderson noted that there was a rumor afloat in Moscow that thousands of imprisoned, exiled clergy and believers might also be freed

1940 (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 107.

¹¹⁹ Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 41.

¹²⁰ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934–1941* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78–79.

¹²¹ Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous*, 186–87.

in a general amnesty. Although they were not “officially” convicted for religious activities but for so-called espionage or actions deemed dangerous to the state, a gesture of good will might go a long way in placating the peasants. But the evidence in the communities also pointed to a continued closing of churches or converting them to non-religious purposes.¹²² Still, people were hopeful. In March/April 1937 articles, *Pravda* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* worriedly discussed the propensity for young people to return to the church and actively participate in its activities. Students were once again joining church choirs. In the Nizhniy Novgorod region, 182 youth of *Komsomol* age [18–25 years old] were serving as members of church boards. Even communist youth were utilizing the services of priests and being married according to religious rites, as well as observing church holidays and serving as godparents at baptisms.¹²³ Nikolai Ustraliiov, a noted émigré who kept an extensive diary upon his return to the Soviet Union, praised Stalin and the Party for restoring pride in the nation through the constitution: “People are proud—I am a Soviet citizen... Long live the USSR! Long live the Soviet state!”¹²⁴

As usual with Stalin, though, the devil was in the details, or perhaps more importantly, the capricious nature of Soviet power. When a concerned communist expressed his fear that priests would actually exercise their right to vote according to the constitution, a village soviet chairman in the Voronezh region assured him: “They will be deprived of the vote on Election Day.”¹²⁵ *Bezbozhnik* journalist F. Putintsev wrote that religious processions were “a sacred performance of the Church for missionary purposes, a sermon outside the walls of the church, an appeal for

¹²² Loy Henderson to Cordell Hull, September 28, 1936.

¹²³ Joseph Davies to Cordell Hull, March 17, 1937.

¹²⁴ Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 342.

¹²⁵ Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous*, 180.

sanctifying the world and worldly life and culture.” As such, an action like this would not be allowed under the new Constitution, Putintsev said, making a distinction between religious freedom for the believer but not for the church.¹²⁶

Despite these reassurances, with representative seats to the Supreme Soviet scheduled for late 1937, other leaders of the USSR were in full panic mode. As the February-March plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party discussed the upcoming elections, Stalin gave them a hint of things to come when he launched into an attack on enemies of the regime.¹²⁷ Nikolai Yezhov, Stalin’s new NKVD chief since September 29, 1936, was similarly unequivocal in declaring that adoption of the constitution only sharpened the struggle against counterrevolutionary elements.¹²⁸ The reassuring message from the regime to communists and atheists was that anti-Soviet elements would be dealt with before they could exercise their new freedoms. “Anti-Soviet elements” was a code word that marked anyone considered dangerous by the state, which certainly included religious believers, especially those of dubious ethnicity (e.g., Finns, Germans, Latvians). Nikolai Ustraliiov’s pride in the constitution would be short-lived, for he soon discovered that Stalin and Yezhov did not issue idle threats. 1937 would see the height of Stalin’s Great Terror and he would be numbered among its victims in the coming year.¹²⁹

The Hidden Story of Pastor Alexander Streck

While the finishing touches were being put upon Stalin’s Constitution, Pastor Streck was experiencing the reality of Stalin’s intentions with regard to religious freedom. For many years,

¹²⁶ Joseph Davies to Cordell Hull, March 17, 1937.

¹²⁷ David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924–1953* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 297–298.

¹²⁸ Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin’s Loyal Executioner*, 54, 106.

¹²⁹ Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 342.

most Lutherans believed that Pastor Streck had been exiled or eventually executed by the NKVD, but no one had ever been able to verify the details. Pastor Dmitry Lotov communicated with some of Streck's family members who had been exiled to Kazakhstan. They said that they had waited for him to follow them, but he never came.¹³⁰ With the opening of the KGB Archives recently, his story can now be told. While Ambassador William Bullitt was angrily responding to the news that Streck had been arrested, the pastor was undergoing the first of his interrogations by the NKVD. On November 15, the NKVD initiated the grueling process by asking him about the 1924 Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Moscow. The direction of the interrogation leads the reader to believe that the NKVD was interested in portraying Bishops Meyer, Malmgren and the High Church Council as tools of the German government, engaged in "a counterrevolutionary, nationalist and pan-Germanic work."¹³¹

Streck's transcribed responses have to be understood, for the most part, as fabricated. During Stalin's Great Terror, the NKVD made up allegations of spying, usually for Japan or Nazi Germany, out of whole cloth. So the historian has to learn to "read between the lines" and be careful about jumping to immediate conclusions based upon the text. In this case, obviously Streck's refutation of virtually all of the words attributed to him by the end of the interrogation process in July 1937 must be given greater weight.¹³² And to be honest, it is rare that the files would actually even preserve such a refutation. These records are important because they give us a window into the mindset of the NKVD and how it attempted to brand Soviet citizens and religious figures like Streck as saboteurs in the pay of Nazi Germany.

Of course, one way in which the NKVD accomplished this task was to speak about

¹³⁰ Dmitry Lotov to Matthew Heise, October 2011.

¹³¹ P-45647, List 7, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹³² P-45647, List 143, 145, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

Streck's connections to foreign organizations. Surprisingly, given the fact that the pastor was clearly ministering to Protestants at the U.S. embassy, his ties to the Americans are not mentioned in any of the open files. (However, it should be acknowledged that not all of the files related to Pastor Streck are available for viewing). Nevertheless, the NKVD's line of questioning makes it undeniable that his connection to the German embassy was of primary interest. Since St. Peter and Paul was often considered the "German embassy personnel's church" and given the toxic relationship between Nazi Germany and the USSR, Streck's ties to those in the German embassy were highlighted in the interrogations and cast in the most damning light.¹³³ German Christian organizations like the *Gustav Adolf Verein* and the *Union of Germans Beyond the Borders* were considered to be the paymasters, sending cash not only for the Lutheran Church or its parishioners but also for enabling the bishops and pastors to engage in subterfuge. (Since the LWC sent its money through Germany, it was not always accused directly of supporting the Lutheran Church in Russia).¹³⁴

What were the accusations that the NKVD was developing against Streck? Besides carrying out the counterrevolutionary work of the German government among Soviet citizens of German descent, he was accused of being involved in a grand plot to assassinate the leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet government!¹³⁵ These fantastic charges echo the Communist Party line taken after the assassination of Sergey Kirov, the NKVD claiming that the Kirov murder was only the beginning of the enemy's diabolical action to undermine the Soviet Union. In this respect, no leader, including Stalin, was safe after Kirov's murder. Historians debate how much of this hyperbole the Soviet leadership actually believed, but most recently historians have

¹³³ P-45647, List 9–11, 20, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹³⁴ P-45647, List 25–26, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹³⁵ P-45647, List 2, 114, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region

come to the conclusion that a genuine fear existed among them of the people's wrath and the formation of fifth columns within the country. However, what no reputable historian doubts is that charges such as those leveled against pastors like Alexander Streck were anything but lies.

German embassy employees Messrs. Gerhardt and Schwindt were said to have been Streck's contacts, the NKVD claiming that their plans were developed with the pastor in the sacristy of St. Peter and Paul.¹³⁶ Most likely Gerhardt and Schwindt were embassy employees who happened to attend a Lutheran church whose services were in German. They may also have been links for financial support to the church that was funneled through the embassy, but the NKVD interpreted any contact that Streck had with them in the worst manner. As the interrogations dragged on through November 23rd, Streck was called in at whatever hour suited the NKVD and kept for hours on end, including one interrogation that began at 9 p.m. on November 25th and continued until 1 a.m. on November 26th, only to start up again the very next day at 11 a.m.¹³⁷

Showing that it had done its homework on the divisions within the Lutheran Church, the NKVD also portrayed Bishops Meyer and Malmgren as proponents of a hierarchical form of church government that strove to sideline those who advocated a more synodical, ergo, "democratic" form of government.¹³⁸ We know that the Soviets had often interfered in the church politics of the Orthodox Church, propagandizing for the Renovationist Church (also known as the Living Church) and presenting it as a movement of the people against older forms of Czarist, top-heavy church government. With the Orthodox Church now in decline, the Soviets had no

¹³⁶ P-45647, List 7, 31, 50, 113, 310, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹³⁷ P-45647, List 27, 30, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region. Again, this is probably some form of the conveyor method. The accused would be kept under interrogation without break, sometimes for 18 hours in a row. The NKVD would exchange officers while the accused would not be given a break. See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 123–124.

¹³⁸ P-45647, List 7, 24–25, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

more need to use the so-called red priests of the Renovationist Church against the Tikhonites (the more con-servative, traditional branch of Orthodoxy). The new, fully compliant Orthodox Patriarch, Sergey, would propagandize for the Soviet state in return for the church's continued existence.¹³⁹

The Lutheran Church had also fought its own battles with Jakob Fritzler and Eduard Luft in the mid to late 1920s, when the aforementioned enticed Lutherans to join their more “democratic” church structure. Luft had, according to ELCR Kharkov District President Gustav Birth, seen himself filling the role of a “second Luther.” Fritzler was the president of the Free Evangelical Lutheran-Reformed Church of a Congressional Position (FELRCCP), which had been used by Soviet authorities as a wedge against the more organized, hierarchical form of church government employed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia. Both of these men, though, were no longer useful to the Soviet government since it were never interested in any form of church government at all. Fritzler was arrested on April 23, 1933 and sentenced to ten years in a labor camp, his congregation in Fischer was closed within a year on December 5, 1934. Luft was arrested in 1934 and died shortly thereafter.¹⁴⁰ The NKVD, though, was creative and used people as if they were simply chess pieces on a board. Rewriting history in light of the present, the NKVD had St. Peter and Paul *dvatsatka* members claim that during the first synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, a decision was reached to “carry out nationalist work among Germans of Soviet citizenship in order that the Lutheran Church of the USSR was in no way simply a religious association of believers, but that above all it would cultivate within the

¹³⁹ Roslof, *Red Priests*, 178–79, 184, 210.

¹⁴⁰ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 420–422; Litzemberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 201–5, 365, 386–87; “Victims of Political Terror,” last modified, December 13, 2016.

German citizens of Soviet citizenship a spirit of devotion to Germany.”¹⁴¹ As such, the NKVD sought to recast the contacts of Bishops Meyer and Malmgren with German nationalists as long-festering, allying with those who could not countenance a more flexible church structure. The bishops were said to prefer to keep power within the hands of their more malleable puppets. In this respect, the High Church Council was said to be “the fulfilling entity” of the bishops’ plans. The NKVD even put words in the mouth of Streck that the bishops’ actions were against the “spirit of the Lutheran Church!”¹⁴² “Nowhere, not in any country but the USSR, had such a situation existed, where everywhere the principle of synodical government was preserved,” Streck supposedly claimed.¹⁴³

The people involved in this plot since 1924 to destroy the synodical government in the Lutheran Church were said to be bishops Meyer and Malmgren, along with High Church Council members, lawyer Paul Althausen and Robert Derringer.¹⁴⁴ Ironically, and quite probably missed by the NKVD, was the fact that the system of church government had not changed appreciably since the days of the former Bishop Freifeldt in the early years of the Soviet Union. In fact, having two bishops instead of one would certainly not be evidence of concentrating power within the hands of a potential führer, even in the NKVD’s creative use of language. Fortunately for the accused, Malmgren was safely ensconced in Germany while Meyer and Derringer were already dead. In fact, Paul Althausen [a member of St. Michael’s in Moscow] was also dead, but he had not died a natural death, having been executed by the Soviet government in 1935 in the Elizabeth

¹⁴¹ P-45647, List 24, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁴² P-45647, List 24–25, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁴³ P-45647, List 25, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁴⁴ P-45647, List 25, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

Meyer Affair. At the very least, the accused here were no longer in the hands of the NKVD. Perhaps this is why Streck mentioned their names, if indeed the NKVD had not twisted his words.¹⁴⁵

Whatever the case, in further interrogations on November 25, Lutheran pastors were named as cohorts of Streck in counterrevolutionary activities: Gustav Birth, Johannes Seidlitz, Helmut Hansen, Kurt Muss, Arthur Kluck, Eugen Bachmann, and even Professor Alexander Wolfius of the Peterschule, among others. When Streck was accused of not naming all of his fellow counterrevolutionists, the NKVD added the names of Arnold Frischfeld and Woldemar Ruger. Pastor Ruger had served St. Michael’s in Moscow and had already been placed under arrest in 1935, but the NKVD has Streck saying he was from Leningrad. Streck would obviously not have said this since St. Michael’s congregation met in the Evangelical Church a few blocks from St. Peter and Paul since its own church was closed in 1928 (and was now closed down completely). For good measure, the NKVD continued adding names of other so-called “conspirators,” like pastors Wilhelm Lohrer of Omsk and Friedrich Mertz, with whom Streck was not intimately acquainted. The interrogations that we possess end on November 26 and do not continue again until January 10, 1937.¹⁴⁶ It appears that the NKVD was preparing a major case against Streck, and that leads to speculation that a plan was afoot to close the last Lutheran church in Moscow. We don’t know what happened with the parishioners after his arrest, although there is evidence to indicate that Streck’s wife, Veronika, bravely continued to conduct the worship services among the faithful in the church building. It had not yet been taken over by the Soviet

¹⁴⁵ P-45647, List 24–25, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region; “Lessons of History in the 20th Century,” accessed April 1, 2015.

¹⁴⁶ P-45647, List 27–30, 40, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region; Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 382.

government.¹⁴⁷

We know that Eugenie Meyer had been exiled 100 kilometers from Moscow to the village of Kashira, so she was certainly living too far away to attend St. Peter and Paul. The Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have preserved a letter from her to Dr. Benze dated December 21, 1936, where she pleaded for anyone to help her imprisoned daughter, Elisabeth. Eugenie learned that Elisabeth was imprisoned in the White Sea labor camp, a brutal location given that her academic daughter was no longer young (42 years) and suffered from past health problems. Eugenie herself was 69 and had survived without financial help for two years since Elisabeth's imprisonment. Unfortunately, Dr. Benze died in the fall of 1936, so Dr. Long received her letter and forwarded it on to Dr. Hans Lilje, the new Executive Director of the LWC.¹⁴⁸ As for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, only eleven pastors remained in office by the end of 1936. Its physical extinction was imminent.¹⁴⁹

“Do You Believe in God? The Soviet Citizen's Surprising Answer in 1937

By the end of the second Five Year Plan, the Soviets had expected that Christianity would be on its deathbed. And yet despite the pressure, arrests and torture, the failure of atheist education in the USSR was epitomized by the resiliency of the average Christian believer. The euphoria of believers in response to the new Stalin Constitution was evidence that Christianity's long-awaited obituary had been premature. Further proof of its vibrancy would become obvious from the results of a census conducted by the Soviet government at the beginning of 1937. On January 6/7, the eve of Orthodox Christmas celebrations, the government included this question

¹⁴⁷ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 151.

¹⁴⁸ Eugenie Meyer to LWC, December 21, 1936, LWC Papers, Archives of the ELCA.

¹⁴⁹ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 277.

in its census: “Do you believe in God?” The results were expected to show the victory that atheism had achieved over Christianity, but it turned out to be a debacle for the stunned atheists. To its great alarm, the government discovered that more than half of Soviet adults still considered themselves believers and were bold enough to acknowledge their faith to the census takers! The Communist Party was flabbergasted. In Leningrad, the League of the Militant Godless had for all intents and purposes collapsed.¹⁵⁰

Stalin had actually formulated the question about religion, making clear that pollsters measure the “current convictions” of the citizen as opposed to religion passed down by one’s parents. Despite this more adequate measure of religion in the country, 55.3 million claimed to believe in God (56.7%), 42.2 million (43.3%) stated that they were unbelievers and 900,000 said they didn’t know.¹⁵¹ The questions about religious belief received a variety of responses, from the priest who confessed to being an unbeliever (“a profession is one thing and convictions another”) to the churchwarden who hedged his bets by being labeled “a bit of a believer” (he was uncomfortable saying that he was an unbeliever).¹⁵² But revelations that religion was far from dead were enough to spoil the celebratory mood of the Communist Party since preparations to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution were already well underway.

To keep matters in perspective, it’s not as if Soviet citizens weren’t frightened by the implications of acknowledging belief in God in an avowedly atheist state. The violent closure of churches during collectivization was still etched in recent memory while rumors abounded that a pogrom along the lines of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre was being planned against believers. Others expected the imminent arrival of the Antichrist. The apocalyptic rumors of the

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 74.

¹⁵¹ Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 113, 118.

¹⁵² Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 80.

End Times that had marked the period of forced collectivization now returned with a vengeance. Some prophesied the return of Czar Mikhail, who would rule Russia at the time of the Final Resurrection.¹⁵³ One Orthodox believer claimed, “The prophecies of the sacred writings say that when the time of the Antichrist comes people will destroy each other; Zinoviev and the others were vozhdii [leaders] not long ago, judged and shot people themselves and today they are being judged and shot; it’s God’s punishment for the fact that people have forgotten God and the church.”¹⁵⁴

Lutherans were for the most part not as mystically inclined as the Orthodox, but the late Bishop Meyer’s identification of the regime as the Antichrist resonated strongly with many in the Church. After all, state pressure on religion had been steadily increasing even in the Lutheran stronghold of Ingria. In 1935, churches in the Ingrian villages of Tuutari, Ropsu, Haapankangas and Skuoritsa had their church bells taken away. Prayer houses in Hajaka and Konnu were closed. The finances of the congregation in Spankkova had been expropriated. In 1936, the traditional and well-attended church festivals in Tuutari, Venjoki and Kolppana were prohibited. The Toksovo congregation saw its bells thrown down from the church tower and cut up with a welding torch. The cross was also thrown down as the altar was taken from the church and reduced to rubble.¹⁵⁵ It is no wonder that interpretations of the Antichrist’s appearance would not be far from the mark in any part of the Soviet Union.

Koltushi parishioner Katri Kukkhonen remembered that many villagers were placed in a quandary by the census: how should they answer this question about their faith? You could be

¹⁵³ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 79–81.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 81. The author recalls such predictions when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and the USSR disintegrated in 1991. Gorbachev was considered to be “Czar Mikhail.”

¹⁵⁵ Junker and Arkkila, *Nacht und Neuer Morgen*, 23.

fired, especially if you worked for the government. Students and teachers could easily be dismissed from an institute for an answer in the affirmative, too. Katri considered the situation of her close friend, Amalia Laskinen, who was the daughter of a kuester from the Petrozavodsk church. Amalia studied at a pedagogical institute and didn't even think of the potential unpleasanties when she answered the question about her faith in the affirmative. Her primary fear was that of denying her Lord and Savior. The following day she was expelled from the institute.

But when the census came to Koltushi in January and February, Katri said that everyone in the village said, yes, he or she believed in God! The simple villagers didn't even think twice. For the youth, however, it was a decisive moment. If they said yes, the doors to higher education would be closed. And indeed they were then closed, but the youth remained firm in their Christian faith.¹⁵⁶ The faith of the Lutherans in Koltushi was remarkable because Pastor Varonen had already been forced to return to Finland at the end of 1935. Despite his departure, parishioners and servants of the church conducted services in the pastor's absence in the wooden church up on the hill. Finally, in February 1937, the remarkable Pastor Aleksanteri Korpelainen came to shepherd the congregation while continuing his service nearby at the congregation in Haapankangas.¹⁵⁷ Korpelainen had been a lay minister in the early 1920s in the Leningrad region village of Gubanitsa. He was considered to have been one of the most energetic pastors of a period that came to be known as "The Time of Awakening in Ingria." Especially talented at working with the young, Korpelainen formed a youth group and often visited neighboring congregations with his students. Musically gifted, Korpelainen founded a church choir at Gubanitsa that he himself conducted for several years. Summer Gospel festivals organized by the Finnish

¹⁵⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 84.

¹⁵⁷ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 81.

Consistory had been held throughout most of the 1920s, including one youth festival in Tuutari in 1922 where the 2200 seats of the church were filled and latecomers were reduced to standing room only, many even being forced to stand outside the church. Even though conditions for Korpelainen and Koltushi were far different in 1937, the bold stands taken by the villagers and the character of their pastor would challenge the Soviets' plans to eradicate religion in the Ingrian regions.¹⁵⁸

According to Soviet archives, 15,000 Christian believers still celebrated Western Christmas in 1935 despite the many closures of key Lutheran churches in Leningrad. On Easter Sunday, May 1, 1937, a total of 81,500 people attended Orthodox services.¹⁵⁹ Even in Moscow, Catholic priest Leopold Braun was amazed at the courage of his Soviet parishioners. Hundreds of them would disappear never to be heard from again. But while they were at worship, they listened in rapt attention to the reading of the Scriptures, especially when they heard the consoling words, 'Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'¹⁶⁰ In short, belief in God was far from extinct and the government knew it. It would soon come to the conclusion that it had stirred up a hornet's nest, for the new constitution was being interpreted as a guarantor for believers to act upon their faith. The Soviets had to act swiftly before religious believers took their constitutional rights too seriously.

In response to this "upsurge in religious activity," the last half of 1937 would be marked by a new wave of persecution that was to be aimed primarily at the remaining pastors/priests and believers who were active in the church. The churches would be closed on a massive scale so

¹⁵⁸ Junker and Arkkila, *Nacht und Neuer Morgen*, 20–21.

¹⁵⁹ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 74–75.

¹⁶⁰ Braun, *In Lubianka's Shadow*, 99.

that believers would understand unequivocally that “anti-Soviet elements,” by definition, would have no rights. The 1937 census was annulled and when a new census was taken in 1939, the government carefully avoided posing any question about religion.¹⁶¹

1937–Their Blood Cries Out! The Great Terror and the Destruction of the Lutheran Pastorate in the USSR

Outside of the Ingrian region, the Lutheran Church in Russia began the year 1937 virtually rudderless from the context of pastoral leadership. While the year would become the most brutal in Stalin’s Great Terror, Lutheran parishioners and the few remaining pastors did not give up without a fight. The pastors and parishioners who had been sent to concentration camps had not abandoned their faith, and as Dr. Morehead had hoped, they had become strong Christian witnesses to those with whom they came into contact. Nevertheless, the limited number of pastors remaining in office had to be very discouraging to the faithful. Added to their losses was Pastor Emil Reusch, serving a congregation in the Caucasus region village, Annenfeld. Late on Christmas Eve 1936, a man and woman unknown to him begged that he baptize a baby that very night. Being a faithful pastor to the last, Reusch couldn’t refuse. But it was a trap intricately laid by the NKVD. Reusch was imprisoned and now lost to the ministry. When he was released in 1937, he took his son with him via train to Baku. NKVD agents were waiting there and rearrested him. He was shot the next day. The boy was sent back to Annenfeld alone.¹⁶²

Now there were only eleven pastors actively serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia at the beginning of 1937. They were: (1 & 2) Paul and Bruno Reichert at St. Peter’s in Leningrad; (3 & 4) Alexander and his brother, Jan Migla, serving the Latvians at Christ the Sav-

¹⁶¹ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia*, 80–81. By Easter of 1938, only five of the 33 open churches in 1937 in Leningrad would remain open. See Davies, 81.

