

Science-Religion Dialogue on the Middle Volga East Bank

Gennady A. Kalyabin

Abstract

Answering the question "Why is the history of Russia in 20th century so tragic?" the famous Russian writer, Nobel Prize winner Alexandre I. Solzhenitsin said: "The reason is very simple. The people have forgotten God". The apostasy from the Lord is baneful not only for individuals but also for the large groups of people and for the whole nations. Since the millenium of Russia's baptism (1988), the return to God has begun and spiritual rebirth is now the main factor of modern Russian life which is much more important than economical and political reforms. Among other activities, such as reconstruction of the demolished churches and monasteries, publishing the Holy Scripture and spiritual literature (it was strictly forbidden for many decades), educating new clergymen, the dialogue between science and religion is one of the most essential parts in the restoration of normal spiritual life in Russia.

The point is that during seventy years of communist regime, atheism and materialism were the only official ideological doctrines in Russia, and a huge army of propagandists existed, who tried to convince the audiences that "science has established firmly that there is no God". Many scientific results were declared false, bourgeois or "top secret", other doubtful investigations were advertised as excellent confirmation of materialism. This strange mixture of incomplete knowledge, falsifications, distortions of science results have filled the minds of Soviet people and it remains to be the case today.

In order to correct this situation the Local