¹⁶² Johnson, *Loyalty*, 198.

ior Lutheran Church in Leningrad; (5) Ferdinand Bodungen who primarily served in Peterhof but also at Christ the Savior, Leningrad; (6) Aleksanteri Korpelainen, who served at Haapakangas and Koltushi, Leningrad region; (7) Leo Schultz, serving Estonians at Moloskovitsa in Karelia; (8) Heinrich Behrendts, serving Germans in Tashkent, Uzbekistan; (9) Pekka Braks, in the Ingrian villages of Venjoki and Gubanitsa; (10) Karl Vogel in Odessa [Ukraine] and (11) Selim Laurikkala, serving Finns and Ingrians at St. Mary's in Leningrad proper and other Finnish-speaking congregations in the Leningrad region.¹⁶³

Looking at the distribution of pastors, it is apparent that vast regions like Siberia, the Volga and the Ukraine, were bereft of spiritual leaders, not to mention the capital city of Moscow. There was no longer talk of reviving the seminary for Bishop Malmgren was gone. What we see from the Lutheran Church is a preserving action that reflected the late Bishop Meyer's sermon quote: "Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown" (Rev. 3:11). While these few remaining pastors were holding firm, many of their friends and colleagues were suffering and dying in the Gulag labor camps. Pastor Arthur Kluck had been arrested back in 1929 and somehow had survived the backbreaking labor of felling and transporting trees all day. An academic unused to such labor, Kluck had been working at slave labor for at least five years.¹⁶⁴ Historian Anne Applebaum, in her comprehensive work *Gulag*, discovered that work in the forests could be the most taxing form of prison labor, especially in the winter. When the winter storms known as *burany* [or *purgai*] raged, the workers were so blinded by the swirling snow that they could only walk back to the camps attached to each other by a rope. Some were left behind when they fell to the ground from exhaustion and their corpses

¹⁶³ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 597–601.

¹⁶⁴ Gisela Kluck-Detterer to Matthew Heise, March 2014.

would not be discovered until the spring thaw.¹⁶⁵

While the Lord was preserving Pastor Kluck under impossible circumstances, his children and mother-in-law were visited by the NKVD one night in 1937. The officers searched the apartment thoroughly and found nothing but Christian books. “Get your things ready!” they shouted to Grandma Behning. The senior NKVD officer informed his colleagues, “We’ll send the kids to an orphanage. Prepare the paperwork!”¹⁶⁶ Grandma Behning’s legs were swollen and she couldn’t stand up nor get out of bed, which she made abundantly clear to the officers. “Madame, get up!” one of them shrieked. “Then you’ll have to carry me out, bed and all,” the grandmother firmly replied.¹⁶⁷ The senior officer summoned his own doctor, who actually confirmed a diagnosis of rheumatism and a weak heart (a brave act given the times!). The NKVD officers cursed, but ultimately left the family untouched. This was truly a miracle in a year when there were few stories of hope, but the paralyzing fear of that encounter would remain with Gisela Kluck all of her life.¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Pastor Kluck would not receive any such reprieve from the NKVD. Several years after his death, Kluck’s family was visited by a fellow prisoner who spoke reverently of the pastor’s faith. After an exhausting workday, the man recalled that the prisoners would devour the little bits of bread they had scraped together for supper and then collapse onto their wooden plank bunks, grasping the few hours of precious sleep they would need in order to survive until the next day. But Arthur Kluck would sit up and pray—for a long time. The man noticed the

¹⁶⁵ Applebaum, *Gulag*, 224–25, 228.

¹⁶⁶ Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

¹⁶⁷ Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

¹⁶⁸ Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

pastor praying often and urged him, “Arthur, why are you praying so long? You better get some sleep!” Arthur looked up at him and replied, “It’s the one thing that I can still do for my family.”¹⁶⁹ And he would go on praying.

Gisela Kluck remembered that she and her brothers would pray with their mother every night for him. She is convinced that God answered her father’s prayers and helped her and her younger brother, Arthur, Jr., survive and eventually immigrate to Germany after the fall of Communism in the USSR in 1991. With tears of joy, upon arrival she would address her late mother (who did not survive the war), “Mama, we finally made it to the promised land—Germany!”¹⁷⁰ In a tragic sort of irony, Arthur Kluck had been transferred to a camp in the Siberian region of Tomsk (Village of Staraya Juvala) in 1933, the very region where his family was living unbeknownst to him! On October 28, 1937, the NKVD troika in the Novosibirsk region sentenced Kluck to death on the absurd charge that he was a participant in the Cadet-Monarchical organization called “The Union for the Salvation of Russia.” The Union was said to be disseminating counterrevolutionary rumors, making defamatory statements against the Communist Party and Soviet government, and consistently praising life in Germany while making preparations for an armed insurrection against the Soviet Union.¹⁷¹

After the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, children from Marxstadt like Gerhard Fink remembered the pastor with the sonorous voice who enthralled them in church with his recitation of familiar Bible stories—Daniel in the Lions’ Den, or David and Goliath. Friedrich Fischer remembered Pastor Kluck for the selfless and bold act he performed, marrying his Uncle Andrei

¹⁶⁹ Gisela Kluck-Detterer to Matthew Heise, March 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

¹⁷¹ Arthur Kluck Family Documents; N. N. Ablazhei, “Stalinism in the Provinces: 1937–1938,” Yakov Krotov Biblioteka.

and Aunt Olga in an apartment when the church in Katharinenstadt had been closed in 1927. The unbelievable nature of the charges against Kluck would eventually be refuted publicly by the Soviet state upon his rehabilitation in 1989. But this was 1937 and no respite was in sight. Despite his wife's pleas, Pastor Arthur Kluck would never make it to Germany or America. On November 9, he was executed.¹⁷²

The Martyrdom of Pastor Alexander Streck: "I was blessed to once know such great men!"

The NKVD resumed the interrogation of Pastor Streck in January 1937, addressing the questions more sharply and with evident irritation because they believed that Streck was not answering their questions directly. On March 2, they brought Harry Helms face-to-face with his pastor in order to force them to refute one another. The NKVD records Streck as saying that Helms promised to lead a reformation in the Church, seeing himself in the role of an "ecclesiastical Hitler."¹⁷³ Helms was portrayed as the one who led Streck into this Fascist circle within the church. This conversation between the two supposedly, and conveniently, took place in March or April 1933, shortly after Hitler's Enabling Act secured his power base in Germany. Streck thwarted the NKVD scheme, though, claiming to have no memory of such a meeting. They then tried to twist the words of the older man, Helms, so that it appeared as if he was accusing Streck of sinister ties with embassy personnel, like Gerhardt and Schwindt. Streck admitted to conversing with them, but only about church matters.¹⁷⁴ The NKVD in their cynicism either couldn't imagine that it was logical for Streck to seek assistance for the operation of the church from the German embassy, or it was simply looking for any connection between Streck and foreigners so

¹⁷² Arthur Kluck Family Documents.

¹⁷³ P-45647, List 40, 49, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁷⁴ P-45647, List 49-50, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

they could be rid of this troublesome priest. Perhaps in their minds, there must have been some kind of political shenanigans going on. After all, the NKVD had accused Bishop Malmgren of no less, engaging in political sabotage when he and Streck communicated with the German embassy, since it was, after all, their protector in the USSR. But even those actions took place before Hitler came to power. Now all bets were off.

On March 4, the NKVD concluded that Streck was “a member of a counter-revolutionary terrorist group” carrying out “Fascist spying” for the German embassy. As such, several of his acquaintances had been arrested because, they claimed, Streck had drawn them into his circle. In order to uncover all of Streck’s activities, his prison term was extended for two months until May 4. Most likely, these so-called “others” were the members of the St. Peter and Paul *dvatsatka*, like Harry Helms and the woman who spoke years later to Johannes Schleuning about the last days of the congregation.¹⁷⁵ By April 25, the NKVD completed its inquiry into the case of Pastor Alexander Streck. The individuals said to have been his accomplices would continue to be investigated. It is not certain, but they, too, were most likely members of St. Peter and Paul. They were Sergey Brillling and those whose last names were given as Fromhold, Mintzer, Krause and Macchus.¹⁷⁶

As for Streck, all that remained was to pass his case along to the “troika,” a special committee of three judges generally consisting of the regional NKVD chief, the Chief Party Secretary of the region and a representative of the prosecutor’s office or the local government. Their task was to speed up the process of convictions, utilizing the right to condemn a prisoner in absentia without even the pretense of judge, jury and trial. In this manner, troikas decided the fate

¹⁷⁵ P-45647, List 55, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁷⁶ P-45647, List 108, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

of millions of individuals in the Soviet Union during Stalin's Terror.¹⁷⁷ At 11:51 a.m., July 3rd, General Vasily Ulrich presided over a closed session of the High Court of the U.S.S.R. (the troika) in the case of Pastor Alexander Streck.¹⁷⁸ Usually in these cases the victim would in penitential fashion confess his guilt and profess his undying love for Stalin or the Soviet state. For example, when Kamenev, Zinoviev and their associates appeared before Ulrich in 1936, they performed something akin to this rite of Soviet hari-kari. One defendant named Lurye even shrieked, 'Long live the cause of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin!'¹⁷⁹ Of course, Streck was not allowed to speak publicly to Ulrich and the troika on his own behalf, but he had already laid waste their plans for a similarly compliant witness. For previous to the final session, Alexander Streck deviated from the pattern. The forthright pastor now rejected *all* the charges brought against him from the time he was arrested in November 1936. "I have never been a Fascist," he declaimed.¹⁸⁰ When asked why he had previously confessed to these crimes, Streck indicated that he had been imprisoned for a long period and this had affected his nervous condition. Plus, he acknowledged that he had been subjected to some kind of torture ["rude methods"].¹⁸¹

In the end, Pastor Alexander Streck made the faithful witness, boldly refuting the lies that the Soviets had so painstakingly concocted. Ultimately it didn't matter to them, but it is important that the history of his refutation was preserved for the sake of his honor and that of the church. Streck was sentenced to death. On the 27th of July, the 54 year-old pastor was executed, probably in Butyrki prison in Moscow (although quite possibly in Lubyanka) where he had

¹⁷⁷ Applebaum, *Gulag*, 107.

¹⁷⁸ P-45647, List 147, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁷⁹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 103–4.

¹⁸⁰ P-45647, List 145, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁸¹ P-45647, List 143, 145, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

been held. His family was thereafter exiled to Kazakhstan, never to return to Moscow.¹⁸²

Recalling the heroism of Pastor Streck, the female church council member arrested in his case declared: “I was blessed to once know such great men!”¹⁸³

The Ingrian Lutheran Pastorate is Decimated

Despite the Soviet government’s botched census, Ingrian Lutherans were still in danger because concerted attempts to place undue pressure upon the Church now came to the forefront. Pastor Selim Laurikkala had been briefly exiled from the Soviet Union back in 1927 and constantly harassed since his return, but he had continued his quiet, persistent testimony to the Christian faith. On Sunday, April 25, Laurikkala returned as usual from conducting services in Ingrian villages southwest of Leningrad, Hietämäki and Tuutari. These worship services would turn out to be the last he would conduct in the Soviet Union. On Tuesday, April 27, he was told to pack his bags and be on the 6 P.M. evening train to Finland. He informed the Finnish (or

¹⁸² P-45647, List 147, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region.

¹⁸³ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 150. American Catholic priest, Father Léopold Braun, writes in his book that a “Lutheran bishop” in Moscow was “savagely shot.” Since his church was only a few blocks from Streck’s, he undoubtedly knew him and heard what happened from inside circles. Braun even claimed that after his execution by firing squad, Streck’s clothes had been sent back to his wife. See Braun, 64. That almost assuredly is incorrect, though. The woman from the church council seems to have heard that Streck was martyred in prison in 1938. She was off by one year. See Schleuning, 150. Current St. Peter and Paul Lutheran pastor, Dmitry Lotov, corresponded with the relatives of Pastor Streck and learned that they had waited for him in exile in Kazakhstan, but he never came. See Dmitry Lotov to Matthew Heise, October 2013. From the NKVD file on Pastor Streck, we now know that his daughter, Stella Leipus, wrote to Nikita Khrushchev on January 31, 1956, inquiring as to the whereabouts of her father. Writing in exile from a collective farm in the Karaganda region of Kazakhstan, Stella informed Khrushchev that she was the only family member still alive and that her family had never learned whether her father had survived the Stalinist years or not. It was already 9 ½ years since his “ten-year sentence without the right to correspondence” was to have expired. Surely, if he was still alive, and he wasn’t in the best of health in 1936, he should be freed so that his daughter could provide comfort to him in his old age. [Stella did not know what we know today. The phrase “ten years without the right of correspondence” was code language indicating that the prisoner had been executed]. On November 20, 1957, the courts declined Stella’s plea and refused to rehabilitate Pastor Streck. His innocence and the spurious nature of all charges against him would only be admitted in 1996 when he was formally rehabilitated by the Russian Republic. See P-45647, List 129, 308–12, FSB Archives of the Moscow Region. Lastly, Elza Georgiyevskaya mentions that on a visit to tend her mother’s grave at a cemetery in Karaganda in 1954, she unexpectedly saw Stella’s grave. Given this FSB document, that certainly cannot have been correct. Perhaps she meant her sister, Ellen? See Georgiyevskaya, “Church Life in Moscow,” 63.

Ingrian) Lutheran Consistory, which he directed, that this time there would be no return from exile as in 1927. His Finnish citizenship apparently was the only thing that kept him from being imprisoned and executed. Recognizing that this time the NKVD would not relent, with heavy hearts the Ingrian Lutherans bid the Laurikkala's goodbye.¹⁸⁴

In a May 13 letter to U.S. Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, diplomat Arthur Bliss Lane attached a bevy of translated articles from Russian and German apprising the secretary of the religious situation in the USSR. Quoting from an article in the German journal *Osteuropa*, dating from October 1936, Lane informed Hull: "The Finnish-Lutheran Church in Ingermanland...is completely destroyed."¹⁸⁵ The journal and Lane were a bit premature, but events were rapidly moving in that direction. After Laurikkala's forced departure only four members remained at the Consistory, and the Soviets would quickly take measures to reduce that number. At the May 25th consistory meeting, Pastor Pekka Braks was chosen to take Laurikkala's position of leadership. Along with him, the other three members included a pastor named Simo Pennanen, who had escaped from exile and was living illegally in the Ingrian region while secretly trying to serve a parish in the village of Bolshoye Zamoste. Aleksanteri Korpelainen was still serving village parishes in Haapankangas and Koltushi (possibly Toksovo); and rounding out the four was a lay minister named Matti Närjä.¹⁸⁶ That summer would be the last time until the end of the 20th century that Ingrian villages would have pastors available to serve them.

Photos from the summer of 1937 show Aleksanteri Korpelainen posing with the *dvatsatka* of the Koltushi congregation on July 11, no one conveying any sense of urgency by his expression. (The photo might have been taken in Toksovo, but most likely was in Koltushi). Later in

¹⁸⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 79.

¹⁸⁵ Arthur Bliss Lane to Cordell Hull, May 13, 1937.

¹⁸⁶ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 236.

the month on July 27, the pastor was photographed with the confirmation class of Koltushi. The mood almost appears serene, especially in the first picture. But unmistakably, storm clouds were gathering on the horizon. That summer, Simo Pennanen had boldly written to Andrei Zhdanov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party for Leningrad and an influential comrade of Stalin's. It's not certain why he took this drastic step, but one thing is clear: such an action was the equivalent of signing his own death warrant since it alerted the NKVD to his presence in the region. On August 8, the NKVD dragged him directly from the worship service to prison. Two weeks later, he was proclaimed guilty and executed on August 24.¹⁸⁷ So now at the next gathering of the Consistory on August 31, only three members remained.¹⁸⁸ It would be their last meeting. Pastor Pekka Braks was arrested the next day, and on the following day, September 2, non-Consistory member and pastor, Antti Jaatinen, was also incarcerated. That left two members, until September 15 when Aleksanteri Korpelainen was taken from his home in Haapankangas on the outskirts of Leningrad. Only Matti Närjä remained free, and that was primarily due to his Finnish citizenship. He would leave the USSR by the end of the year, never to return. He died in Finland in 1963. For all intents and purposes, though, the pastorate of the Lutheran Church in the Ingrian region was now completely decimated.¹⁸⁹

The interrogation of Pastor Korpelainen began on September 16 and followed the pattern used against German Lutherans; that is, he would be accused of espionage. The 57 year-old had been serving since 1920 (while holding the status of lay preacher from 1900–1920) and had been pastor at the congregation in Haapankangas since 1929. The father of a twelve year old boy,

¹⁸⁷ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 81.

¹⁸⁸ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 236.

¹⁸⁹ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 81–82; P-59410, Volume 12, List 2, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Sulo, and husband to his 40 year old wife, Mathilda, Korpelainen was recorded as not being in the best of health when he was transferred to the Leningrad jail of the Interior Ministry. Even though he had impeccable worker credentials as the son of peasants, it did him no favors. And although he had undergone a police search back in 1931, this investigation would be much more thorough and serious.¹⁹⁰

As the NKVD began the interrogation process of the pastor, its goal became readily apparent. Quizzing him on his former military service dating all the way back to 1901, the NKVD pursued any connection to the former Czarist regime. During their search, they found a photo of him in military uniform taken in November 1917, which Korpelainen assured them was due to his being called up for one month of military service. Since he was undeniably not a Bolshevik, this evidence created some doubts about his loyalty to the Soviet regime. The direction of the questioning then turned to whether Korpelainen had any relatives living across the border in Finland. The pastor admitted that he himself had lived in Finland before the 1917 Revolution, but confessed that he had no more contact with the people he knew. Apparently not convinced, the NKVD next asked whether he knew people who had lived in the Soviet Union but had departed for Finland.

It was a trick question, and Korpelainen did not fall for it, because he knew that the NKVD knew he was acquainted with Pastor Selim Laurikkala.¹⁹¹ In fact, one of the accusations against him would be that he had prayed publicly for the health of a “foreign spy,” none other than Laurikkala!¹⁹² The September 17 issue of *Leningradskaya Pravda* actually carried an article entitled, “A Community of Priests and Bourgeois Nationalists,” accusing Korpelainen of anti-

¹⁹⁰ P-59410, Volume 12, List 10–11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹¹ P-59410, Volume 12, List 11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹² Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, 255.

Soviet activities. So naturally Korpelainen admitted that he knew Laurikkala, who had been ordered by the Soviet authorities to leave the country a few months previous. Such questioning was a classic case of how the NKVD would try to tar an individual with “guilt by association.” Laurikkala was an enemy of the Soviet Union. Korpelainen knew Laurikkala. Hence, Korpelainen was an enemy of the people.¹⁹³

The interrogator now quickly came to the point: “You have been arrested for active, anti-governmental activities. Give us the actual details!!” Korpelainen responded clearly and honestly: “I have never carried out any anti-government or counterrevolutionary work.”¹⁹⁴ Period. Given Korpelainen’s categorical denials of anti-governmental activity, one shudders to think what occurred in the bowels of the prison that evening. Because when he was asked again to list his counterrevolutionary activities the next day (September 17), we instead read: “I’m convinced that the NKVD is aware of all my criminal, anti-governmental activities and that I am no longer able to hide from the NKVD my participation in illegal, counterrevolutionary organizations. I admit that I am truly a participant in a counterrevolutionary, nationalist organization.”¹⁹⁵ This patently forged answer makes it apparent that the NKVD was getting the answer desired, either by force or literally making up the confession themselves. In addition, the prisoner was required to sign the interrogation record for the day. After the first day, Korpelainen’s signature is clear and distinct. All subsequent signatures were smudged and indistinct, possibly indicating a person who had undergone some form of physical hardship or torture.¹⁹⁶ Naturally, in trying to get to the truth in the matter, greater weight should be accorded to Korpelainen’s initial denial of any anti-

¹⁹³ P-59410, Volume 12, List 11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Kandidov, *Church and Espionage*, 90.

¹⁹⁴ P-59410, Volume 12, List 11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁵ P-59410, Volume 12, List 12, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

¹⁹⁶ P-59410, Volume 12, List 11, 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

government activity.

Nevertheless, this so-called “confession” of Aleksanteri Korpelainen still provides us with vital information about the NKVD’s fears and whose name it was seeking to blacken. For example, Pastor Antti Jaatinen, who was already under arrest since September 2nd, was accused of recruiting Korpelainen for anti-government activity back in 1931. Previously, a former teacher, Mikhail Kasolainen, was said to have recruited Jaatinen for his counterrevolutionary nationalist organization in the Leningrad region. Now Jaatinen supposedly gathered Finnish pastors for this organization, hence the contact with Korpelainen. “I am an anti-Soviet and Finnish nationalist by conviction,” Korpelainen is recorded as saying.¹⁹⁷ As the interrogation continued on September 20, it was claimed that Korpelainen first began his spying activities for Finland in 1931 under the direction of Pastor Selim Laurikkala and then afterwards under Finnish consulate employee Alexander Tillonen. Laurikkala was said to have asked him to spy in the regions where he served, asking about the political and economic situation in the Ingrian territory. Furthermore, he was to ask about the expulsions of Ingrians from the land, the mood of the population, arrests and conditions on the collective farms. Korpelainen was even said to have met with Tillonen in the consulary of the Ingrian Lutheran church, an obvious attempt by the NKVD to link the Church to Finnish political institutions. Interestingly, another NKVD agent takes over the interrogations on September 20th until the conclusion, leading one to suspect that the latter NKVD interrogator was just a little more creative at fabricating details and responses than the first agent.¹⁹⁸

Whatever the case, the further interrogations had the teacher Koselainen identify the

¹⁹⁷ P-59410, Volume 12, List 12, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 82.

¹⁹⁸ P-59410, Volume 12, List 14–16, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

traitors' goal as getting the Ingrian region to secede from the USSR and join Finland. Despite attempts to tie Jaatinen to Korpelainen's activities, Laurikkala was said to have been the true mastermind. He was the one ordering Korpelainen to recruit Finnish-speaking pastors for counterrevolutionary work and fostering a counterrevolutionary spirit among the people. Therefore the NKVD needed the Finnish state to be fascist and an enemy of the Soviet Union, certainly not a far-fetched conception in some minds given that the Winter War would soon take place between the two nations.¹⁹⁹ Special interest was also given to Korpelainen's work with youth. The NKVD described him as encouraging the youth to immigrate to Finland, assuming that this was the reason for his forming youth groups in villages like Toksovo. Along with a group of seven individuals, who are named in the account, Korpelainen was said to have gathered the youth inside the church for these villainous activities. When Pastor Varonen left for Finland in 1936, Korpelainen allegedly expanded his web of influence to the youth in Koltushi. Even amidst the parade of NKVD lies about counterrevolutionary activities, a truthful picture of Pastor Laurikkala's desire to keep the church alive can be gleaned. Laurikkala had prepared Matvei Ulonen to undertake pastoral activities among the youth in Koltushi, no doubt like Bishop Meyer, preparing for the day when he might be forced to leave.²⁰⁰ Therefore after Laurikkala's forced departure, Korpelainen inherited an active youth group when he went to the Koltushi parish in 1936.

Summing up the case, the NKVD had created the picture it desired from the interrogations, condemning Korpelainen and four of his co-defendants on November 10.²⁰¹ It must be clearly stated that of the complete falsification of these documents there is no doubt whatsoever.

¹⁹⁹ P-59410, Volume 12, List 16–18, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁰ P-59410, Volume 12, List 19–21, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰¹ P-59410, Volume 12, List 55–56, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

When Nikita Khrushchev's initiated his de-Stalinization program in 1956, the wife of one of the defendants, Matvei Koronen, protested this verdict. In 1960 several Ingrians were questioned and they all denied witnessing any anti-Soviet activities on the part of Pastor Korpelainen and his fellow defendants. In fact, the Leningrad War Tribunal discovered contradictions, including the testimony of one individual (who corrected the testimony in 1960) about Korpelainen. This man had alleged that Korpelainen recruited him for anti-Soviet activity in 1927, while the NKVD's own records indicate that Laurikkala, whom they had accused of recruiting Korpelainen, had recruited him in 1931! They couldn't even get their lies straight. Given the obvious fabrication, the war tribunal acknowledged in 1960 that in the period of 1937–1938, the Leningrad region's NKVD engaged in “widely practiced unfounded arrests of citizens of Finnish ethnicity accused of espionage, beating them and using other measures of compulsion.”²⁰²

Unfortunately for Pastor Korpelainen and his fellow parishioners, their future vindication in 1960 would be too little, too late. On November 15, one of the darkest days in the long history of the Ingrian Lutheran Church occurred. The last Soviet citizens serving as ordained Lutheran pastors in the Ingrian region, Aleksanteri Korpelainen, Pekka Braks and Antti Jaatinen, were accused of belonging to a separate nationalist organization founded by Pastor Laurikkala. Along with twelve of their faithful parishioners, they were shot and buried in the killing fields of Levashovo. Yet despite the loss of their shepherds, the spiritual flock of the Lutheran Church of Ingria did not immediately scatter. Their faith had been cultivated lovingly and painstakingly for centuries. It would not disappear overnight.²⁰³

²⁰² P-59410, Volume 12, List 57–60, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰³ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 81–82.

The Execution of Pastor Helmut Hansen (1892–1937) and Other Heroes of the Faith

The Ingrian Lutheran pastors, as well as believers in the Gulag camps, had been the subjects of a new decree issued by NKVD Commissar, Nikolai Yezhov. Yezhov ordered that as of August 5th, [1937] “all republics and regions launch a campaign of punitive measures against former kulaks, active anti-Soviet elements, and criminals.”²⁰⁴ Included in that definition would be “sectarian activists” and “church officials” who were currently held in the prisons and labor camps and were carrying out what was identified as “active anti-Soviet espionage.”²⁰⁵ Approximately 936,000 people would be arrested in the USSR in 1937.²⁰⁶

Unfortunately, Pastor Helmut Hansen was to be one of those who fell under the scope of Yezhov’s new decree. Hansen had been laboring in Gulag labor camps after receiving his ten year sentence back in September 1930. His health had declined over the years as he suffered from inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis), a form of diabetes and anemia.²⁰⁷ This was only natural given that he had now served seven years in the Gulag under very harsh conditions. Furthermore, he had apparently not been a model prisoner in the eyes of the Gulag camp administration and had suffered for it. In early 1937, he sent the letter of another prisoner [presumably who had not been allowed the privilege] to the city of Segezha and also used the right for official correspondence to send his own private letters, no doubt to his wife Erna who had been freed and was working as a nurse in Petrograd District of Leningrad. For this offense, he was put in the camp prison for five days without having those days deducted from his sentence.²⁰⁸ According to

²⁰⁴ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 474–75.

²⁰⁵ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 474.

²⁰⁶ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 492.

²⁰⁷ P-17014, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁰⁸ P-17014, List 1, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Hansen's nephew, Erik Muss (when he was interviewed in 2006), in 1937 Erna and the boys actually succeeded in traveling to visit him in his Gulag labor camp in the Karelian village of Medvezhegorsk, an unimaginable journey at that time and a true testament to the love that they had for each other.²⁰⁹

As the year proceeded, though, the NKVD continued to gather evidence from so-called witnesses within the camps, portraying Hansen as an enemy of the Soviet state. One witness claimed, perhaps accurately, that Hansen didn't believe the Soviet evidence of espionage against Marshall Tukhachevsky and the other military leaders executed by Stalin in June 1937. Hansen supposedly exclaimed, "I can't understand how they harmed their own government since they [the government] were protected by them."²¹⁰ Indeed, if Hansen did say this he certainly saw through the case that Stalin had manufactured against the popular marshall. Evidence years later would confirm that Nazi Germany had planted false evidence of Tukachevsky's betrayal, and in the accusatory spirit of the times when the purges were in full operation, he wouldn't have had a chance to counter Stalin's paranoia.²¹¹ Nor, ultimately, would smaller fish in their eyes, like Helmut Hansen.

Another witness claimed that with respect to the coming 20th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1937, Hansen had said, "We can't expect an amnesty for the 20th anniversary of the revolution because there are still classes and camps, but when we reach the 50th anniversary of Soviet power then we can expect amnesty because there will be no camps or classes."²¹² This statement, the witness said, was accompanied by a knowing smile, meaning that Hansen didn't

²⁰⁹ Erik Muss to Olga Ryumina, 2006.

²¹⁰ P-17014, List 9, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹¹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 199–204.

²¹² P-17014, List 6, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

believe it and considered it all nonsense. Of course, the witness prefaced his comments about Hansen with the statement "... as a former servant of the cult, he was inclined in an anti-Soviet direction against all the activities of Soviet power and politics carried out by the Communist Party."²¹³ With regard to Statute 58, which allowed for the sending of prisoners to other camps (usually with a stricter regime), Hansen allegedly stated that they all had to be prepared to be sent to Solovetsky Island as the Soviet government would fabricate evidence against someone who held to "older views."²¹⁴

A final witness in the files recorded a recent conversation (August 16, 1937) where Hansen was accused of saying that he argued with other prisoners about how a Soviet citizen should believe and act. Hansen supposedly said that to be a Soviet citizen, you had to act like Stalin, but it was impossible for everyone to follow on the Stalinist path because millions of citizens simply can't do it. Each person was subject to his own opinions and inevitably contradictions would arise in the political sphere.²¹⁵ Of course whether Hansen actually made these statements cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, but given his bold nature these statements do not seem to be out of character with his known views. Hansen never shied away from confronting the Soviet atheistic perspective, although he had simultaneously advocated submission to the government in all things not pertaining to religion. It is not likely, either, that he had grown less cynical towards the Soviet's destruction of Christianity in his homeland. He was never fooled by the lies being perpetrated in the name of communism and atheism.

Accused now for a second time of "anti-Soviet agitation," this time among prisoners in the Gulag camps, Hansen was sentenced to death on September 2. In the official death sentence, it

²¹³ P-17014, List 5–6, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁴ P-17014, List 6–7, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁵ P-17014, List 10, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

was noted once again that Hansen had organized underground children's groups for the purpose of religious education. This was described as "counterrevolutionary agitation against the Communist Party and Soviet power."²¹⁶ Herein lay the real reason that Hansen could no longer be allowed to live. He was faithful to the Lord above the state. At 1:15 a.m., September 22, in the Karelian republic of the USSR, a Soviet government that could no longer countenance a man who boldly obeyed God rather than man, a hero of the Faith who spoke freely from his conscience, carried out the execution of Pastor Helmut Hansen in the forests of Medvezhegorsk.²¹⁷ Years later after the fall of communism, evidence of mass graves would be uncovered there.²¹⁸

Stalin's promise to annihilate the clergy now picked up steam in the late summer and autumn of 1937. Dr. Morehead's dear friend from Grossliebenthal, Pastor Albert Koch, had been released after his initial arrest back in 1930. He was released in 1932, because human rights organizations record that he worked as an accountant in the Kursk region until he was re-arrested. On August 31, 1937, though, on a website run by the human rights organization, Memorial, there is a simple notation that he was arrested and imprisoned in Butyrki prison in Moscow. There is information that he was shot afterwards, although no date is given.²¹⁹ The citation of his activities in atheist Boris Kandidov's book published in 1937, *Church and Espionage*, indicate that he had not been forgotten by his enemies.²²⁰

²¹⁶ P-17014, List 11, 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁷ P-17014, List 11–14, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²¹⁸ Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 2–5.

²¹⁹ Жители Курской области, репрессированные в 1930–1950 годы [Residents of the Kursk Region, Repressed in the years 1930–1950, accessed 2017.

²²⁰ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden*, 298.

Others connected to the Hansen-Muss Case or seminary were also re-arrested. Gustav Golde, the nephew of Bishop Meyer and husband of Elsa Freifeldt, had been working as a teacher at Middle School Number 2 in Leningrad when he was arrested on August 6. On September 20, he was sentenced to the highest measure of punishment and shot on September 24.²²¹ Heinrich Behrendts, seminary professor and son-in-law of Bishop Malmgren, who had been falsely accused of the firewood theft back in 1932 and given reprieve by being exiled to Uzbekistan, was now arrested in September. This time there would be no mercy for him. He would die in a Gulag labor camp.²²² Former pastor of St. Catherine's in Leningrad and seminary professor for a brief spell, Woldemar Wagner, had been arrested in Leningrad back in 1935 with several of his other pastoral colleagues in the city. Like many others, he would be re-arrested, too, in his case on September 10th inside a labor camp in the Novosibirsk region. We learn from the charges against him that he had actually been helping Pastors Zahlit and Migla (probably Alexander) in the past with the dissemination of Christian literature. These are his real crimes, not the imaginary German Fascist connections that the NKVD was so expert at establishing out of thin air. His wife, Paulina had last heard from him via post in August. But shortly afterwards, she and their three children were exiled to Kazakhstan, like so many of German Lutheran background in 1937. Having heard nothing from her husband for quite a long time, she wrote to Lavrenty Beria when Woldemar's five-year sentence was set to conclude in 1940. She received no answer until 1957, when she and the family learned that Woldemar had died of a kidney disease (acute renal failure) in 1942. Only, it wasn't true. After the fall of the Soviet Union in

²²¹ Возвращённые Имена: Книги Памяти России [Return of the Names: Book of Memories in Russia], accessed October 9, 2013.

²²² Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 298.

199, Woldemar Wagner's great-grandson learned the truth, that he was executed on September 24, 1937.²²³

Another seminary professor and pastor, Arnold Frischfeld, who had suffered psychologically after his and his two daughters' ten year sentence to labor camps, also received the "crown of life" in the northern region of Archangel. This son of a telegraph clerk who had truthfully confessed to his NKVD interrogator, "I'm a religious person, I have no interest in politics," had been originally sentenced to Solovetsky Island labor camp.²²⁴ However, he may have been eventually transferred to a labor camp in Archangel. We simply don't know all the details. The notation in "Return of the Names" only records that he was executed in Archangel on November 3rd. He was 63 years old.²²⁵

Likewise, Ossip Toryassan had been languishing in a Soviet prison cell in Vladikavkaz since 1936 (at that time, named after a deceased Georgian communist, Ordzhonikidze), having been arrested for his work as a pastor. Since November 1933, his son Bruno had been serving a detachment of the "Labor Army" in the distant taiga of Khabarovsk but apparently had come back to Vladikavkaz.²²⁶ Bruno managed to visit his father in prison, cherishing the last moments he would spend with his father on earth. Before his execution on October 23rd, Ossip gave his son his most prized possession—his Bible. Bruno would attempt to decipher his father's notes in Gothic German script until the end of his life, treasuring the wisdom and honoring the courage of this man who had given his life for the Lord.²²⁷ The NKVD would now finally deal with the Lu-

²²³ "Open List:" Woldemar Bogdanovich Wagner.

²²⁴ P-82333, Volume 8, List 328–329, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²²⁵ Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR], last modified, December 13, 2016.

²²⁶ Tatsenko, Pastor and Schwan, "Bruder Bruno."

²²⁷ Tanya Ryumina, "May God Preserve You...."

theran pastor who had caused them the most grief, Pastor Kurt Muss.

The Forgotten Hero of the Lutheran Church: Rev. Kurt Muss, The Lonely Martyr

Since December 28, 1935, Kurt Muss had been laboring in Camp number 14 in Mai-Guba, located in the general vicinity of Kem and offshore from the Solovetsky Island camp in northern Russia.²²⁸ The lonely pastor's wife had long since left him and married another. He had been allowed to write once a month while in the camps, and in this way his mother, Alexandra, was able to keep in touch with her son. A confirmand from his last class in May 1929, Dagmara Zeksel, had also been corresponding with him. After giving her own blood for money, she was able to purchase a train ticket to visit him in the far north. Muss was working as a clerk in the administrative management office of the camp, evidently due to his academic capabilities which had to have been in short supply in the north. Because he was not an ordinary inmate, he was given the privilege of visitors. Dagmara, who according to her own account was in love with him, arrived at the camp and stayed with people nearby for six days. Muss would come to her after work and she would feed him. As she left, Muss asked her to send him books on becoming a paramedic. Since she herself had been studying to become a doctor, she easily found and sent him the books.

Muss informed Zeksel that all of the books she sent had made it to him, but in August 1937 he stopped answering her letters. Zeksel was certain that something had happened, and her hunch was not incorrect.²²⁹ Muss had been watched for his actions in the camp, especially for his penchant to continue to speak unabashedly about his faith in Christ. The NKVD had been steadily accumulating evidence from fellow prisoners in order to incriminate him. For example,

²²⁸ Mikhail Shkarovsky, "Pastor Kurt Muss."

²²⁹ Dagmar Zeksel, "Воспоминания о Пасторе Курте Муссе" [Memories of Pastor Kurt Muss] in *Уроки Гнева и Любви: Воспоминания о Репрессиях (1920–80 гг.)*. Выпуск 5 [*Lessons of Hate and Love: Remembrances of Repression (1920–80)*]. Volume 5 (Saint Petersburg, Russia: B.I., 1993), 15–17.

one man claimed that in front of all the prisoners, Muss had spoken negatively about how the communists were educating youth in the Soviet Union. Muss, he complained, was gathering fellow Russian Germans about himself and urging the prisoners to be disobedient to Soviet power. He accused Muss of saying that the Soviet Union had imprisoned the entire country and placed its citizens on hunger rations, and if someone expressed this opinion publicly he would subject himself to the highest measure of punishment. Contradicting himself in his own testimony, this man further stated that Muss was one of those “hidden, anti-Soviet characters.”²³⁰

Another witness who claimed to have known and observed Muss for close to ten months may have been closer to the truth. In his bitter recriminations against Muss, he characterized him as a man “impregnated to the core with anti-Soviet religious aspirations, clearly expressing his open hatred to the current system and with everything in his power and means to plant his religious teachings into the mass of prisoners.”²³¹ One imagines that Muss was not inclined to hatred, but to communists and atheists his ideas were indeed dangerous. That is why he was arrested in the first place. Dramatic plays would often be staged in the Gulag camps as a means to take the prisoners’ minds off their hardships. They had become a popular means of entertainment for those subjected to the mind-numbing, repetitive labor of the camps. This witness claimed that Muss had directed the well-known 19th century play by Alexander Ostrovsky entitled, “The Guilty without Fault.” Muss used just such an opportunity to address the prisoners with his own thoughts, the witness continued, engaging them in a “deeply religious sermon” all the while continually urging the prisoners to put their hope in God. This individual described Muss as an “en-emy of the Soviet people,” accusing him of calling the Constitution of

²³⁰ P-12690, List 3– 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²³¹ P-12690, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

the USSR “a collection of pretty words and nothing else,” all the while admonishing prisoners to change their lives through religion.²³² Who knows how many prisoners gathered hope in their dire circumstances by Muss’ reminder to put everything in the Lord’s hands, the One who was in charge of time?

Doubtless Kurt Muss’ real crimes were that he would not cease serving his Lord, even when his life hung in the balance. This is the message that he had preached and lived before his confirmands and parishioners since the beginning of his pastoral service. How could he change now? He had remained faithful to the Lord despite the lonely years of physical and emotional hardship in the Gulag labor camps of the far north, his curiosity for life and ideas remaining intact. A hand drawn picture of Kurt near the end of his life, sketched by a fellow inmate named Lukin, survived the camps. His family preserved the portrait and it was eventually passed along to interested parishioners of St. Michael’s Lutheran in St. Petersburg. In the drawing, Muss’ forehead is creased with lines, having aged prematurely. A close look at his face also shows signs of his having been beaten. His had not been an easy path.

Dagmara Zeksel said that Muss had always known he would be obliged to carry his own cross of suffering, perhaps even to his death.²³³ Now that moment had come. Excoriating him as a Fascist who praised Hitler, the NKVD brought out all of its verbal ammunition to calumniate Muss when its “troika” in Karelia took up his case on September 13. After placing him in a special cell, it didn’t take long for them to formally proclaim that on September 20 he would be shot. Shortly before midnight on October 4 (11:50 p.m.) in the far north region of Mai-Guba near the White Sea, Kurt Alexandrovich Muss joined the ranks of the martyrs of the Evangelical

²³² P-12690, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²³³ Dagmara Zeksel, “Memories of Pastor Kurt Muss,” 16.

Lutheran Church of Russia. There would be many more before 1937 concluded.²³⁴

Among them would be someone who was probably an acquaintance of Kurt Muss. Dr. Elisabeth Meyer was imprisoned in virtually the same region and perhaps the same camp as Muss, the White Sea region near the city of Kem. We know that her mother had begged Dr. Morehead and the LWC to do whatever it could to help her when she was arrested in 1935. But the letters that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America archives preserve between Dr. Ralph Long and Eugenie Meyer cease around this time. From Russian state archives, though, we know that Eugenie was exiled to a village Kashire (100 kilometers outside Moscow) shortly after her daughter's sentencing. A friend of Elisabeth's named Anita Weinberg appealed to Pompolit, the one human rights organization existing in the Soviet Union. (Pompolit was a Russian acronym standing for Political Help for Prisoners and was often called the "Political Red Cross"). Anita was most likely a fellow member of St. Peter and Paul in Moscow and apparently also worked for Pompolit, therefore she knew the director, Yekaterina Peshkova. Peshkova was the ex-wife of the famous Stalinist apologist and author, Maxim Gorky. Peshkova was renowned for managing to get so-called "politicals" out of prison, earning the gratitude of the prisoners' families and apparently some grudging respect from the NKVD.

Addressing Peshkova, Weinberg begged her to find some way to get Elisabeth released so that she could assist her aged mother in her latter years. In the previous two years after she was arrested, this talented academician had been doing heavy labor in the forests, then as an accountant and finally, was reduced to sewing mittens for the slave laborers. "For what and to whom is it necessary that these two people should suffer?" Weinberg cried. Giving her phone

²³⁴ P-12690, List 5-7, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

number and work hours, Weinberg begged Peshkova to call her.²³⁵ But even if Peshkova had moved heaven and earth in her attempts to help free Elisabeth Meyer, sympathy from the government was in very short supply in 1937. Peshkova's Pompolit would be closed in 1938, so its influence would soon be reduced to nil. Through the preservation of history undertaken by the Russian human rights organization Memorial, we now know that on August 1, 1937 Dr. Meyer was re-arrested inside the camps like Kurt Muss and Helmut Hansen. On September 2nd, a troika of the Karelian Soviet Republic declared her guilty of treason, applying Article 58 probably due to her German ethnicity, Lutheran faith and work as a professor of German on the dictionary that had landed her in the Gulag in the first place. She was executed on September 20, the same day Kurt Muss was sentenced to death. Many years later, she would be rehabilitated in 1989 when Mikhail Gorbachev's program of *glasnost* (openness) shed light on the terror created by Stalin.²³⁶

Last Christmas in Leningrad: Erasing Three Centuries of Lutheran Presence

The web now tightened around Leningrad's last Lutheran pastors. The Reicherts' could not have been oblivious to the arrests of pastors taking place all around them. In fact, Bruno Reichert's sudden resignation from the pastoral ministry on October 18 gives us a hint that the family knew something was afoot. Perhaps Elza Golubovskaya had discussed the questions

²³⁵ Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR], [last modified December 13, 2016](#).

²³⁶ Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR] last modified December 13, 2016. Anne Applebaum's Gulag has an interesting note related to executions in Karelia, and quite possibly, Muss' and Meyer's labor camp: "On September 20, 1937, a fairly typical day, the troika of the Karelian Republic sentenced 231 prisoners of the White Sea Canal camp, Belbaltlag. Assuming a ten-hour workday, with no breaks, less than three minutes would have been spent considering the fate of each prisoner. Most of those condemned had received their original sentences much earlier, at the beginning of the 1930s. Now, they were accused of new crimes, usually connected to bad behavior or a poor attitude to life in the camps. Among them were former politicals—Mensheviks, Anarchists, Social Democrats—and a former nun who "refused to work for the Soviet authorities." Applebaum's research paints a very clear picture of how Muss and Meyer were simply put on the conveyor belt of Soviet justice, their sentences rubber-stamped in a transparent attempt to do away with the "former people." See Applebaum, *Gulag*, 107.

posed about them in her husband Konstantin Andrievsky's interrogations, and the threats that he had received while in NKVD custody? Or perhaps Andrievsky's friend and St. Peter's parishioner, Alfred Zietnick, had alerted his pastor? It's also possible that since Elza was in contact with him, the Reicherts' might have learned that Andrievsky was sentenced on July 7 to eight years in a labor camp, his appeals to poor health being rejected after a month of tests at the Haas Hospital in Leningrad.²³⁷

Whatever the case, Bruno's resignation from the ministry, which was accepted by the Inspector of Cults for the Kuibyshev region of Leningrad on October 29, meant that only his father remained at St. Peter's. Perhaps Paul Reichert hoped that Bruno's resignation would save his son, for now he stood alone—the last Lutheran pastor remaining in Leningrad.²³⁸ But both father and son would not remain free for long. Grabbing the keys from the doorkeeper, Ivan Ilyin, NKVD agents trundled up the stairs of house number 16, Sophia Perovskoi Street, on the night of November 16/17.²³⁹ The 29 year-old Bruno had served with his father at St. Peter's since 1932 and still lived in the family apartment located on Leningrad's busiest thoroughfare. Twin daughters aged 25 (Gertrude and Irmgard) as well as a 23 year-old son (Wolfren) were also registered at the apartment with Paul Reichert and his 60 year-old wife, Ida.²⁴⁰ The NKVD documents charged the Reicherts' with being members of a Fascist spy ring carrying out activities for

²³⁷ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 8, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg; P-34994, List 80–92, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Andrievsky was accused of slandering Soviet power, conducting anti-collective farm agitation, praising the life of workers in Czarist Russia and carrying out counterrevolutionary conversations about the new constitution. His ultimate fate is uncertain, but he was finally rehabilitated by the Russian state only in 2001!

²³⁸ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 11, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²³⁹ P-32706, Volume 1, List 3, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁴⁰ P-32706, Volume 1, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

a foreign government. As such, they were charged under the notorious Statute 58.²⁴¹

In their search of the five room apartment that evening, the NKVD sealed off two rooms and left the key with the doorkeeper.²⁴² Immediately, the interrogations began that night at the NKVD's notorious *Bolshoi Dom*, Bruno being quizzed for the names of his closest acquaintances. It continued a few days later, as his questioner took him back in time, asking when he turned onto the path of fighting Soviet power. Bruno supposedly answered that it all began at his "reactionary German school", the Peterschule, and continued under Bishop Malmgren's direction at the seminary. Of course, the Peterschule had been recognized as "anti-Soviet" back in 1928, having been reorganized under communist leadership when the Lutheran teachers and administrators were removed. His "counterrevolutionary convictions" were said to have been strengthened in conversations with the *dvatsatka* at St. Peter's and interaction with a German embassy employee by the name of Wilhelm Buchholz. Buchholz was a member of the *dvatsatka* with whom Bruno had become acquainted in 1934. Their meetings allegedly took place primarily at the church until Buchholz's departure from Leningrad in the spring of 1937. Of course, by now it didn't matter since Bishop Malmgren was safely ensconced in Germany, but Bruno's testimony claimed that Buchholz and another embassy employee, Albert Aurich, were often at Malmgren's apartment where conversations of a "counterrevolutionary nature" occurred.²⁴³

Once again a historian can never be certain of the complete accuracy of NKVD transcripts, especially in the latter 1930s. What is truth and what is fabrication? While most of the material is clearly fabricated, it is certainly not impossible that the conversations Bruno is

²⁴¹ P-32706, Volume 1, List 7, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁴² P-32706, Volume 1, List 9, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁴³ P-32706, Volume 1, List 115–117, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

alleged to have described could very well have taken place at Bishop Malmgren's apartment. The bishop and his German embassy guests would only have had to discuss the dangers threatening the Church and the NKVD could easily have interpreted that as "anti-Soviet." The idea supposedly proposed by Buchholz was for Bruno to indoctrinate the youth groups in a more Fascist orientation. While Buchholz couldn't participate in the subterfuge as a German citizen, in 1935 he allegedly asked Bruno to recommend possible spies for Germany. Bruno, under duress from Malmgren and Buchholz, was said to have agreed.²⁴⁴ Included in the list of youth he connected to the German consulate were two German teachers, Erik and Lilya Martinson. Lilya happened to be the sister of Bruno Toryassan. In the summer of 1936, Bruno Reichert was then to have turned them over to Buchholz for work as spies.²⁴⁵

The NKVD's accusations of spying for Germany were often leveled against high-ranking communists during the Terror, but as we can see, they were also lodged against ordinary citizens of German ethnicity. The ground for such concerns had been laid back on December 3, 1936, when Yezhov ominously warned, "Each year we draw nearer and nearer to a war. Foreign intelligence services get more active, develop a feverish activity on our territory."²⁴⁶ An April 2, 1937 directive ordered surveillance of German embassy personnel and anyone connected with them.²⁴⁷ By autumn of that year, the NKVD went a step further. Soviet citizens of German nationality were now subject to arrest as well as German citizens living in the Soviet Union. In this so-called "German operation," 42,000 ethnic Germans would ultimately be given the death pen-

²⁴⁴ P-32706, Volume 1, List 118, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁴⁵ P-32706, Volume 1, List 119–120, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁴⁶ Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 73.

²⁴⁷ Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 73.

alty, 2/3 of them being Soviet citizens.²⁴⁸

Such fevered statements like Yezhov's did not bode well for the Reicherts'. Just as with Kurt Muss and Helmut Hansen eight years ago, the NKVD now cast a wide net of suspicion upon the Reicherts' close acquaintances. It really didn't matter that the elderly Russian-German pharmacist, Alfred Zietnick, didn't speak any German. On November 22, he, too, was arrested as part of the alleged Nazi German spy ring.²⁴⁹ Zietnick's interrogations began on November 25. He was accused of having joined Kurt Muss' counterrevolutionary German nationalist group in 1929, the NKVD claiming that the German government had been using Muss at that time. Of course, this revisionist history does not quite fit the year 1929 accurately because the German and Soviet governments had a more or less cordial and working relationship at the time. However, the language used does fit the year 1937, when it was clear that Hitler's National Socialists were considered the communist state's bitterest enemy. Therefore the confession attributed to the 70 year-old man whom Konstantin Andrievsky described as a "strong believer" simply does not ring true.²⁵⁰

In fact, Zietnick had been one of the foundational members of Jesus Christ Lutheran, all the way back to 1923. It was he who noted that many of the historic Lutheran ethnic groups no longer knew the languages of their heritage, and thus it was essential to form a Russian-speaking Lutheran congregation. It was also Zietnick who recommended and convinced members that the congregation be named Jesus Christ Lutheran rather than St. Paul's. He furthermore urged the

²⁴⁸ Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 94–95. Between October 1936 and February 1937 alone, Yezhov oversaw the arrests of 2116 individuals who were accused of working in "anti-Soviet blocks or for hostile governments." See Shearer, *Stalin's Socialism*, 320.

²⁴⁹ P-32706, Volume 1, List 38, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁵⁰ P-32706, Volume 1, List 147–150, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

parishioners to emulate the early Christian Church and provide aid to the poorer members of the congregation. This was no cultural Christian and accusations that he was a secret German Fascist sympathizer are completely ludicrous.²⁵¹

Back in 1929, Zietnick had avoided arrest due to his age. The irony that he was now eight years older seems not to have made any impression upon his current jailers. Nevertheless after Zietnick dodged a prison sentence in 1929, the NKVD claimed that he continued his counterrevolutionary activities at St. Michael's Lutheran until 1935 when it was closed. He then transferred his membership over to the Reicherts' St. Peter's, where the pastor supposedly informed Zietnick of his continuation of the espionage activities that had begun under Helmut Hansen. With the complicity of parishioners Woldemar Schmidt and Sergey Berner (who had also been arrested with Zietnick), German consulate personnel Messrs. Sommer, Aurich and Buchholz were said to have been cultivating the parishioners in a Fascist spirit of animosity towards Soviet power. Their propaganda resulted in the Russian parishioners gathering secrets of an economic-military nature that were then passed on to the Reicherts', who would in turn forward them on to the German consulate personnel.²⁵² It all fit together quite nicely, or so the NKVD wanted the Soviet people to believe.

Zietnick was pressed for more names during his interrogations, but told them he could give no more because he wasn't privy to all of the details. After being accused of lying, Zietnick was recorded as telling the NKVD agent, "I confirm that I have spoken the truth of my criminal activities directed against Soviet power."²⁵³ Reading his file, the biblical passage from Matt. 5:11 comes to mind: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of

²⁵¹ Fond 1001, Delo 52, List 10, 104, Central Government Archives of St.Petersburg.

²⁵² P-32706, Volume 1, List 147-150, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁵³ P-32706, Volume 1, List 150, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

evil against you falsely on my account.” Alfred Zietnick did not run from danger in 1929 or 1935. A weaker Christian might have slipped out the back door of the church and blend-ed into the crowds, but the faithful Zietnick continued his active engagement in the church de-spite the danger. When one Lutheran congregation was closed, he simply moved over to another worshipping community.

Pastor Paul Reichert’s interrogations now began on November 20, three days after his arrest. The NKVD agents traced Reichert’s connections with the German consulate back to their origins and began quizzing him about his visits there. Why was he going there and with whom was he conversing? Reichert made it very clear that he went to the consulate strictly to carry out a religious function, possibly conducting a service of some kind but more likely discussing church matters. The NKVD was also suspicious that several employees (Aurich, Buchholz) and General Consul Sommer not only met Reichert at the consulate but also attended St. Peter’s on occasion. What’s more, Aurich and Buchholz were even added to the *dvatsatka* at St. Peter’s, ostensibly at Sommer’s request, so that the consulate might be able to provide material aid and remain aware of the church’s needs.²⁵⁴

Reichert’s ties to Sommer were conveniently traced back to 1933, no doubt providing ammunition for the NKVD since that was the year in which Hitler came to power in Germany. Initially, Reichert said that Sommer had cautiously approached him. But by 1934 he was already becoming bolder, urging him to unite the Russian-Germans in the Lutheran Church and lead them in a more Fascist direction. The idea was that German Lutherans in the USSR, being persecuted for their faith [yes, the NKVD spoke about their “persecution!”], would be ripe for developing a cadre of agents who would help Nazi Germany in a future war with the USSR.

²⁵⁴ P-37251, Volume 1, List 125–126, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Reichert was said to have acknowledged his guilt, accepting Sommer's recommendations to form a Fascist spy ring within St. Peter's under Aurich and a German consulate employee named Lippert.²⁵⁵ Several parishioners from St. Peter's were said to have joined the Reicherts'. They were... Woldemar Schmidt, Alfred Zietnick, Sergey Berner, Erwin Deters, Josef Beech, Erwin and Lilya Martenson, Ernst Essifer, Konstantin Kem, Fyodor Stroh, Christian Ulrich, Heinrich Ulrich, Yakov Kern and Georgy Dauwalter. One of the most baffling participants said to have joined this conspiracy was the director of the German Lutheran cemetery, an ethnic Armenian named Tigran Kegomyants. Showing that their imagination knew no limits, the NKVD decided that the elderly 73 year-old caretaker of the German Lutheran cemetery was a reasonable recruit by Paul Reichert to promulgate Fascist propaganda among visitors to the cemetery!²⁵⁶

In keeping with the strict reporting of their activities required of congregations, the *dvatsatka* at St. Peter's now informed the Inspector of Religious Cults that in the absence of a pastor, they could not hold divine worship services on November 21st.²⁵⁷ It's not certain what information had been conveyed to the parishioners. Surely some word of the terrible events of the night of November 17 must have come down from Mrs. Reichert and her children? Whatever the case, on December 17th at the council meeting of the Presidium of the Kuibyshev region, a request was received from the St. Peter's *dvatsatka* to close the church and hand it over to the government.²⁵⁸ One week later on Christmas Eve, this request was made official in a written

²⁵⁵ P-37251, Volume 1, List 126–127, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁵⁶ P-37251, Volume 1, List 127, 204–206, 220–227, and Volume 2, List 122–123, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Erwin Deters and Ernst Essifer were classmates of Bruno Reichert's at the Peterschule, so that association allowed the NKVD to link them to Bruno and claim that he recruited them for the fabricated German spy ring. As a current graduate student at the Leningrad Industrial Institute and with his past practical work as a student at the Lenenergo plant, Deters was said to have gathered information for Bruno which he then passed along to the German consulate. See P-32706, List 129–134, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁵⁷ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 12, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²⁵⁸ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 16–17, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

letter signed by all the members of the *dvatsatka*.

The *dvatsatka* at St. Peter's was by now basically comprised of the elderly, including housewives and general laborers. Perhaps, as with St. Peter and Paul in Moscow, this was an attempt to protect younger parishioners? It's not certain, but the names of the members for the most part indicate those of an advanced age and German ethnicity: Emilia Must [60 years old], Elsa Weinberg [55], Anna Schultz [65], Conrad Ulrich [60], Evgeniya Martens [72 year old retired German teacher]. The treasurer was the 71 year-old August Kort. One can hardly imagine the pain it took for these elderly believers to admit that the congregation could no longer continue operating due to lack of funds or pastors.²⁵⁹ The state had expropriated so much of its wealth through confiscatory tax policies and in the past year had demanded exorbitantly expensive repairs to the church façade and roof. The bill from August 22 totaled about 7500 rubles, even though the financial records of the church at the beginning of July registered only 3542 rubles in the treasury! On October 24, only 1942 rubles remained. And now, the NKVD had taken away its pastors. The situation of St. Peter's is a perfect illustration of how the state, by applying inordinate financial pressure and terror tactics against the congregation, left the *dvatsatka* with little choice but to submit to its will.²⁶⁰

Apparently unaware of the letter that had been signed by the *dvatsatka* earlier that day, though, parishioners arrived at the church that evening to celebrate Christmas Eve. There was no note or anything to indicate that the church had been closed. The doors were simply locked. The Soviet authorities must have taken particular glee in this circumstance. Some parishioners gave up and went home, but others filtered over to Zagorodnoi Prospect and the Latvian Lutheran

²⁵⁹ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 14, 16–17, 26, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²⁶⁰ Fond 7384, Delo 159, List 41, 44–45, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

Church that had not yet been closed.²⁶¹ Its pastors, Alexander and Jan Migla, had already been executed on December 15 along with the chairman of the *dvatsatka*, Jakov Smigla, as well as eight other parishioners. The pastors and parishioners were said to have been part of a counterrevolutionary Latvian nationalist group, an accusation that had been leveled against approximately 200 Leningrad Latvians in 1937, the vast majority members of the Lutheran church on Zagorodnoi Prospect. On December 17 a Vladimir Stangul was even arrested just because the NKVD claimed he had been a member of a “Latvian insurgent organization” created in 1929 under Pastor Julius Zahlit, who had already been sentenced in 1935 and was serving a Gulag prison camp term!²⁶²

Despite the devastation wrought against the Latvian Lutherans, there was a surprisingly

²⁶¹ Mikhail Mudyugin, “A Remembrance of Life,” 20.

²⁶² Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 119–20. The Migla brothers lived with their 72 year-old mother, Maria, in Apartment 27 at Kanal Gribodeyeva in the center of the city, equidistant from St. Peter’s on October 25th Street and the Latvian Lutheran church, Christ the Savior, on Zagorodnoi Prospect. The brothers were arrested on October 27th and on November 22nd, the name of the *dvatsatka* chairman of Christ the Savior Lutheran, Jakov Smigla, was included in the indictment against the Migla’s, along with parishioners Eduard Vineger, Minna Ravushka, Otilia Lutova, Aleksey Mikstais, Anna Smirnova, German Ozolin and Petr and Hermina Jakovlev. Alexander Migla’s correspondence with foreigners was noted, including letters to an Edith Spier in America [whose parents lived in Pskov, Russia, where he had once served]. It was also observed that he had received food parcels in the past through Bishop Malmgren, most likely that aid which John Morehead had secured for the pastors. We also learn that the late Pastor Mikhail Lapping’s daughter, Marta, now 30 years old, was still alive and free, singing in the choir of the Kirov Theater. Alexander Migla’s visits to the Latvian, German and American consulates in Leningrad and Moscow were recorded, even though he said his visits were related to church matters. These connections were easily used by the NKVD when they wrote down Alexander’s “confession” on November 9, claiming that Bishop Malmgren and the late Pastor Lapping had recruited him to create this group opposed to Soviet power. Alexander is then supposed to have stated: “I beg you to accept my wholehearted recognition and complete revealing of all of these organizations of parishioners and give me the opportunity to serve honestly and earn the future trust of Soviet power.” That this was pried out of him either without his knowledge or by force seems obvious, because the following day the NKVD agent shrieks, “Stop your useless denials of counterrevolutionary activity!!” Twice, though, Migla refused to accept responsibility for counterrevolutionary activity. Only after the agent reveals that Migla has been unmasked by the others, does he “recollect” those involved with him in these anti-Soviet actions. On the 7th of December a typed copy of the charges against the Latvian Lutherans was prepared, and Alexander Migla was accused with his brother and fellow parishioners of creating a counterrevolutionary group dedicated to carrying out spying activities and terrorist propaganda among the Latvian community in Leningrad. On December 8, Nikolai Yezhov and the Procurator of the Soviet Union, Andrey Vishinsky, accepted the evidence that the group was spying and acting on behalf of Latvia and order all of the indicted Latvian Lutherans to be shot. The sentence was carried out on December 15, virtually ending the existence of Christ the Savior Lutheran in Leningrad. See P-30561, List 4, 79, 81–82, 87–96, 203–10, 272–73.

large crowd of people gathered that Christmas Eve, some traveling from the very fringes of the city limits and comprised of many ethnic groups. The attendance was astonishing because it has to be remembered that Christmas Eve, like Christmas Day, was a normal working day in Soviet Russia in 1937. Inside the church that night there was no pastor conducting a service since the Migla brothers had already been executed. There was no organist, either, and thus no worship service. To gather under these conditions was a strong testament to the faith of these remarkable believers, because they would not allow the Soviet government to keep them from celebrating the Lord's birth. It's not certain how it all began, but soon each group started to sing Christmas hymns in its own particular language. Most likely, Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, German and Russian voices were among those heard that evening. Kurt Muss' young protégé, Mikhail Mudyugin, was a witness to the proceedings, and although he described the singing as disorderly compared to historic Christmas services, he believed that the hard-pressed believers' plaintive cries had never sounded sweeter in the Lord's ears. In the grip of persecution and at the height of Stalin's Great Terror, the Church proved that it was alive even while it was dying. It would be the last Christmas celebrated in Leningrad until the end of the 20th century.²⁶³

As the New Year dawned, on January 2nd the troika reached its decision on the individuals involved in the Reichert Case. All 13 individuals were sentenced to be shot, except for the Martinson couple (Ervin and Lilya) and Konstantin Kem.²⁶⁴ It is possible that the accused were shot in the basement of the *Bolshoi Dom*, the holding prison for the NKVD in the city, or they may have been shot in the fields of Levashovo.²⁶⁵ If they were shot in the *Bolshoi Dom* on

²⁶³ Mikhail Mudyugin, "A Remembrance of Life," 20.

²⁶⁴ P-32706, Volume 2, List 122–123, 144–146, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Ernst Essifer is not listed among those who were executed, but there is also no mention of him being released.

²⁶⁵ Alexey Uimanen to Matthew Heise, November 2013.

Liteiny Prospect in the center of Leningrad, they would then have been transported to Levashovo on the outskirts of Leningrad where mass graves would have been dug and the bodies unceremoniously deposited, awaiting the resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. There is some more recent debate as to just where the bodies of those executed were deposited. Soviet officials had long denied that Levashovo was used as a burial ground for victims of The Great Terror. But when interest in Stalin's repressions was at its height during Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* period [late 1980s], the government capitulated and the memorial complex at Levashovo cemetery was dedicated. Investigative journalist David Satter claims, though, that the human rights organization Memorial has recently discovered an even larger burial ground at Koirangakangas [near Toksovo, about 20 kilometers north of St. Petersburg]. Since Toksovo was a major center for Ingrian Lutherans, it is certainly possible that parishioners and pastors may be buried there as well.²⁶⁶

In this tragic affair of the destruction of the Lutheran Church in Leningrad, it is essential to emphasize that of the complete innocence of the Reicherts' and the St. Peter's dvatsatka members arrested with them, there is absolutely no doubt. In 1939, the NKVD officer, I.M. Lobov, who had interrogated Paul Reichert was himself arrested and accused of "corrupting Soviet legality." He explained during his own interrogation how the NKVD operated during the Great Terror in Leningrad: "In the first section of the Third Department of the Leningrad Regional NKVD, the case against the members of the church dvatsatka of the German Lutherans churches in Leningrad was falsified. The falsification ... occurred in that the protocols of the arrested were not taken from their own words but were created by the officers themselves and then they had

²⁶⁶ David Satter, *It was a Long Time Ago and It Never Really Happened Anyway: Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), Kindle, 91–94.

the accused sign the protocols.” The Reicherts’ and the eleven other dvatstaka members would be fully rehabilitated by the state in 1957.²⁶⁷

1938–The Church Destroyed: The Antichrist Reigns Victorious for “A Little Season”

With almost all of the churches being shut down, the presence of native Lutheran pastors conducting worship services were a thing of the past. The last Soviet citizen and ordained pastor remaining free in the Soviet Union, Ferdinand Bodungen, had been arrested on November 27. All the NKVD could accuse him of was receiving some money and a parcel from Germany and Latvia. Out of this evidence, they concocted the threat of espionage. The last and longest serving pastor, Bodungen had faithfully shepherded the congregation of St. Peter and Paul in the Lenin-grad suburb of Peterhof since 1901. But none of that mattered to the NKVD. Working quickly, they convicted him on January 10th and executed him five days later. Like his fellow Lutheran pastors, the Reichert’s, his body was then disposed of in the fields of Levashovo.²⁶⁸

Other Lutheran pastors may have still been alive but were imprisoned, so basically the few congregations struggling on at the beginning of 1938 were being kept alive solely by the efforts of their parishioners. Those laymen who attempted to step up and serve congregations, like the peasant laborer, Abraham Koskelainen, now attracted the attention of the ever-vigilant NKVD. When the persecution had begun to escalate, the Finnish Consistory was already anticipating congregations’ future needs. In 1937 it appointed Koskelainen to fulfill the duties of a pastor, first in Koltushi (January 26, 1937), then afterwards in other Ingrian village churches like Hietämäki and Jarvirsarii (May 25), and finally in Duderhof (August 31). The Soviet government, however, would not recognize Koskelainen as a pastor nor register him, leaving him

²⁶⁷ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 57.

²⁶⁸ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 57.

in limbo. Given Stalin's call to "annihilate the clergy," they developed plans to arrest him. Due to a serious illness, however, he was allowed to remain under house arrest. He would not survive 1938, dying of natural causes.²⁶⁹

Taking pride in Soviet patriotism, journalist Boris Kandidov celebrated the work of the NKVD in a February 5 article in the newspaper *Izvestia*. "During the last year, the valiant agents of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs detected and annihilated a number of gangs of wreckers, diversionists, terrorists and spies which had been organized by the agents of foreign intelligence services with the assistance of the Orthodox, the Catholic, the Lutheran and the Mohamedan [sic.] clergy, and of sectarian missionaries."²⁷⁰ Elaborating on how these religious people had established a fifth column within the country in league with Nazi Germany and Japan, Kandidov sounded the alarm on the danger posed by these theists: "Every honest Soviet citizen must help the Soviet intelligence service reveal and destroy the spies and diversionists in clerical garments. Often the religion mask serves to disguise spies of the enemy. This is completely proved by the undermining activities of the clericals."²⁷¹

Although Kandidov railed against the clergy, he and his atheist allies were not unaware that believers were striving to keep their congregations operating despite the danger. We know that the Soviet government was stunned by the evidence of its failed census in early 1937, silently recording the public affirmation of a large number of believers who had not turned to atheism after years of state-sponsored propaganda. After all, Christian believers were not supposed to exist in the Soviet Union anymore! How many believers were still actively pursuing their faith? From personal recollections and secret police files, we can piece together some kind of picture

²⁶⁹ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 82, 311.

²⁷⁰ E.L. Packer to Cordell Hull, March 5, 1938, RG 59, 861.404/418, National Archives II.

²⁷¹ E.L. Packer to Cordell Hull, March 5, 1938, RG 59, 861.404/418, National Archives II.

concerning the difficult decisions that Lutheran believers had to make while their Church was being buried by the state.

In seeking an answer to the question of how the government might publicly respond to a present or past expression of Christian faith, it is helpful to learn what had happened to those Lutheran parishioners who had been arrested in the Hansen-Muss Case in 1929. We know that almost all were released after two years of hard labor, many of them slaving on the construction of the White Sea Canal. Others had been sent to more distant labor camps. A good example of the trials and tribulations of those parishioners can be seen in the life of Tamara Kossetti. Tamara had been sent to a camp in Irkutsk after the guilty verdicts of the Hansen-Muss Case were delivered in 1930. In spite of her tragic situation, Tamara's life had taken a romantic turn. Her former Peterschule classmate in Leningrad, Reinhold Mai, undertook the arduous journey to Siberia and proposed marriage. Tamara accepted and after her release would give birth to three children as they moved from place to place due to her criminal record. (Her sister, Benita, would marry Reinhold's brother, Arnold. They had all become acquainted as students at Leningrad's Peterschule).²⁷²

The Mai's nomad type existence began in 1933 as they returned to Leningrad only to be denied residency. Not one to be dissuaded by circumstances, as evidenced by his long-distance courting of Tamara, Reinhold sought and found work as an agronomist in the city. They then moved to one of the islands on the outskirts of the city. The following year, they moved again, this time to Koltushi (about 10 kilometers northeast of Leningrad) when Reinhold was hired by the commune's machine-tractor station. Tamara was able to find work as an accountant at the commune while raising her children. Since Koltushi harbored one of the strongest congregations

²⁷² Marina Mikhalova, "Family Photograph."

in the Lutheran Church, it is interesting to speculate upon whether the Mai's participated in congregational life. While there would be difficulties in practicing one's faith in the city, parishioners in countryside parishes like Koltushi still faithfully attended church and confirmation classes were quite large. (Maria Saakonen showed the author a photo of her 1935 confirmation class in Koltushi consisting of 34 girls!). But with Finnish as the operative language rather than the Mai's German, coupled with any suspicion that would be placed upon Tamara for attending Lutheran services, it's also possible that they kept a low profile.

At the beginning of 1936, the Mai's left Koltushi and once again returned to the environs of Leningrad. Tamara went back to school and quickly found employment as a kindergarten teacher in September 1937, working in the Moskovsky region of Leningrad at the school "Proletarian Victory." But life was hard. Her husband switched jobs, finding work in the suburban city of Pavlovsk where he and their three children took up residence.²⁷³ Tamara seems to have stayed at her parents' apartment on Rubinstein Street in Leningrad during the week since they couldn't find a place for the family in Leningrad, again probably due to her police record. Her granddaughter says that she would visit with her children and husband whenever possible, probably on weekends as a daily trek would be exhausting. Or perhaps they met in Leningrad, since St. Peter's organist, Wolf Liss, described Reinhold as a longtime member of St. Peter's? It is again quite possible that he resumed attending the church until its closure. After all, his cousin, Marta, was an organist on staff at the church.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph." Pavlovsk was the hometown of the Mai family, so they most likely found housing rather easily since Reinhold's mother, Maria, still lived there in the family home. His parents had operated a pharmacy, but his father, Arnold, had disappeared during the Civil War and was presumed dead. Maria raised the boys by herself.

²⁷⁴ Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph;" P-87431, List 60-63, 66, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Wolf Liss' NKVD interrogation file lists Marta as a sister of Reinhold's, but Tamara Kossetti Mai's granddaughter says she was a cousin. Sometimes Russians refer to cousins as brothers and sisters, so she was more than likely a cousin.

One day at school in early 1938, however, Tamara's efforts to avoid her past turned into tragedy. The children were building a replica of the Kremlin with blocks and someone naturally attached a portrait of Stalin to its walls. The children then commenced to parade around the blocks, but one child inadvertently knocked the portrait of Stalin to the floor. Tamara quickly restored it to its proper place, but these were not ordinary times. Suspicion and fear ruled the day. Someone reported the incident and made an accusation against the former Gulag camp prisoner. As a result, in the late evening/early morning of February 2/3, Tamara once again found herself face to face with the dreaded NKVD. She was under arrest.²⁷⁵

Perhaps it was not completely unexpected. Tamara's family had already received a shock when her stepfather, Paul Neiman, captain of an icebreaker in the Leningrad ports and a faithful member of St. Peter's, was arrested on the night of December 9, 1937. The Neimans lived in apartment 131 in the Tolstoy house on the Fontanka embankment, a ten-minute walk from the church. As the NKVD rudely escorted him out of his own apartment, Neiman looked back at his wife, Emilia, and cried out, "Mila, I'm not guilty of anything!"²⁷⁶ The following morning, Emilia went looking for him at the DPZ on Shpalernaya Street, the former Czarist prison.²⁷⁷

A native of Leningrad who spent seventeen months waiting for information about her son, poet Anna Akhmatova would vividly describe the long lines that Emilia was subjected to that morning in her classic poem entitled "Requiem." Describing a woman waiting in line for some word on her loved one, lips blue from the cold that pierced every bone of her body, Akhmatova recalled her question: "Can you describe this?" Akhmatova's immediate response was, "Yes, I

²⁷⁵ P-25625, List 14, 164, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph."

²⁷⁶ Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph."

²⁷⁷ Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph." Leningraders often employed black humor when referring to the DPZ, labeling it as "Domoï Poiti Zabud"—"Forget about Going Home."

can.” Then she described the woman this way: “And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.”²⁷⁸ Now Emilia, too, stood for hours in the long, gloomy line. When she reached the window, a voice asked, “Who are you?” After she identified herself, the voice said, “Wait!” When the window reopened, she was given an order to leave Leningrad in 24 hours and report to Birsk (in the republic of Bashkortostan, central Russia), her new settlement in exile. Benita Kossetti and her mother had to think quickly and take stock of the family predicament. After all, the Reicherts’ were under arrest along with many other members of St. Peter’s at that time. They opted to take Tamara’s three children (Reinhold, Valentin and Renata) and Benita’s son, Pavel, with them to Birsk. Arnold Mai, Benita’s husband, planned to join them later. Tamara was subsequently arrested on the night of February 2nd–3rd while her stepfather, Paul Neiman, was executed the following day, the 4th.²⁷⁹

Russians of German descent or perceived German links like Tamara’s family would constitute the first wave of arrests in a series that would focus upon Leningrad’s Lutherans, especially those who had long-standing ties to St. Peter’s or the Peterschule. Such arrests were no longer limited to suspected enemies within the Communist Party. They were also impacting ordinary citizens as Yezhov’s thirst to provide even more victims for Stalin grew. The NKVD’s prepared documents from January 31st show that they were planning to accuse Tamara of belonging to a “German Fascist youth counterrevolutionary organization” carrying out espionage.²⁸⁰ That so-called counterrevolutionary organization was apparently the very *Jugendbund* to which many of Helmut Hansen’s confirmands had belonged back in the 1920s.

²⁷⁸ David Remnick, *Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), Kindle, 117.

²⁷⁹ Marina Mikhailova, “Family Photograph.”

²⁸⁰ P-25625, List 15, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

The arrests at Christmas in 1929 had broken the back of Hansen's youth group, but the NKVD either refused to believe it had ceased activities or, more likely, simply decided to utilize this Germanic-sounding organization to increase the number of arrests in order to please Yezhov and Stalin.²⁸¹

Tamara's interrogation began on February 7 with the NKVD agents attempting to link the kindergarten teacher to a Nazi German consulate-inspired, anti-Soviet conspiracy involving a host of past acquaintances at the Peterschule. One of those prominently mentioned in her case was none other than Margo Jurgens, the young woman who had been in the *Jugendbund* with Tamara and who along with Tamara's sister, Benita, had tried to raise money to support Pastor Hansen's family after his arrest in 1929. Tamara's interrogation records her identifying her sister Benita and Jurgens as part of this revived *Jugendbund* conspiracy, headed up by Wilhelm Derringer (a musician and organist) and Franz Müller (a former classmate of Tamara's at the Peterschule). In a chance meeting with Jurgens at a health club on January 20, Jurgens is said to have told her she was helping to regather the *Jugendbund's* former members and collecting funds for its directors. The plot recorded in NKVD files was an attempt to fight Soviet power through this Germanic organization, but the language attributed to Tamara is awkward at best, making it rather evident that these were not her own words.²⁸²

For example, after some initial questions, Tamara is recorded as saying, "I'm tired of hiding the truth from the inquiry, so I will be open with you. I beg you to accept my testimony."²⁸³ Besides this stilted language, what's more, the facts attributed to her are wrong. Tamara allegedly states that Jurgens is a former Peterschule student along with Derringer and

²⁸¹ P-25625, List 164, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸² P-25625, List 174, 180, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸³ P-25625, List 181, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Müller, but Jurgens went to a Soviet school and Tamara would obviously have known that. In addition, in her testimony she mentions that Erna Hansen corresponded with her brothers in Germany. She knew Erna well enough to know that her brothers lived in Finland. But of course, this conspiracy had to have Germanic roots for the NKVD. They would only use Finnish contacts when attempting to tar Ingrian Lutherans with being traitors. The logical answer is that Tamara's alleged testimony was being prepared to fit this German spy plot spun by the NKVD.²⁸⁴

Despite what appear to be obvious fabrications, the historian can glean some truths from the NKVD's record of Tamara's testimony. Tamara took pains to mention in her interrogations that her husband, Reinhold, had no knowledge of any conversations with Jurgens about the Jugendbund.²⁸⁵ Before her second interrogation began on April 4th, the ever-courageous Reinhold came to the prison (March 7) to see if he could help her, but in the process was himself arrested.²⁸⁶ In fact unbeknownst to him, Reinhold was going to be linked to yet another fabricated German Fascist plot, this one led by the former Lutheran pastor, Woldemar Wagner. Wagner had been sentenced back in 1935 to a five year Gulag term in the Novosibirsk region and had already been re-arrested and executed in September 1937.²⁸⁷ But since Wagner had served in Leningrad, he was said to have gathered 28 Leningrad Lutherans of German ethnicity to conduct counterrevolutionary activities during the time frame 1930–1935. Reinhold Mai was considered to have been one of those.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ P-25625, List 181–182, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸⁵ P-25625, List 183, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁸⁶ Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph."

²⁸⁷ "Open List:" Woldemar Bogdanovich Wagner.

²⁸⁸ P-32723, Volume 1, List 389, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

Another of the key figures in the conspiracy working in close association with Wagner was said to be the talented musician and former organist of Leningrad's St. Peter's, Wolf Liss. Liss had already been arrested on February 19 and now on February 28, these additional 28 parishioners were rounded up.²⁸⁹ Liss had been under investigation back in April 1935 in conjunction with the case tied to pastors Woldemar Wagner, Samuel Wohl and Alfred Prib, accused of receiving aid from the German humanitarian organization, Brüdershilfe.²⁹⁰ After three months Liss was exonerated, but since his passport was not returned to him, he was forced to move 101 kilometers outside Leningrad to Malaya Vishera (where Friedrich Wacker had been exiled years before and still remained). He must have eventually received permission to work in Leningrad again, because on January 7, 1937, Liss moved to Detskoe Selo and found work as an organ technician for the Muzkomedii Theater at 200 rubles a month in Leningrad, as well as at the State Conservatory for 365 rubles a month. Given his talents as an organist, virtually all churches in Leningrad, not just Lutheran, requested him to do repair work on their organs. Theaters and conservatories in Leningrad also took advantage of his skills.²⁹¹

With this latest arrest, Liss' German ties came to the forefront of the investigation and this time, those relationships would not be taken as lightly as in 1935. He was asked to list the musicians in Germany with whom he had contacts, and naturally the list was extensive. He only admitted to receiving catalogues advertising musical instruments from the companies Sauer, Ruger and Walcker. The fact that his mother had brothers and sisters in Latvia and Estonia was

²⁸⁹ P-32723, Volume 1, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁹⁰ P-87431, List 1, 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁹¹ P-87431, List 60–63, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Not only was Liss blessed with musical talent, he also served both the Czarist (1915–1917) and Red Army Air Force (1918–1920) as a radio technician. He apparently had served effectively because he was given a small silver medal by the Soviet government for his zeal. Unfortunately, none of this redounded to his benefit. See List 7, 12 of the same file.

also noted, though, and obviously not in his favor.²⁹² Since Wagner had already been executed, the NKVD focused upon the personality of Wolf Liss and made him responsible for the counterrevolutionary activity of the Russian-German Lutherans in Leningrad. Most of the accused were young to middle-aged parishioners of St. Peter's. Among those listed included—Ernst and Waldemar Zeidel (the uncles of the Mai brothers), Axel Unbegaum, Herbert Hesse, Walter Tiedemann, Georgy Eichfuss, Herman Bergholdt, Woldemar Kem, Heinrich Schlipper, Eduard Glokov, Wilhelm Shoch, Benjamin Yanchurov, Ferdinand Autzen, Elfrieda Ber as well as Reinhold Mai and his cousin, Marta, and eventually, Arnold Mai. The interrogations would last for close to four months.²⁹³

Nothing Sacred: Turning Churches into Soviet Space

As arrests were being made of influential parishioners now that pastors were mostly out of the way, the Soviet government also turned its sights upon the spacious church buildings that had housed congregations for years. The buildings were being fought over by interested parties grappling for prime real estate, especially as the larger churches were located right in the center of Leningrad. But not only were St. Mary's and St. Peter's in a central location, they also contained valuable objects of art that were of inestimable interest to curators. Although the *dvatsatka* of St. Peter's had signed over the church to the authorities in December, apparently it still was required to handle matters pertaining to the building because on January 13 it gave its 71-year old treasurer, August Kort, the authority to take 1542 rubles from the church bank account to pay those workers who had been making repairs. Normally they would have requested funds from

²⁹² P-87431, List 60–82, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

²⁹³ P-87431, List 389, 407, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Энциклопедия Петришуле: Тамара Валентиновна Коссетти [Encyclopedia Petrischule: Tamara Valentinovna Kossetti], last modified October 21, 2017.

the chairman, Sergey Berner, but he was already under arrest, which was even acknowledged in their declaration.²⁹⁴ In fact, we now know that Berner had already been executed. Evidently the Leningrad Soviet greedily eyed the church where Helmut Hansen had held concerts in the past, because on January 24 it was decided by their Department for the Preservation of Monuments that St. Peter's would be turned into a concert hall known as *Lengosestrada* (Leningrad Government Hall). The department chairman for this institution, Comrade Borisov, noted in a letter to the Leningrad Soviet secretary, Comrade Ziminoy, that the building constructed in 1838 was in good condition and needed very little repair. But then again, the government had already confiscated money from St. Peter's parishioners for just that purpose.²⁹⁵

But not only were the buildings immediately confiscated, the objects within them were also coveted and removed. On February 20, the Administrative Inspector for the Regional Soviet of the Kuibyshev region of Leningrad, a Comrade Leibovich, acknowledged that August Kort and Emilia Must of the *dvatsatka* had turned over the entire church inventory, minus a keyboard and glass-plated book shelf that had been "lent" to Pastor Reichert. (Kort and Must couldn't turn over these goods since they were under the control of the local NKVD agents, who had already sealed the rooms of the Reichert apartment).²⁹⁶ The world famous Hermitage Museum and the Russian Museum received chalices, crosses, Bibles, and other churchware. Perhaps most desired by their curators, though, was the famed Karl Brullov painting of the crucifixion, which had hung above the altar for almost a century, as well as a Hans Holbein masterpiece of Jesus with Thomas and the other disciples and lastly, a copy of an Albrecht Dürer wood print.²⁹⁷ The Museum of the

²⁹⁴ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 30, 63, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²⁹⁵ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 28, 30, 32, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²⁹⁶ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 27, 38–41, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

²⁹⁷ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 46, 49, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg; Sebastian Brandt,

History of Atheism, housed in the former Kazan Cathedral (kitty corner from St.Peter's), gobbled up items, too, including Martin Luther's *Church Postils*.²⁹⁸ The famed organ produced by the Walcker firm in Germany and played by Wolf Liss, Marta Mai and a young Peter Tchaikovsky, who had even learned to play organ on this very instrument, was sent on to Moscow and ironically, to the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall.²⁹⁹

The sculpture of an angel holding a cross, though, was one item that was an eyesore to the Soviets and an image they wished would disappear. An obvious Christian symbol still gracing the roof of a former church in an officially atheist country was an embarrassment to the authorities, and its presence was unavoidable to the pedestrians who frequently strolled in the city center. While debate was raging over whether the building should be remodeled as a concert hall for the city, a photo from 1938 still shows the angel with the cross in plain sight with a sign on the church facade displaying a temporary exhibition entitled Panorama. The Soviet Union had just sent four explorers to the North Pole, so they were in the process of being lionized in society at large. Portraits of the four were hung on the exterior of the church, just to the right and left of the former church door.³⁰⁰ On September 17, the Chairman of the Leningrad Soviet (equivalent to a mayor), Alexey Kosygin, who would rise to fame as the Premier of the Soviet Union (1964-1980), called for the immediate reconstruction of St. Peter's. That meant the angel would have to be dealt with and quickly. On October 8, Kosygin reiterated his demand that the angel with the cross needed to be removed from St. Peter's and pronto. The Inspector for Religious Cults in

Editor, *Petrikirche—Tserkov Svyatogo Petra [Peterkirche—The Church of St. Peter's]* (St. Petersburg, Russia: Ofset Master, 1998), 3.

²⁹⁸ Sebastian Brandt, *Petrikirche—The Church of St. Peter's*, 16–17.

²⁹⁹ Sebastian Brandt, 43; “В Петрикирхе торжественно откроют новый орган” [In Petrikirche a Solemn Opening for a New Organ], IANews, Sept.25, 2017.

³⁰⁰ Северный полюс-1 [North Pole-1], wikipedia.ru; last modified October 28, 2017.

Leningrad, Comrade Gavrilov, set to work and finally reported to Kosygin on October 28 that the angel with the cross had been removed from the church. In addition, he informed Kosygin that a commission of Soviet artists (sculptors, architects, etc.) affirmed that the cross could even be effectively removed from the angel without distorting its artistic appearance since the cross “isn’t an artistic object” anyway.³⁰¹

Just around the corner from St. Peter’s at St. Mary’s, where Mikhail Mudyugin had first heard Kurt Muss preach a sermon that would dramatically change his life, interested parties were fighting over the building now that the *dvatsatka* had officially acknowledged on March 20 that it had no pastor to serve the congregation and could no longer pay its expenses.³⁰² (Pastor Pekka Braks had been executed at the end of 1937). A Mr. Abolimov put in one of the first requests on March 25, asking for the building to house his factory for the production of typewriters. He offered to give back two of his five properties scattered throughout the city so that his firm (Soyuzorgchyt) could reconstruct the considerably larger area of the church into a factory.³⁰³ In April, the requests for the building came fast and furious: A Comrade Smirnov of the Construction Department for Living Quarters of the Leningrad Soviet hoped to reconstruct it into separate apartments for workers; a company named START wanted to use it for a sports club; another entity named Rossnabfilm wanted to turn it into a film and music studio. Of course, most influential might have been the request by the Director of the State Hermitage Museum, an I. Obreli, who requested the building to serve as a warehouse for special items from the museum.³⁰⁴ In fact,

³⁰¹ Fond 7384, Delo 160, List 52–53, 63, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

³⁰² Fond 7384, Delo 162, List 30, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

³⁰³ Fond 7384, Delo 162, List 39, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

³⁰⁴ Fond 7384, Delo 162, List 40, 43–45, 52, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

it seemed that the Leningrad Soviet was leaning towards giving the building to the Hermitage, but at the last minute, on May 13 it decided to transfer the property to its Construction Department for Living Quarters. Socialist class consciousness in the person of the proletariat would win the ghoulish battle for the longtime church building.³⁰⁵ The Hermitage had received some valuable art objects from St. Peter's, but St. Mary's churchware would not make its way to them. The items compiled over centuries, clocks, elaborately wooden chairs replete with figures carved on them, vases, curtains, a painting of Jesus' Ascension and a painting of the evangelists in a wooden frame, were transferred to the Museum of the History of Religion in the former Kazan Cathedral. At the very least, the Lutheran churches were providing Soviet citizens with an education of what had once been a vital part of their history, even if they wouldn't be able to control the dialogue on that subject.³⁰⁶

Over in Moscow, St. Peter and Paul struggled on without their martyred pastor, Alexander Streck, his wife Veronika boldly leading the flock every Sunday in services within the church. Mostly elderly women and men remained faithful, but the confiscation of their building was only a matter of time, for it was difficult to hide the large Lutheran church located a short fifteen-minute walk from the Kremlin. On the Sunday of August 7, the parishioners found the doors locked as they came to church. The Soviet authorities had finally closed the church for good, inviting the Arktika Theater to become its new occupant.³⁰⁷ According to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the spot in front of the church formerly occupied by statues of Saints Peter and Paul was

³⁰⁵ Fond 7384, Delo 162, List 47, 54, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

³⁰⁶ Fond 7384, Delo 162, List 55–56, Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg.

³⁰⁷ Kahle, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden in der Sowjetunion*, 142. Theaters would become a popular use for former church buildings, as St. Anne's was reconstructed into the Spartak theater in January 1938. See Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 137.

now replaced by an iconic, large picture of Stalin holding a young girl in his arms with the caption, “We thank Comrade Stalin for our happy youth!”³⁰⁸ We know that the Streck’s had been exiled to Kazakhstan and with the Meyer family gone, too, the lights of St. Peter and Paul would not come back on until the 1990s.

Under the Watchful Eye of the NKVD: Rounding Up the Remainder of the Hansen-Muss Case Participants

While the Soviets voraciously set about occupying churches and counting the wealth stolen from the congregations, believers like Tamara Kossetti continued to be threatened with imprisonment. In her second interrogation on April 4, Tamara was forced to acknowledge her participation in the *Jugendbund* from 1925–1930. Names re-emerged from her past as the NKVD attempted to tar Tamara with guilt by association: Professor Alexander Wolfius from the Peterschule, Pastor Helmut Hanson, Arvid Ballod [the son of St. Peter’s caretaker], and the supposed masterminds of this plot, Wilhelm Derringer and Franz Müller. She acknowledged having known Müller since her childhood, but admitted that she had heard Derringer’s name for the first time from the NKVD agent. It didn’t matter. They had established the leaders of this Fascist counterrevolutionary group and the truth would not play any role in their conclusions.

In her file, Tamara is recorded as saying that she met with Müller shortly after her release from the Siberian Gulag in 1932. He is then said to have used her apartment to gather ten co-conspirators as he proposed that she join the *Jugendbund* organized by Derringer in order to spy and commit terrorist acts against the leaders of the Party and government. Included among those meeting in Tamara’s apartment was said to have been Erna Hansen.³⁰⁹ The NKVD arrested her

³⁰⁸ Schleuning, *Und siehe, wir leben!*, 151.

³⁰⁹ P-25625, List 184–187, 194, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

on March 4 as another key figure in this so-called conspiracy. This was now Erna's second arrest. She was probably unaware that her husband had been martyred in September 1937, struggling in the intervening years since his arrest in 1929 to keep her family of three boys intact. She no longer had the pastor's apartment on October 25th Prospect because her family was now housed in her brother's apartment on Geslerovsky Prospect in the Petrograd District of Leningrad. She and her boys, Ralf, Gerhardt and Meinhardt (ages 19, 16 and 14 years old, respectively), were housed on the upper floor while her brother (Otto Spenneman) and his three children resided on the lower floor.³¹⁰

Erna was 48 years old and was listed as having worked as a nurse at the emergency ward of a health institute since her release from the Gulag camps in 1933. She had no property to speak of and was recorded as having satisfactory health. Still, the NKVD took away from Erna the few items she possessed in this world, including a five-gram wedding ring. Her husband, Helmut, was listed as being in the camps, as was her brother Otto (in Chita, Siberia), but we know that Helmut had already been executed.³¹¹ In fact her brother, a noted engineer and the technical director of the Leningrad factory, Progress, had been arrested on December 16, 1937. He, too, was no longer alive, having been shot on January 15, 1938. He was only forty-four years old.³¹² Probably due to such potential danger, her sister, Irina, who had married Kurt Muss' brother, Erik, had studiously avoided any contact with those in the church. Her son, Erik, remembered

³¹⁰ P-40699, List 33, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Erik Muss to Olga Ryumina. According to Gerhardt, who lived until 2004, he had become a bit of a hooligan without parental supervision, stealing free rides on the trams in Leningrad. Once his uncle Otto saw him from his own car and gave him a "dressing down" afterwards. See Erik Muss to Olga Ryumina.

³¹¹ P-40699, List 33, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³¹² Жертвы политического террора в СССР [Victims of Political Repression in the USSR], last modified December 13, 2016.

that his mother said that they should not stir up trouble by having any connection with the Church. It was simply too dangerous.³¹³ That, no doubt, was especially true in the 1930s and was certainly magnified during the Great Terror among a frightened population who knew that of which Stalin was capable. Mikhail Mudyugin acknowledged the obvious: “Church activity was weakened, and in the end, completely frozen. Less and less people attended church services, one pastor after another lost his freedom, yes, and one congregation after another in one way or other ceased its existence.”³¹⁴

As Erna’s interrogations began, the NKVD expressed an interest in her acquaintances who had studied at the Annenschule or the Peterschule since they were in the process of arresting influential persons associated with those institutions. Furthermore, she was asked if she had any relatives living outside the USSR. (She had—two brothers in Helsinki).³¹⁵ No questions posed by the NKVD in 1938, however, were innocuous. The next question was actually a command: Erna was to list her counterrevolutionary activities before this most recent arrest. But apparently Erna was no longer the timid soul whom Natalya Stackelberg described back in 1930 as weeping continually and needing comfort from her fellow Lutheran cellmates. She had survived the White Sea Canal depredations, some of the worst of the Gulag camps. In no uncertain terms, Erna answered, “I have not carried out any counterrevolutionary activities since 1930. Before 1930 I was part of a counterrevolutionary group in the Lutheran Church for which I was sent to Karelia [location of her camp] where I remained until 1933.” The agent immediately countered, “You’re not telling the truth. Give us your testimony with details!” Erna again

³¹³ Erik Muss to Olga Ryumina.

³¹⁴ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 58.

³¹⁵ P-40699, List 38, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

insisted, “I will tell you once again, that I have not carried out any counterrevolutionary activities from 1930 until the day of my arrest!”³¹⁶ It took great courage in 1938 to stand up against the NKVD and tell them they were wrong to accuse her of political activities.

Her courage was all the more impressive because on April 5, when the interrogation continued, her signature on the documents confirming her testimony became weaker. The topic of the *Jugendbund* was again raised, and she admitted to having imbued German youth in a “nationalist spirit” along with her husband. Perhaps she felt that she couldn’t contradict what she had been convicted of those many years ago, and certainly “nationalist” or “Pan-Germanic” was the phrase that Soviet authorities used in those days to describe suspect Russian-Germans. But since Hitler’s rise to power, the NKVD now frequently used the term “Fascist” to describe them. Erna did not give them the satisfaction of that reply. When the agent demanded that she speak about her further criminal activities, she again refused to play their game. “Since 1930 I stopped my counterrevolutionary activity.” The agent must have been furious, because he says, “You are not telling the truth. Our investigation has uncovered the exact details... We demand that you stop with your denials and tell the truth!”³¹⁷ It is heartbreaking to imagine what they did next to change her mind, but the record has her say, “I acknowledge that I have really tried to hide the evidence... I’ve decided to tell the whole truth.”³¹⁸ Did she break down under physical pressure or torture? Were threats made against her three boys? Did the agent tell her that her husband had been executed the previous year and that the same could happen to her? Or yet another more likely alternative, it is conceivable that they just made up her confession. There is nothing in the record to let us know exactly, but the text changes dramatically and has her confessing to being a

³¹⁶ P-40699, List 39, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³¹⁷ P-40699, List 40, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³¹⁸ P-40699, List 40–41, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

spy for Germany. (These are virtually the same words Tamara Kossetti is recorded as speaking in her April 4 testimony, a strong hint that their replies were the standard, fabricated NKVD fare.).

Wilhelm Derringer was one of the NKVD's chosen instigators of this plot, and the fact that Erna acknowledged that she knew him as a member of the *Jugendbund* linked him to her. From there, the NKVD could simply fill in the blanks as they chose. In response to the question of what concrete actions she had carried out, a stream of information came pouring out. "I gathered and transferred to German intelligence the following data: (1) On the preparation of weapons of varying calibers for Factory Number 7 (guns, mortars and howitzers); (2) On the preparation of radio equipment at the Kulakov Factory for the Red Army; (3) On the location for the preparations for mobilization of Factory Number 7 and the Kulakov Factory."³¹⁹ When asked how she gathered this material, Hansen said that she compiled this information through the personal observations of factory workers and then passed it on to Wilhelm Derringer. These are the last words she is recorded as speaking. The impossibility of this nurse and wife of a pastor carrying out such activities is self-evident. During the Yezhovschina, however, such fabricated accounts were the norm.³²⁰

Many of the Lutherans from the Peterschule and St. Peter's were slandered in like manner. In reality, the NKVD probably knew that they couldn't present anything resembling credible evidence that Erna Hansen was the propagator of an espionage circle. She was just a cog in the wheel of their own construction, and they needed a suitable number of "enemies of the people" to illustrate the chaos they believed was enveloping the USSR. One the other hand, by July 1937

³¹⁹ P-40699, List 41–42, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³²⁰ P-40699, List 42, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. The Yezhovschina, or "Yezhovization," is the phrase often used to describe the Great Terror of 1937–1938. Authors Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov think it is a bit of a misnomer since Stalin surely was ultimately responsible, however eagerly Yezhov carried out his instructions. See Getty and Naumov, 491.

one Soviet writer claimed that the NKVD didn't even care whether charges bore any semblance of reality or not. This was after the writer related the story of a middle-aged washerwoman who was accused of meeting with foreigners in expensive restaurants and seducing Soviet diplomats in order to wheedle out secrets from them. The accusations against Erna Hansen were equally preposterous.³²¹

Conrad Muss was also among those accused of belonging to this web of conspirators. The brother of the late pastor, Kurt, Conrad was the engraver who had made the pins for confirmation students back in the 1920s. On the 10th of March, he joined the ever-growing list of the arrested.³²² Just as Konstantin Andrievsky's words were twisted to blacken the image of the Reichert's, Muss appears to have been utilized to indict the former teachers of the Peterschule, Principal Erich Kleinenberg and teacher Alexander Wolfius. The NKVD agent asked him about the German cultural organization "Bildungsverein," which had been active in the 1920s. Naturally Kleinenberg and Wolfius, as scholars and linguists, were associated with this entity. In fact, practically all the employees of the German consulate were said to have attended its sessions. Muss himself confessed to being a participant, but he informed them that it had been closed upon the arrest of most of its members.³²³ This was the point of the interrogation when the NKVD agent asked him to speak about his counterrevolutionary activities, and ultimately, the scribe's record did not disappoint. However, Muss' initial answer was that he had not engaged in counterrevolutionary activities. The agent accused him of lying, because Kleinenberg was said to have counted him among the counterrevolutionaries. Immediately, the recorded answer changed. Now, he not only said that Kleinenberg had recruited him for counterrevolutionary work, but he

³²¹ Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 281.

³²² P-40699, List 4, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³²³ P-40699, List 10–11, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

had done so as far back as 1925!!! Kleinenberg brought him into the Bildungsverein and cultivated a “German nationalist spirit” within him long ago while he was a student at the Peter-schule.³²⁴

Kleinenberg allegedly complained about the poverty of the citizens of the USSR, praised Germany and argued for perpetrating terrorist acts in order to combat Soviet power.³²⁵ In the awkward, unnatural language in which the NKVD was so proficient, Kleinenberg declared to Muss in August 1937: “I’ve known you for a long time. I trust you... Therefore in the name of German intelligence, I am commissioning you to select people for the violent removal of the leaders of the Party and Soviet government.”³²⁶ Muss was said to claim that he and the group he formed had been commissioned to carry out terrorist acts against Leningrad’s Communist party boss, Andrey Zhdanov, but up until their arrest had done practically nothing. Near the end of 1937, Kleinenberg supposedly sent Muss to Novgorod to gather info on air bases, warehouses, and the like. Muss’ friend, Nikolai Streiss, worked there, and was supposed to have conducted espionage for him. Streiss was said to have contacts in the German consulate in Leningrad where the information would be passed.³²⁷

The conspiratorial threads woven together by the NKVD were coming together in an appropriate fashion: The Bildungsverein connection, his former teacher, his German background. A creative storyteller could put all these pieces together and craft a tale of espionage and treason. And naturally, an individual of the intellectual acumen of Erich Kleinenberg would be chosen to

³²⁴ P-40699, List 12, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³²⁵ P-40699, List 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³²⁶ P-40699, List 14, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³²⁷ P-40699, List 14–15, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

play the lead role in this fantasy. Since his dismissal as principal of the Peterschule in 1928, Kleinenberg had used his talents to teach German literature and language at the Institute of Foreign Languages in Leningrad, still retaining his apartment right around the corner from the Peterschule in the center of Leningrad.³²⁸ He also served as a lecturer at the university in the Department of Germanic Studies. In 1932, he moved on to Leningrad State University and served as a professor of foreign languages until 1935. One of his old students, Nikolai Ulyanov, speculated that his arrest in 1937 may have been due to the fact that he had been invited to teach German to the daughters of Czar Nicholas II, even having appeared several times at the Kremlin to carry out his duties.³²⁹

Being German Proves Fatal: The Fate of Leningrad's Lutherans

Quite frankly, it was open season on Soviet citizens of German heritage. Other German Lutherans outside the immediate Peterschule/St. Peter's circles would also be subjected to arrest. Former seminary student, Otto Tumm, who had married Luisa Muss after serving prison time for his conviction in the Hansen-Muss Case of 1929, was re-arrested in July 1937. He was soon released, but then arrested yet again on February 28, 1938. Tumm was convicted of anti-Soviet activity and sentenced to ten years. He was sent to Tashkent, eventually ending up in the dreaded Gulag camp of Kolyma where he died in 1942. He never really got to know the sons (Lothar Kurt [born in 1936] and Ulrich [born in 1938]) that Luisa bore to him. She herself was in

³²⁸ P-40699, List 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers," 204.

³²⁹ Ulyanov, "The Fate of the Teachers, 204; Энциклопедия Петришule: Эрих Карлович Клейненберг [Encyclopedia Petrischule: Erik Karlovich Kleinenberg], last modified October 21, 2017. A glimpse into the Kleinenberg family's mentality is instructive when one realizes that Erik's son, Igor, initially refused to take the exam on Marxism-Leninism at Herten University in 1924 and was thus forced to work in a factory for one year. He rethought his decision the next year and passed his exams, but it does tell us that the Kleinenberg's had little use for communism. See Энциклопедия Петришule: Игорь Эрихович Клейненберг [Encyclopedia Petrischule: Igor Erikovich Kleinenberg], last modified October 21, 2017.

the camps at the time of his arrest. A haunting photo exists of an emaciated Luisa after her release from the Gulag in 1939. It contrasts sharply with healthier photos of her taken earlier in the decade. Subsequently, Luisa would be exiled to Kazakhstan with the boys and live a full life, serving as a nurse. She died in 1983, retaining her Christian faith but keeping it concealed as believers were forced to do in the Soviet Union. Still, her strong moral character had an impact upon her co-workers. After the fall of the Soviet Union, her daughter-in-law spoke reverently of the faith that she had never lost despite the persecution she had undergone.³³⁰

The Wagner/Liss Case now reached its conclusion in late June with all the alleged participants being declared guilty.³³¹ How the NKVD and the courts arrived at their verdict is instructive. The situation of Herman Bergholdt provides a good example of how the NKVD took the initial evidence and manipulated it to its own benefit. Bergholdt was originally from Assureti, just outside modern day Tbilisi (known as Tiflis to Russian-Germans at that time). It was one of those cities to which German Lutherans had migrated back in the early 19th century when they believed the world was coming to an end. As a young man, Herman's father had implanted in him the idea to obtain a quality education in Leningrad. So in the auspicious year of 1929, he traveled to Leningrad to attend a language institute that trained future teachers of the German language. While in Leningrad, he befriended other Russian Germans who studied at the institute and also attended the concerts arranged by Helmut Hansen at St. Peter's. After his studies, he returned to Georgia to teach German, but his hunger for deeper learning in the field of technology led him to enroll at an institute where he graduated with a degree in engineering. He returned to Leningrad with his wife and young daughter and found work as a radio engineer at an institute

³³⁰ Lothar Tumm Letters—Muss Family Documents.

³³¹ P-32723, Volume 1, List 389, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

and rented an apartment in the Petrograd region of Leningrad. The family had not even lived there for a year before they heard a knock on the door one evening and opened it to find two pleasant young men standing there. Obviously they were with the authorities, because Herman was asked to come with them to clarify some matter. It was February 27, 1938, the day those 28 people connected to Wolf Liss and St. Peter's Lutheran were arrested. His wife didn't recognize the seriousness of the situation, because when she asked when her husband would return and whether he should take something along with him, the young men replied, "What do you mean? What do you mean? No, your husband will be back home tomorrow!"³³²

Just as Emilia Neimana searched and searched for her husband in the prisons, Herman's wife Nadezhda now did the same, but to no avail. She would never see her husband again. When Herman's daughter Elena read her father's file years later after the fall of the Soviet Union, she spied that frightful yet ambiguous phrase on his document: "Ten years without the right of correspondence." As she read on, she learned that a pastor at a church in Peterhof had been accused as the ringleader of the group [Woldemar Wagner] and his right hand man was an organist whose last name was Liss.³³³ (Elena seems to have confused Wagner's place of employment, St. Catherine's in Leningrad).³³⁴ The NKVD repeatedly questioned Herman about his connections, but he only replied that he had gone to the church and heard the organ. So they concocted a terrorist act pulled off by him on the Leningrad railroad system. When he objected that he was actually living in Georgia at that time, they quickly changed the accusation to a terrorist act against the rail system in Tiflis. Compounding their sloppiness, Herman had actually taught in a village. There was

³³² Фонд Последний адрес [Last Address Foundation], Герман Яковлевич Берхдольт [Herman Yakovlevich Bergholdt, accessed April 2, 2017.

³³³ Last Address Foundation, "Herman Yakovlevich Bergholdt."

³³⁴ Litzenberger, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Soviet Government, 1917–1938*, 338.

no railroad in that village. It didn't matter to the NKVD.³³⁵

The Bergholdt's world was coming to an end in a way unimaginable to their millennialist ancestors from the 19th century. Now instead of the Lord's Second Coming, those Germans from Georgia and Russia were coming to terms with the arrival of the Antichrist in Soviet atheism. The late Pastor Waldemar Wagner [executed in 1937] and perhaps the finest organist in all of Leningrad, the former St. Peter's organist, Wolf Liss, were accused of creating a German spy group from 1930–1935 with 28 Soviet citizens and Leningrad Lutherans like Herman Bergholdt and others listed above. They were all executed on June 28.³³⁶ But the greatest tragedy had to be that which occurred within the Mai family that year— in addition to Paul Neiman, the Kossetti girls would become widows with the execution of Reinhold Mai and his brother, Arnold [a little later on September 6], the Mai boys' uncles, Ernst [a music specialist at a Leningrad radio station] and Woldemar Zeidel, and lastly their cousin, Marta Mai, an organist at St. Peter's.³³⁷

The NKVD had little time for rest in 1938, because they continued to toil feverishly in their search for enemies. Returning to the Derringer/Müller Case, it was now Margot Jurgens' turn to be linked to the plot. The NKVD arrested her on July 22nd. Margot was 29 years old and worked at Kindergarten Number 15 in the Moskovsky region of Leningrad since her 1933 release from the White Sea Canal labor camp. She lived at the apartment of her mother, House number 36, Plekhanova Street, apartment 75, with four other siblings. One of those, her brother Walter, had

³³⁵ Last Address Foundation, "Herman Yakovlevich Bergholdt."

³³⁶ P-32723, Volume 1, List 389, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³³⁷ Marina Mikhalova, "Family Photograph." In 1962, Reinhold Mai's family would be told that he died of gangrene of the lungs in 1942. However, due to the tireless labors of the human rights organization Memorial and its website, "Return of the Names," after the fall of the Soviet Union, Reinhold's granddaughter would learn of his 1938 arrest and execution and eventual rehabilitation in 1957.

been arrested on June 11th.³³⁸ When she was brought into the interrogation room on July 28, Margot was accused of being an enemy of Soviet power. She quickly acknowledged her guilt. But when the agent asked her to identify the foreign power for whom she was working and why she was hiding her affiliation, Margot rejected the accusation and said that she was working for no foreign power. Therefore, there was nothing to confess.³³⁹ The NKVD record provides conflicting information, one time identifying her as an ethnic German but then reversing that error and stating that she was of Estonian ethnicity.³⁴⁰ Parsing her testimony from the second interrogation on August 4, Margot admitted to being involved in “counterrevolutionary nationalist propaganda against the Soviet power as an Estonian patriot.” But, she insisted, she was not a participant in espionage against the Soviet Union, so there is nothing further to confess.³⁴¹

Of more interest to them, though, was her past connection to the Lutheran youth group, the Germanic-sounding organization, *Jugendbund*. In the record of the investigation, her brother Walter is quoted as saying that Pastor Helmut Hansen “...educated him to be a person who should hate Soviet power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, Party and government.” And naturally, what could the NKVD imagine about his sister if she also associated with such people? In response, the NKVD would keep her in custody until well into 1939.³⁴² In the meantime, the NKVD continued to gather the testimonies of Tamara Kossetti and Margot so that they would incriminate one another in connection to the Germanic-sounding organization, *Jugendbund*. It

³³⁸ P-6790, List 1, 6, 13, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³³⁹ P-6790, List 17, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁴⁰ P-6790, List 1, 16, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁴¹ P-6790, List 18, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁴² P-6790, List 2, 28, 30, 32, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

was their modus operandi. If these tactics failed, they could simply make up quotes. They, after all, held all the cards against the ordinary people of the Soviet Union. On March 26, 1939, the NKVD interrogated Margot from 12:40 to 3:15 in the morning, obviously depriving her of sleep and trying to trip her up in her testimony. They asked for her acquaintances (like Tamara Kossetti, Marta and Elsa Freifeldt) and attempted to tie her to their Müller/Derringer Plot. She refused to play this game, replying that she was now “an honest Soviet citizen.”³⁴³ Around the same time (March 21), they interrogated Tamara Kossetti and through the recorded testimony, we get a glimpse of the pressure the NKVD brought to bear upon these young Christian women who had already experienced the indignities of the Gulag labor camps. After answering the question as to how many *Jugendbund* members she recruited for nefarious activities against the government (answer: none), she stated unequivocally that she had not associated with counterrevolutionary elements upon her release from the labor camp.³⁴⁴ The NKVD agent responded to her denials with the following questioning:

NKVD agent: But you spoke differently in your April 4, 1938 testimony.

Tamara: It wasn't truthful. It was a false testimony not written from my words but by the interrogator. Both of them convinced me of the necessity to give such testimony if I was an honest Soviet person and spoke quite a bit about the necessity of this testimony. I believed them and signed.

NKVD agent: You are a cultured, educated person, condemned for counterrevolutionary activity. How could you acknowledge such crimes of you weren't actually guilty?

Tamara: I tried to reject this false testimony, but they convinced me after speaking to me for a long time. I had already been sentenced to three years. I think I was correctly judged for my actions. So I believed the interrogator. Especially when one of the interrogators said that if I was an honest person, I should without question sign the testimony. I should realize, those agents who were in the cell with me told me, that

³⁴³ P-6790, List 20–21, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁴⁴ P-25625, List 188–189, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

some of the arrested were subjected to physical or other means of compulsion, so that it was necessary to give false testimony.

NKVD agent: Were any physical methods of compulsion or threats used against you?

Tamara: No one ever threatened me or used physical methods against me. They addressed me very respectfully and promised to send me home in 25 days.

NKVD agent: Look, notwithstanding your rejection and statements about ‘lying testimony,’ which you evidently signed, the interrogation has uncovered material about your participation in a counterrevolutionary organization since 1933. Therefore we propose that you give a truthful testimony.

Tamara: I was not in any counterrevolutionary organizations and did not engage in any criminal activity.³⁴⁵

This interrogation took place from 10 p.m. until 12:45 a.m., so it is apparent that the NKVD were trying to wear her down with pressure and lack of sleep, methods in which they excelled. The following day they brought her into the interrogation chambers at 12 p.m. and followed with another two hour, twenty minute session in which they pried out of her Margo Jurgens’ current connections to St. Peter’s. Tamara apparently indicated that her sister, Benita, had seen Margot in a park in 1936 and learned that she gathered money at the church concerts, which were still continued by Paul Reichert even after Helmut Hansen’s arrest. Not only did Margot attend church, but apparently Peter Mikhailov (another former *Jugendbund* member) had been seen there along with Benita’s old friend, Ada Grepper. Ada was described as “very religious,” but had not been a member of the *Jugendbund*, perhaps due to work conflicts. She also confessed to having visited Erna Hansen, but less than previously. (The NKVD was trying to prove she was still communicating with Lutheran believers from the past in order to imply that these sinister connections to “counterrevolutionary activities” continued).³⁴⁶ Margot also was said to still be

³⁴⁵ P-25625, List 189–190, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region

³⁴⁶ P-25625, List 191–193, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. In her interrogation on April 17, 1937, Margot’s sister, Eleonora, admitted to both of them seeing and conversing with Peter Mikhailov and Ada Grepper

associating with Erna Hansen, a fact that she confirmed. (Although she claimed it was only “sometimes” that she saw Erna in order to help her with housecleaning activities).

In her March 26 interrogation, Margot rejected certain aspects of Tamara’s testimony, saying she didn’t gather money for the church but that she did attend services and that it was not a criminal activity. The NKVD’s tactic, though, was to accuse her of trying to reconnect with her “criminal past” by associating with former convicts and attending church. It was obvious that the NKVD was applying its special brand of intimidation and pressure, and Margot was naturally frightened. She confessed about her testimony given on August 4, 1938:

I was virtually insane and signed beforehand the prepared protocol under the pressure of the interrogator. At that moment I was in a condition to sign any kind of document. ... I was in total despair because of my second arrest and did not perfectly understand why I was brought in because I had been working honestly before Soviet power. Specifically, the incriminating material of the investigation was not presented to me and I heard only the threats and insistent demands to sign the protocol.³⁴⁷

Just like Tamara, Margot had been pressured into signing documents accusing her of counterrevolutionary activities of some sort. While we can glean some truth from these investigations that the ties to the Lutheran Church still remained among those who had been convicted in the Hansen-Muss Case, Tamara was said to have attempted to dissuade Margot from having any association with the Church. This testimony seems dubious at best. Tamara’s husband was still a member of the congregation at that time and his cousin Marta was the organist. Tamara’s mother, Emilia, also still attended and Tamara’s granddaughter indicates that the Christian faith

outside St. Peter’s after a church service in the mid-1930s. Margo also met with former Sunday school teacher, Ilsa Wasserman, who lived not too far from them on Dekabristov Street. See P-6790, List 77–79, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁴⁷ P-6790, List 22, 26, 32–33, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region. Actually, it was Margot’s sister, Eleonora, who gathered money for the church once back in 1933, according to her testimony. See List 77–79 from the same file.

remained strong in the family.³⁴⁸ It is highly unlikely that she would follow this line of reasoning. It may have been just another example of the NKVD trying to use fabricated testimony that held partial truths to terrify these poor young women into incriminating one another.

Both women received surprisingly strong recommendations from their co-workers that they were honest, Soviet citizens. These were not harmless statements to make when the NKVD sought to use friends and co-workers to incriminate the accused, but there is no negative testimony given against either woman's character. It worked out for Margot's benefit, as it was even admitted in the NKVD file that she had signed her protocol under "physical pressure" from the interrogators. She was declared innocent and released on April 19, 1939.³⁴⁹ Tamara was not as fortunate. On September 23, 1939, it was announced that Tamara had been declared guilty and was sentenced for participating in a counterrevolutionary organization to five years of labor camp, beginning from her incarceration on February 3, 1938. Perhaps because of her Peterschule education and the connection they made with her to Principal Erich Kleinenberg, teacher Alexander Wolfius and the Derringer Case, the "German ties" were simply too extensive for Tamara to overcome?³⁵⁰ We don't know for sure, but Ada Grepper must have learned about the sentence immediately, because she sent a parcel of candy to Benita in Birsik for the four children (Benita's two children and Tamara's two children). When Benita opened up the wrapper of one of the pieces of candy, a small enclosed letter popped out. It was then that she learned of the guilty verdict passed upon her sister and knew that the future of her sister's children's rested in

³⁴⁸ P-25625, List 192–193, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region; Marina Mikhailova, "Family Photograph."

³⁴⁹ P-6790, List 78–79, and P-25625, List 146, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁵⁰ P-25625, List 1, 180–181, 274–280, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

her hands.³⁵¹

Given the NKVD program for arrests in 1937/1938, in retrospect it seems clear that Erich Kleinenberg was a prime candidate to be branded as a ringleader of a spy circle. He was educated, articulate, and clearly did not shy away from his German heritage or Lutheran faith. Any contact with the German consulate opened one up to the possibility of arrest in 1937. Historian Robert Conquest acknowledges that, “All direct contact with foreign consulates was likely to prove fatal.”³⁵² He had been arrested before Conrad Muss and Erna Hansen (February 17, 1938) and his incarceration would last 19 months in total. Erich Kleinenberg’s tragic life ended in the hospital of Kresty prison in Leningrad, where he died before the verdict was rendered on this case of espionage and treason. Insisting upon his innocence to the end, Kleinenberg’s courage to speak the truth no matter the circumstances most likely helped his wife and family avoid arrest and future persecution. He was rehabilitated in 1956 after Nikita Khrushchev’s anti-Stalin speech.³⁵³

His colleague at the Peterschule, Alexander Wolfius, had also been convicted in this espionage case. After his dismissal from the Peterschule back in 1928, Wolfius remained in Leningrad due to the need for foreign language specialists. On April 19, 1930, Wolfius was arrested as part of the “Academic Affair” in which Pastors Hansen and Muss were said to have participated

³⁵¹ Tamara Kossetti Mai’s term was extended in 1943 since the camp officials didn’t think it suitable to release a “traitor” in the middle of the war. She was finally released in 1948, remarried [Pavel Reichel] and lived her remaining days in Kusekevo, a collective farm in the Novosibirsk region. She saw the children she had with Reinhold only twice after that and gave birth in 1952 to a daughter, Evgeniya, who lives today in Bulgaria. Tamara died on July 22, 1952. Her sister, Benita, lived in Birsik, Bashkortostan and passed away of tuberculosis 12 days after her sister on August 3. In a documentary film shot a few years ago about the history of the Peterschule, it is claimed that Margot Jurgens lost her mind after her release. No further details were offered, though. See Marina Mikhailova, “Family Photograph;” Encyclopedia Petrischule: Tamara Valentinovna Kossetti; Коссетти, БЕНИТА Валентиновна, Энциклопедия Петришуле [“Benita Kossetti,” Encyclopedia Petrischule], accessed 14 August 2014 and “Внуки Святого Петра” [“Grandchildren of St. Peter’s], accessed November 27, 2017.

³⁵² Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 271.

³⁵³ Ulyanov, “The Fate of the Teachers,” 204; Encyclopedia Petrischule: Erik Karlovich Kleinenberg.

along with their Sunday School teachers. Sentenced on August 8, 1931, he was exiled to Pavlodar in Kazakhstan where he taught German and History at a technical school. Accused of using the word “lumpenproletariat,” to which a student took exception, he was immediately fired. Some-how he eventually managed to find his way back to Leningrad in 1934 and become a professor of German at the Leningrad Institute of Engineers of Communalka Construction. (Communalkas were the apartments where rooms were divided between several families. It made privacy virtually impossible and spying on one’s neighbors unavoidable). Not being able to avoid the studious eye of the NKVD in 1937, Wolfius was again arrested on February 11 and accused of “counterrevolutionary activities.” Sentenced to an eight-year term and dispatched to Siberian regions, he labored in the camps until he became physically exhausted. A nurse, working in the hospital of the camp, with difficulty recognized her former teacher from the Peterschule. The strong man with the sonorous voice could barely make himself heard as he asked for a glass of hot tea. Realizing that he was near death, she complied. Alexander Wolfius died in the Vorkuta region in 1941. He was rehabilitated in 1958. When the current incarnation of the Peterschule celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1962, a former student mentioned his name in one of the speeches. Remembering their heroic mentor, his former students filled the hall with thunderous applause.³⁵⁴

Meanwhile, for Erna and Conrad, as well as others accused of participating in this fabricated nest of spies, the case now reached its conclusion. The theater of the absurd reigned in NKVD headquarters, as enemies, some real but most imagined, went to their graves in order to

³⁵⁴ Ulyanov, “The Fate of the Teachers,” 204; Александр Германович Вульфийус, [Alexander Germanovich Wolfius], Wikipedia.ru, last modified September 29, 2016. Ulyanov states that Wolfius was sent to Magadan while Wikipedia and the Government Archives of the Russian Federation indicate Omsk. See <http://pkk.memo.ru/page%202/KNIGA/Vr.html>.

fill prescribed quotas.³⁵⁵ Conrad Muss and Erna Hansen were sentenced to death as participants in a plot to kill Leningrad Party head Sergey Kirov and party member and successor to Kirov, Andrey Zhdanov. Their executions were carried out on October 22.³⁵⁶ Of course, Leonid Nikolaev and several suspected accomplices had already been convicted shortly after he pulled the trigger back in 1934. It also mattered not one bit that the old Bolsheviks, Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, had been convicted and executed along with 160 others in 1936 as leaders of the elaborate plot that had conspired to murder Sergey Kirov.³⁵⁷ Different ethnic groups were now accused of conducting espionage for some foreign power, and for Lutherans, it was generally supposed that those ties were to Nazi Germany or Fascist Finland. All these victims were fed to the Moloch-like death machine whose appetite was still strong in 1938.³⁵⁸

The truth would remain hidden in most cases until the de-Stalinization period under Nikita Khrushchev, or it would have to wait until Mikhail Gorbachev initiated his *glasnost* period in the late 1980s. But as early as February 4, 1939, an agent of the Third Department of the Lenin-grad NKVD, K. P. Tikhomirov, confessed to the spuriousness of the charges against the Luther-ans of German heritage and how false evidence was obtained:

In June or July of 1938, an order came down from the former head of the NKVD, Litvin, of the immediate detainment and arrest of all former members of the *dvatsatkas* of the German Lutheran churches. In the course of a few days, we worked day and night to detain and arrest the suspects, but the administration of the

³⁵⁵ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 475–76.

³⁵⁶ P-40699, List 208–226, 231, 236, FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region.

³⁵⁷ Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 256–57.

³⁵⁸ Only one of the Hansen boys lived into old age. Ralf and Reinhardt Hansen did not survive the Leningrad Blockade by Nazi forces in 1941. Gerhardt survived the Blockade, though, and went on to serve on the Front during World War II. After being wounded in battle and due to his German last name, he was evacuated to Sverdlovsk [modern day Yekaterinburg]. After the war he settled down in Nizhniy Tagil, just north of Sverdlovsk in the Ural Mountain region, and worked as a chauffeur. With the demise of the Soviet Union, he went with his cousin to the KGB archives where they both learned the fate of their fathers. Gerhardt died in 2004 at the age of 84. See Erik Muss to Olga Ryumina.

department complained about us and suggested that we fulfill the orders of the commissar— arrest even more.... Therefore we arrested 25 persons. Of these individuals, 75 % were senior citizens. We, seeing before us people who might be anti-Soviet on the strength of their conversations with Lutheran pastors, and likewise due to their religious convictions and ethnicity as Germans, began to obtain proof of their anti-Soviet inclinations and with oversimplified methods we wrote down accusations of the “second category.” Khatenever, the substitute for the boss of the NKVD, threw [Agent] Sisoyev out of the room because he couldn’t fabricate an organized counterrevolutionary group. So the agents found new proof. In sum, the investigating organs “created” four of the groups that were demanded from “congregations” which included 32 persons. All were repressed.³⁵⁹

This rarely preserved confession of how evidence was fabricated during the Great Terror is an important document. The aforementioned agent Tikhomirov may have felt emboldened to make such an honest statement since the national NKVD commissar, Nikolai Yezhov, had stepped down from his position on November 23, 1938.³⁶⁰ It also indicates that the elderly *dvatsatka* members of St. Peter’s, like August Kort, Emilia Must, among others, who had not been arrested along with the Reicherts’ and other active church members, would probably not have escaped Soviet “justice,” either.

The terror would only end with Yezhov’s fall from power and execution. On April 10, 1939, the noose that had been tightening around him resulted in his arrest. Stalin let his faithful minion lingered in prison until February 2, 1940, when he was shot in a cell of his own making not far from Lubyanka headquarters.³⁶¹ Pavel Postyshev, one of Stalin’s henchmen who eventually fell foul of the dictator, waxed prophetic in a Butyrki prison cell in Moscow back in 1938. Describing Yezhov as Stalin’s faithful hunting dog, Postyshev predicted that as soon as the hunt was over, Stalin would declare the dog mad and destroy it.³⁶² The tragedy of Russia and its

³⁵⁹ Shkarovsky and Cherepenina, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 57–58.

³⁶⁰ Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 164–65.

³⁶¹ Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 181–82, 187–88.

³⁶² Jansen and Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner*, 211.

dedicated Lutherans was that so many faithful witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ were destroyed in the process of a satanic bloodlust that closed the decade of the 1930s.

Last Church Standing: The Village of Koltushi and the End of Organized Lutheranism

By the end of 1938, the organized Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Soviet Union was dead, except for one last holdout. The village congregation in Koltushi had always been one of the strongest in Russian Lutheranism. The pastors may have been gone, but in 1939 the people still came to the church on the hill on Sundays and it was always full. Faithful parishioners like Katri Kukkhonen made sure the assembled heard the Word of God. She felt as if "...God had let loose all the powers of hell and pushed the angel of death towards the earth in order to punish mankind for sin."³⁶³ It wasn't uncommon for the preacher to take the text straight from the Book of Revelation because, as Katri recalled, the stark reality of events led all to believe the time of the Beast of Revelation had come and the Soviet government was serving as the agent of the Antichrist. They prayed and prayed, fervently and often, expecting that the Lord's Second Coming was as near as the early church had thought. "But's God's plans," Katri declared, "were different from man's. God's time clock went more slowly, but correctly."³⁶⁴ The Lord was not coming yet, and so, they remained faithful. Someone would always play the organ in the church and the youth had not dispersed or given in to the tenor of the times. They remained faithful despite the hardships that were brought upon those who clung to what was considered an outmoded form of thinking by the enlightened atheists. Even though local communists purposely arranged all night dances for the youth before church holidays, or especially on the eve of Christmas or Easter, the Koltushi youth did not abandon their faith in Christ. They formed a

³⁶³Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 82.

³⁶⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 82.

church choir which sang songs from the hymnal, recited poetry and retained the Lutheran teaching from the Confessions. Youth even began to lead the services, and others from congregations now closed throughout Ingria offered to share the Word of God. They were allowed to do so as long as they adhered to Lutheran teaching, and no one objected to the Koltushi parishioners' request. In fact, people from all over the region began to show up on Sundays since the only remaining services were taking place in Koltushi.

But in August of 1939, the last holdout among Russia's Lutheran congregations held its last service. The youth prepared a festive church program that lasted the entire day and Katri made certain that she addressed the youth for the last time with the words from John 1:45–46: “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” She then repeated the Apostle Philip's words to Nathaniel—“Come and see!”³⁶⁵ Her aim was to assure them that salvation only came from Nazareth. The regime looked in horror at all of these activities and decided to lock the church for good, forbidding any further church services. (It would later be burned to the ground). But the people still gathered in the cemetery surrounding the church, so the authorities banned them from the church grounds entirely. The parishioners silently responded by moving two kilometers further down the hill amidst the enormous birch and pine trees, close by some old rusty, ancient crosses. There outdoor services were held and people from around Ingria kept coming, until the arrests began in October of 1940. Katri and others important parishioners were taken into custody and sent to Siberia. Although a few churches in Ingria would open briefly during World War II, with the closing of the Koltushi parish, public worship now ceased. People would have to practice their faith in secrecy during the remaining years of darkness.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 82–83.

³⁶⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria, *The Path of Faith*, 83, 89, 106.

Epilogue: The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail

The years between 1939 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 were bleak for Christians. Surrounded by the daily drumbeat of atheist propaganda, many kept their faith underground, not just figuratively but literally by hiding Bibles under the floorboards. World War II enacted a severe toll upon the nation as well as Christians, whether underground or open about their faith. Friedrich Wacker had survived the Great Terror and the closing of the churches, but when Nazi Germany invaded the USSR on June 22, 1941, he knew his family would suffer as a result and he deemed it best that they suffer together as a family. Previously he would illegally take the local night train to visit his wife and children in Leningrad, assuming that under the cover of dark he could slip in and out of their apartment more easily. But with the coming of war to Russia, he decided to risk it and take the day train. The caretaker at the apartment recognized him and informed the NKVD.³⁶⁷ He was arrested on June 28, 1941. When his wife heard about his arrest, she went looking for him. She, too, was arrested. Wacker was shot on July 10th, the last professor of the Leningrad Lutheran seminary who had been left alive. His wife suffered the same fate as well.³⁶⁸

After Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization program led to some liberalization, but no long-lasting improvements in religious freedom were forthcoming. Eventually, two Lutheran churches were allowed to quietly open their doors in the 1970s (Pushkin and Petrozavodsk) and in the late 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* experiment gave new life to free speech in the Soviet Union.³⁶⁹ It was the beginning of the end for the communist experiment,

³⁶⁷ Margarita Schulmeister to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

³⁶⁸ Mikhail Shkarovsky, "New Martyr, District President Friedrich Wacker;" Margarita Schulmeister to Matthew Heise, October 2013.

³⁶⁹ Junker and Arkkila, *Nacht und Neuer Morgen*, 30–33.

because when the USSR disintegrated in 1991, churches suddenly began to reopen throughout the former Soviet territory. In St. Petersburg (Leningrad had returned to its former name in 1990), Lutheran congregations struggled to regain their property. St. Peter's, naturally, was at the center of this debate, and now a spirited argument arose within the neighborhood as to whether the "swimming pool" should be returned to what remained of the old congregation. The Baltic Sea Steamship Company was reluctant to part with this valuable property since it rented out the church (under contract until 1993) and operated the swimming pool, allowing as many as 128 organizations to use the premises. The Leningrad city government was certainly not inclined to take into account the opinions of this small band of Lutherans, but the *glasnost* period had unleashed the long-stilled voices of the Russian public. In a 1991 article, even the newspaper *Evening Leningrad* took the side of the Lutherans: "When the judiciary in our country operates in contradiction to the moral law, it stands to reason that we should consistently observe the latter."³⁷⁰

As the reassembled church council of St. Peter's appealed for the return of its building, though, some parents in St. Petersburg complained about losing their swimming pool. Where would their children go? These Lutherans could find other churches, couldn't they? Initiating a letter writing campaign, they even received support from employees of the Russian National Library! But the days when atheism ruled as the arbiter over public opinion were fast receding. Most Russians in the 1990s were now ashamed of the communist past and its destruction of the church. The St. Petersburg newspapers were flooded with dozens of letters supporting the believers. More representative and influential was the opinion voiced by one reader of the newspaper *Smena* (appropriately, the Russian word means "change"): "When I walk past the

³⁷⁰ Maxim Ivanov, *The Lutheran Quarter of Petersburg*, 45–46.

Evangelical German Lutheran church, it seems to me that the mournful figures of Sts. Peter and Paul appeal to our conscience. How can you take children to a swimming pool church?! It is the purest form of blasphemy!”³⁷¹

The Leningrad city government eventually relented and St. Peter’s succeeded in regaining its sanctuary. On Reformation Day 1992, the first divine service was held within the walls since Paul and Bruno Reichert had conducted services in 1937.³⁷² Lyudmila Shmidrina, the granddaughter and niece of the martyred pastors, became the choir director for the congregation. She had observed the resolute quest of her mother, Irina, to clear the names of her father and brother from the stain of being labeled an “enemy of the people.” In the 1960s Irina obtained a document dated November 22, 1957, rehabilitating her father and brother and establishing their innocence. This led Lyudmila to search for and finally read the actual case file of the pastors, learning of their last days and burial in Levashovo. The lifelong pain of her mother combined with the memory of her grandfather and uncle exercised a powerful effect upon her and pulled her back to the church.³⁷³ Today she serves as the choir director for St. Mary’s Lutheran church, just around the corner from St. Peter’s.

Former members of St. Peter’s, too, came streaming back to the church upon its reopening. Irma von Löwenich’s family had been a part of St. Peter’s since the days of her grandparents in the late 19th century. She was baptized there in 1913, had studied at the Petrischule and was among those who were in Pastor Helmut Hansen’s last confirmation class of May 1929. On that day, she recalled that she wore a white dress and carried flowers in her hand. The memory re-

³⁷¹ Maxim Ivanov, *The Lutheran Quarter of Petersburg*, 46–47.

³⁷² Maxim Ivanov, *The Lutheran Quarter of Petersburg*, 47–48.

³⁷³ Sebastian Brandt, *Petrkirche—The Church of St. Peter’s*, 45–46; Vladimir Izotov, “Немецкая Волна: Петрикирхе: лютеранская церковь в истории города на Неве,” in Portal Credo.ru, February 2, 2003, <https://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=monitor&id=1238>.

mained a lifetime as she now captivated a new generation of believers with stories of the grand old church and the “coffee evenings” at the Hansen’s apartment that *Leningradskaya Pravda* had found so outrageous in what must have seemed like another day and time. Irma remembered with joy and tears the concerts, the services, but especially her spiritual leaders, Helmut and Erna Hansen and the Reichert’s. They had given their lives so that a new generation of believers could be born and nurtured. Irma passed away in 2000 at the age of 87, a powerful witness that God’s promise that the church would endure were not mere words on parchment.³⁷⁴

As far as records can determine, Elsa Freifeldt (Golde) also lived until 1995 and might very well have seen the church of her youth returned to the congregation.³⁷⁵ She was buried in Smolenskoe Cemetery in St. Petersburg, along her parents. Meanwhile, over at St. Michael’s on Vasily Island, Kurt Muss’ old sanctuary saw some of his surviving confirmands also return to the reopened church. They remembered with fondness their old mentor, a picture of him and the 1929 confirmation class being hung upon a wall of the church. How many of them might have recalled the lyrics of that hymn they sang on their Confirmation Day in May 1929?—

By our own strength in the hour of trial
Through adversity we would not stand
But standing to fight for us
Is the Chosen One of God's kingdom³⁷⁶

Dagmara Schreiber died of tuberculosis in 1963, but her sister, Elena, survived to see St. Michael’s doors open and the volleyball factory that occupied the premises expelled. She died in

³⁷⁴ Sebastian Brandt, *Petrkirche—The Church of St. Peter’s*, 42–44; “Ein Wort über einen Freund,” *Der Bote* 4, 2000.

³⁷⁵ St. Petersburg Martyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church.

³⁷⁶ Zeksel, “Remembrances of Pastor Kurt Muss,” 17. The words in Russian are: Своей нам силой в трудный час, не устоять в напасти, но ратует в борьбе за нас, избранных Божьей власти.

1993, but her brother-in-law, Mikhail Mudyugin, returned, albeit in a different garb.³⁷⁷ Mudyugin had taken note of Kurt Muss' counsel about the churches being closed by the time he left the seminary, so he forwent a theological education for a secular one, becoming a noted academic in the years after Muss' martyrdom. However, he never lost his hope to serve one day in the church. In 1958, he caused a public sensation when he left his position at a linguistic institute and became an Orthodox priest. Rising through the ranks of the Church, the elderly Mudyugin was eventually elevated to the rank of archbishop. But with the fall of communism, he was often seen frequenting the reopened Lutheran church of his spiritual father, Pastor Kurt Muss. Mudyugin was invited from time to time by the pastor of St. Michael's, Sergey Preiman, to address the congregants during the service in his Orthodox garb.³⁷⁸

He probably never thought even in his wildest imagination that he would be asked to preach in German at St. Peter's after that last Christmas Eve in 1937, but that is just what happened as worship services were renewed in the early 1990s. Mudyugin also had the opportunity to share his extensive experience of God's faithfulness to believers, lecturing at the newly reopened seminary located in the Lutheran church in Novosaratovka, the former parish of Paul Reichert.³⁷⁹ He provided an important dimension to an ecumenical relationship between Orthodox and Lutherans. He even penned a preface in 1994 to a new book on the selected works of Martin Luther, urging Russian Orthodox to read this influential theologian. Mudyugin died in 2000 and was mourned by many in Orthodox and Lutheran church circles.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ St. Petersburg Martyrology of Clergy and Laity: Evangelical Lutheran Church.

³⁷⁸ Oleg Sevastyanov to Matthew Heise, June 2017.

³⁷⁹ "Cool Journey of the Archbishop: Mikhail Mudyugin Path from Engineer to Bishop."

³⁸⁰ Oleg Sevastyanov to Matthew Heise, June 2017. See Mudyugin's preface to the book Мартин Лютер: Избранные произведения [Martin Luther: Selected Works] at http://www.soluschristus.ru/biblioteka/mezhcerkovnye_otnosheniya/predislovie_k_knige/.

In 1992, a new church was built in the village of Koltushi on a hill not far from the old one, the place where the church from centuries past had stood and new church leaders from the 1980s like Aari Kugappi had continued to lead services in the fields despite pressure from KBG agents.³⁸¹ Katri Kukkhonen was 92 years old now, but after all she had endured, she wouldn't miss the dedication of the new church for all the world. The new seminary for what would become the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria was situated just down the hill from the church. It would be named in honor of the pastor whom the communists could never stifle or rattle, Selim Laurikkala. Katri died in January of 2001 at the age of 100, knowing that God had preserved her all those years and allowed her to see a new generation enter the Lutheran Church in her home village.³⁸² The angel of death may have been let loose for a time, but the gates of hell had not prevailed over the church.

At St. Anne's in St. Petersburg, where the Leningrad Lutheran Seminary had conducted classes under Bishop Malmgren's tutelage, a remnant of believing Lutherans gathered to rent the church on Sundays for divine worship. In the intervening years it had been turned into Spartak Theater, but after the fall of communism the sounds of disco pulsed throughout its halls until the wee hours of the morning. Now as a Lutheran pastor from Germany, Heinz Klitzka, prepared students for confirmation, he heard the story of one of his 77 year-old students. Her father had been ordained in this very church on a warm, July Sunday back in 1925 when she was just five years old. All throughout her life the pastor's daughter never forgot the vivid images from that solemn occasion: the sun flooding through the stain-glassed windows, the aroma of the flowers permeating the church and the rising crescendo of the music as her father knelt before the altar to

³⁸¹ *The Path of Faith*, 115; Aari Kugappi to Matthew Heise, May 2007.

³⁸² *The Path of Faith*, 96, 114–116.

be ordained by Bishop Arthur Malmgren. Unable to be confirmed in 1935 due to her father's arrest, she quietly took classes in 1997 to prepare for her long-delayed confirmation. The past and present blended together seamlessly as that little five year-old girl was transformed into a 77 year-old senior citizen. As her tears flowed freely, the elderly woman took her place at the altar amidst teenage and middle-aged believers. Her name was Edith Müthel and her father was the martyred pastor, Emil Pfeiffer. She had come home—at long last.³⁸³

While most of those who had experienced the days of persecution were dying out at the dawn of the new century, there were survivors who could tell a new generation that despite the long years of suffering under communism, God had never abandoned His people. The rising of this phoenix-like Church from the ashes of the communist experiment was proof that the gates of hell had not prevailed, although, as St. John might attest, they did have their “little season.” After Johannes Lel's arrest and expulsion from the Leningrad seminary in 1932, he had been sent to Semipalatinsk in Kazakstan where he worked as an economist. Mobilized for the Soviet Labor Army in 1942 (as a “religious person” and ethnic German), he survived the war and landed a bureaucratic position in Solikamsk as a manager of labor. In the 1990s at the advanced age of 80, Lel was called to serve as a pastor for the Evangelical Lutheran congregation in Solikamsk, Kazakhstan. It was at a Lutheran Church synod in 1998 that he had that encounter with an elderly man who told him that he had been arrested in 1934 just for filling out an application to study at the Leningrad Lutheran seminary.³⁸⁴

Meanwhile, his former classmate, Bruno Torossyan, had also been preserved by God in the intervening years in ways too numerous to mention. Two days before the Soviet Union's entry

³⁸³ Müthel, *I Remember*, 192–193.

³⁸⁴ Lel, “How They Were Trying to Destroy Us,” 12.

into World War II (dated from the June 22, 1941 Nazi Germany attack upon Russia), Bruno was called up for military service. Since his ancestry was half German, Bruno should have been sent from Baku to the so-called Azerbaijani Gulag with the many other Germans (who were feared to be potential supporters of Hitler). But the commander of the resettlement brigade looked at his last name and declared, “What kind of German is this? You’re Armenian!” So while hundreds of other Germans were sent to the Gulag, Bruno remained free and served in the military until the end of World War II. After demobilization, he married and worked as the main accountant for a machine building factory for 38 years until his retirement. When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 and an outbreak of violence against Armenians in Azerbaijan erupted, his family resettled in the Leningrad region of northern Russia.

It was there he began to assist the pastor at Sts. Peter and Paul in Vyborg by leading a seniors’ Bible study class and helping out with church services. Finally, the time had come for him to perform the pastoral duties for which he had been ordained by Bishop Meyer back in 1933!³⁸⁵ At a Lutheran Church synod in Moscow in 1999, the two former classmates, Bruno Torosyan and Johannes Lel, met once again. They had last seen each other 67 years ago. Johannes was now 89; Bruno, 87. Of the 15 students who had entered the Leningrad seminary in 1929, the first year of Stalin’s brutal assault upon the Church, only five had made it to graduation. Of those five, only two lived to see the dawn of the 21st century.

These two witnesses, Johannes Lel and Bruno Torosyan, were the Caleb and Joshua to Lutherans in Russia. Like those Israeli scouts from the Old Testament, it was given to them to glimpse the Promised Land that great prophets like Moses would not see. They were among those for whom Dr. Morehead and Bishops Malmgren and Meyer had fought to preserve the

³⁸⁵ Tanya Ryumina, “May God Preserve You.”

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia. One can only imagine the tears that were shed at that extraordinary meeting, as these two survivors marveled at how the Lord had preserved them and brought them to this moment in time 67 years later. Lel would continue to serve the congregation in Solikamsk, passing away in 2001 at the age of 91. Toryassan would live until the ripe age of 97, his memory intact and his desire to preserve the history of his Lutheran Church strong. This living testimony to God's faithfulness was mourned by both re-established Lutheran churches at his funeral in 2009.³⁸⁶

No doubt Pastors Lel and Torosyan had heard of, if not seen, that extraordinary American Lutheran, Dr. John Morehead. After witnessing the devastation of the Volga region famine in the early 1920s and raising funds to feed the hungry, Morehead simply could not look the other way and ignore what he had seen. Like the Good Samaritan, he had seen his brother in peril and was compelled to help the Lutheran Church fortify itself after the Bolshevik Revolution. He had gathered funds, raised up supporters, and worked tirelessly until the point of exhaustion so that a historic Church could breathe again. He had truly been his brother's keeper. Morehead was always impressed by the courage of those who read the times and prepared their parishioners for the inevitable persecution. Kurt Muss was one of his proteges, a young man who risked his life to feed the hungry in body and soul. Bishops Theophil Meyer and Arthur Malmgren, likewise, drove themselves to physical and spiritual exhaustion for the good of their Lutheran Church. They all seemed to know that the persecution would be severe, but that in the end, the man-made sand castles of Soviet utopianism would not withstand the timelessness of God's Word. John Morehead's biographer and friend, Samuel Trexler, at the height of the persecution in the mid-1930s had hoped: "What a glorious satisfaction it will be if we have been able to keep alive the

³⁸⁶ Lel, "How They Were Trying to Destroy Us," 19.

spark which shall some day leap into the irresistable flame of religious fervor that shall lighten Russia.”³⁸⁷ That hope was kept alive. These remarkable men and women, and so many others named and unnamed in this chronicle, were used by God to sustain the church in times of spiritual famine for the day when it would be revived with the living waters of His Word. That day is now at hand.

³⁸⁷ Trexler, “What of the Church in Russia?”

APPENDIX ONE

Photos from the Dissertation



Kurt Muss Arrest Photo- December 1929 (FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region)



Elena Muss Arrest Photo- December 1929 (FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region)



Mikhail Mudyugin Arrest Photo- January 1930- (FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region)



Dagmara Schreiber Arrest Photo- January 1930- (FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region)



The Ferdinand Hörschelmann, Sr. Family with Friends- Rev. Hörschelmann is in the center, standing, with the large white beard. Seminary professor and pastor, Arnold Frischfeld, is seated on the far right. (Photo courtesy of Hörschelmann's great-granddaughter, Alexandra Nikolaev).



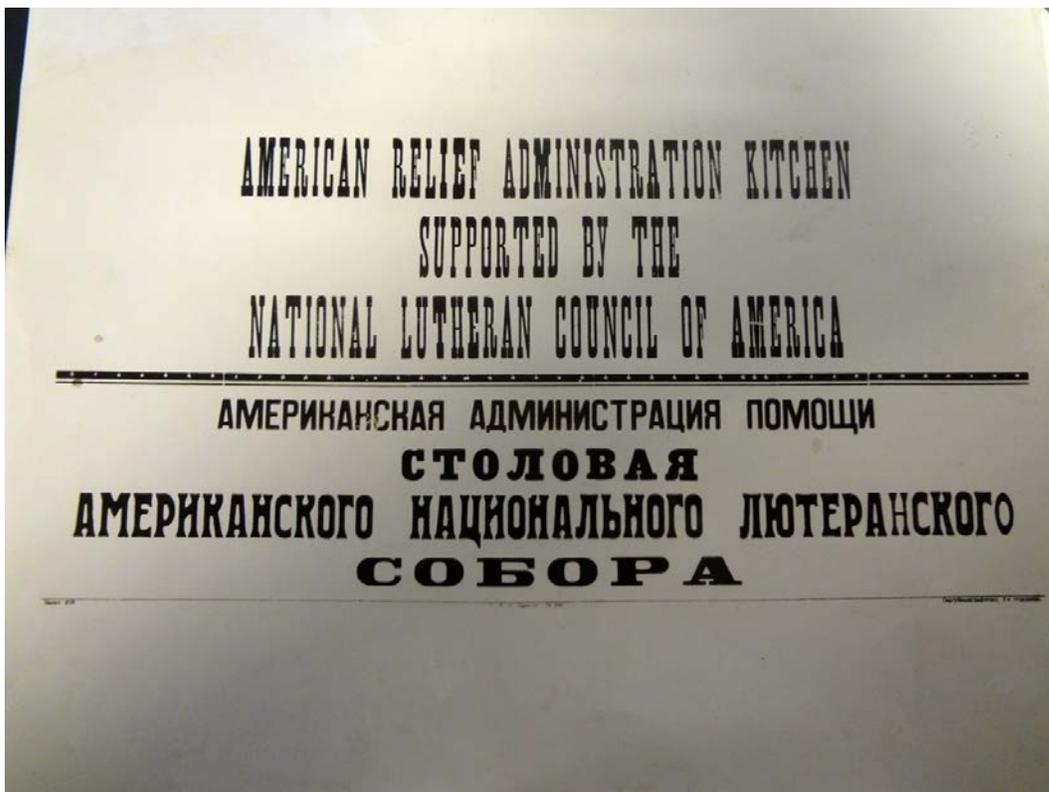
Left to Right: Elenora Schreiber, Mikhail Mudyugin, Ksenia Mudyugina, Dagmara Schreiber Mudyugina (Courtesy of the Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Children's Summer Camp in Strelna- Summer 1929- (Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Students of the Leningrad Lutheran Seminary- 1929- (Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Advertisement of National Lutheran Council Volga Famine Relief- 1922- (Archives of the ELCA)



Latvian Lutheran pastor, Julius Zahlit in early 1930s- (FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region)



Pastor Kurt Muss wearing VDGE pin- Late 1920s- (Courtesy of the Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Rev. Oktav Simon upon his arrest in 1935- (FSB Archives of St. Petersburg Region)



Rev. Alexander Streck upon his arrest in November 1936- (FSB Archives of Moscow Region)



Warenburg, Russia: Site of the last Volga Mission festival 1928 (Photo by author)



The Family of Leningrad Lutheran Seminary dean, Friedrich Wacker—Wacker and his wife were executed in 1941. (Photo courtesy of Wacker's niece, Margarita Schulmeister)

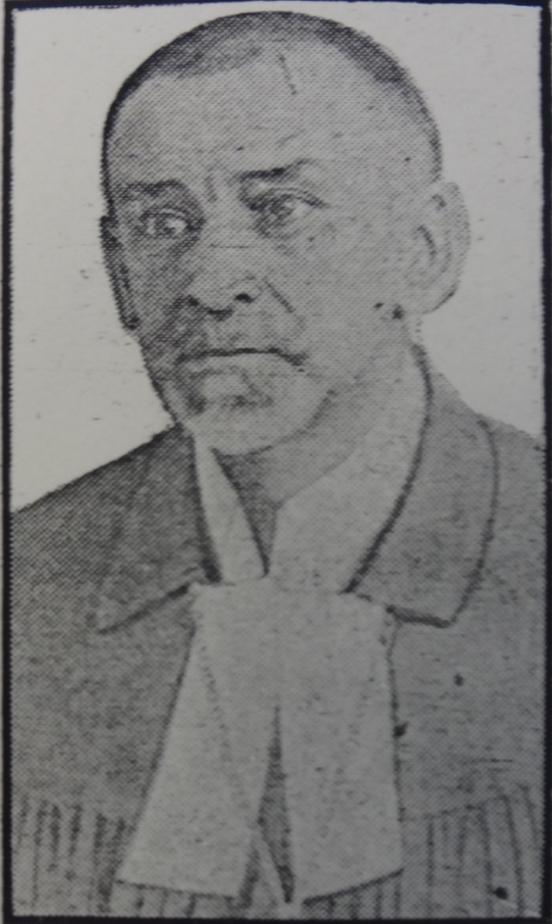
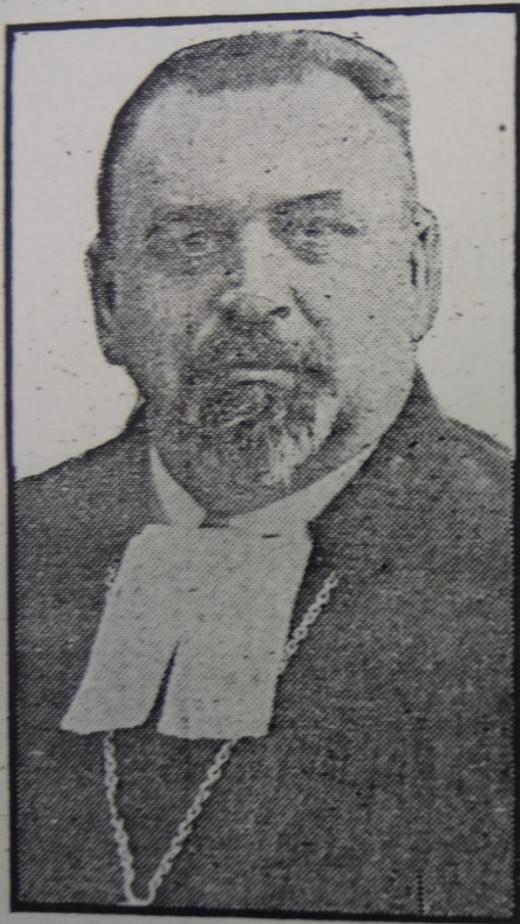


ARA (American Relief Association Director, Herbert Hoover, and NLC representative, W.L. Scheduling (Courtesy Archives of the ELCA)



ARA humanitarian work in Russia (Courtesy Archives of the ELCA)

... and then took to his heels.



As he looked in 1917.

A recent picture.

THE EFFECT OF BOLSHEVISM.—Dr. F. Gruenberg (above), Petrograd bishop, is the only Lutheran minister alive in Russia today out of twelve who went there to labor five years ago. The two photographs show the effects of Red rule on him. He is now receiving aid from the National Lutheran Council of New York.

Bishop Gruenberg of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia (Courtesy Archives of the ELCA)

Январь.

2^{ое} ИЗДАНИЕ

January, 1922
Цена 3 руб.

БЕЗБОЖНИК

РЕДАКЦИЯ: Советская площадь
Новодевичья пер., д. № 3,
тел. 1-99-62.

№ 1.

Орган М. К. Р. К. П.
(большевиков)

С земными царями разделались, принимаемся за небесных.



Господи благослови!

Bezbozhnik- Atheist magazine from the late 1920s (Courtesy of Russian National Library)



Dr. John Morehead (front row, center) with the NLC- (Courtesy Archives of the ELCA)



Dr. John Morehead with the Meyer's on their Volga journey- 1923 (Courtesy of ELCA Archives)

was mit dem
Pastor Hansen geschah, ist
nicht bekannt.

сыновьями неизвестно.



Pastor Helmut Hansen mit seiner Frau Erna und drei Söhnen
(v.l.): Gert (geb. 10.03.1921), Ralf (geb. 6.04.1918) und
Meinhard (geb. 30.11.1923)

Пастор Гельмут Хансен со своей женой и тремя сыновьями

Liebe

Family of Pastor Helmut Hansen (Courtesy *Der Bote*)

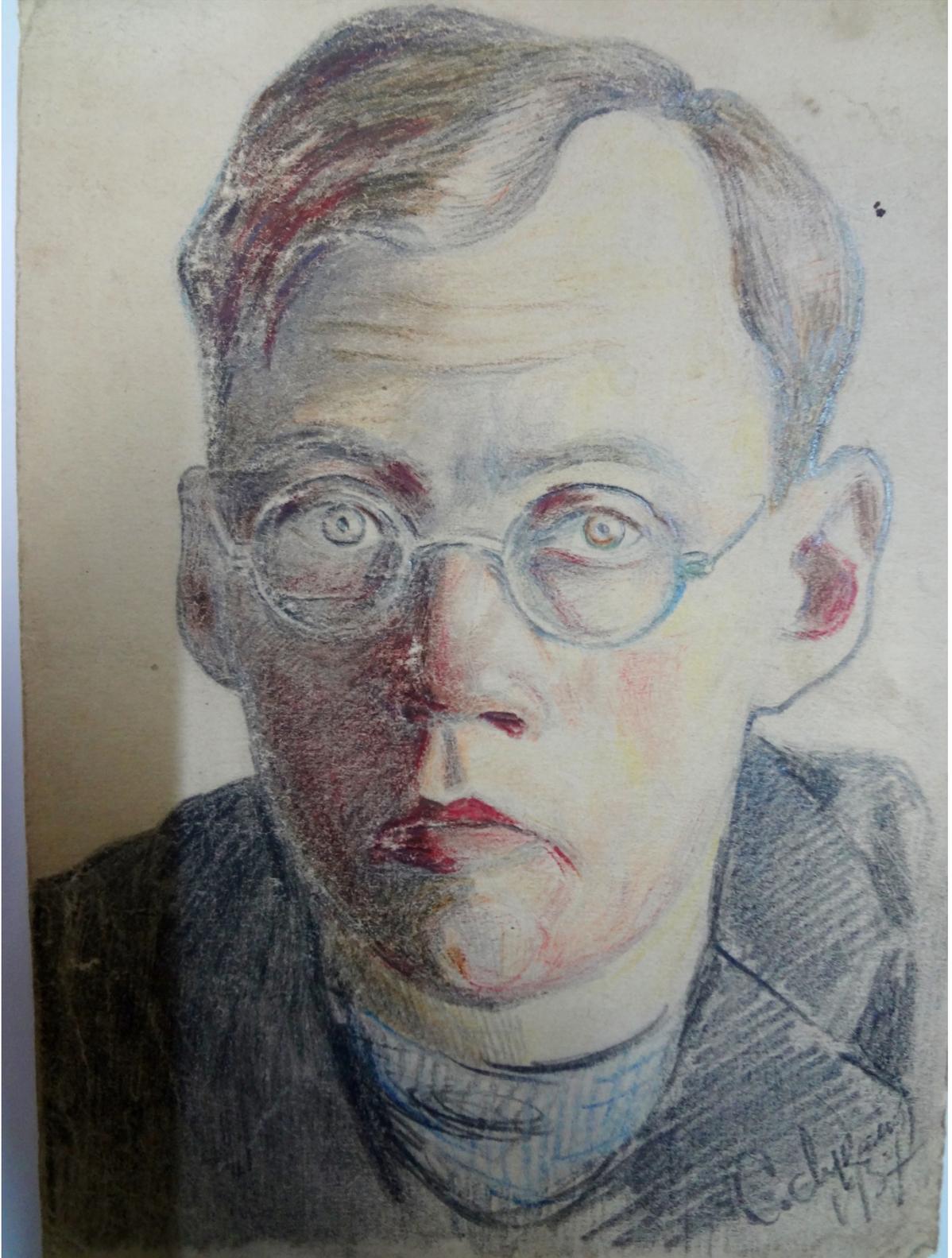


Wedding of Otto Tumm, Leningrad Lutheran seminary student, and Luisa Muss-1932

(Courtesy of the Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Luisa Muss, after her release from the Gulag, with sons-1939 (Courtesy of the Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Last Drawing of Kurt Muss in Gulag (Courtesy of the Muss-Tumm Family Photo Archive)



Matthew Heise with Edith Müthel in her kitchen-St. Petersburg, Russia, 2013 (Photo by author)

Notes on Sources for Research

The topic of the persecution of Lutherans in the Soviet Union has few resources available in English, the bulk of the material being written in German, Finnish and Russian. If one is searching for English sources on Russian Lutheran history, Edgar Duin's *Lutheranism under the Tsars and the Soviets* from 1975 provides some information, much of it gleaned from German sources and it offers a general treatment of Christianity's difficulties under Soviet rule with some discussion of Lutheranism. The Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America contain the papers of Dr. John Morehead, the longtime executive director of the National Lutheran Council. While his papers are in English, the correspondence in the archives from Bishops Theophil Meyer and Arthur Malmgren are in German (with his replies mostly in English). This correspondence is quite useful in order to discover the complications of running a seminary and church in the early years of the USSR.

The earliest secondary sources for this topic are in German, and in particular, Wilhelm Kahle's *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinden in der Sowjetunion, 1917-1938* from 1974. It is an exhaustive study that utilizes German diplomatic files from Bonn (the former Bundesrepublik) as well as church archives from the Evangelical Church of Germany and the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland. Kahle covers a lot of ground in his study but due to the era in which he researched, he had no access to Russian archives. Inevitably, some of the record is incomplete, especially the fate of several of the Lutheran pastors serving in the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s. Helmut Tschoerner has done recent research (2012) and his short book on Bishop Arthur Malmgren (*Arthur Malmgren—Theologe, Pfarrer, Bischof in Russland und der Sowjetunion*) offers solid details on the life of this influential figure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the USSR. Tschoerner has mined the *Gustav Adolf Verein* Archives that contains

Malmgren's correspondence with that institution during his service as bishop in the USSR. There are also several other books in German that focus on particular individuals or regions of the USSR.

Finnish sources have become more plentiful, especially after the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2011. Naturally the focus of this research is almost exclusively on those congregations that worshiped in Finnish, meaning the region around Leningrad known as Ingria. Personal remembrances as well as scholarly books from Finns and Russians on this topic have been published. The magnum opus is *Путь Веры Длинного Востолетий Церкви Ингрии: 400 Лет Истории, 40 Лет без Храмов, 4 Веки Возрождения*), printed in 2012. The entries on Pastor Selim Laurikkala and Katri Kukkhonen are especially helpful in understanding the difficulties of being a faithful Christian in Stalin's USSR.

Of course, to really dig into this topic, a knowledge of Russian is invaluable because this is where the primary sources on this topic are located. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, access to Russian state archives has improved and it is also possible to gain entry to the archives of the FSB (Federal Security Bureau, most famously known as the KGB and called the NKVD in Stalin's time). The two essential Russian authors to read are Olga Litzenberger and Mikhail Shkarovsky. Both utilize German diplomatic sources and cover this topic in extensive detail, but Shkarovsky has had greater access to FSB files. Litzenberger focuses her attention primarily upon the Volga region, although she explores the general scope of the persecution of Lutherans in the USSR. Shkarovsky's focus is upon the region surrounding Leningrad, where most of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia were located. He also discusses the various ethnic groups within the Church in some detail.

To understand the individual histories of pastors and parishioners, the FSB files provide the interrogations by NKVD agents. It is important, though, to understand that accusations of espionage cannot be taken at face value, given the source, so one must read carefully and understand the time frame in which the interrogations were conducted. Nevertheless, the files provide detailed histories of the bravery of these pastors, and the earlier the file (1930, for instance, as opposed to 1937 during Stalin's Great Terror), the more likely the accuracy of the historical record. More recently, descendants have been putting the case studies of their ancestors online. These can usually be accessed through Volga German websites or the website of the Russian human rights organization, Memorial.

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Archives and Libraries Utilized:

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(321 Bonnie Ln, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007)

Central Government Archives of St. Petersburg

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Germans from Russia Archives at North Dakota State University

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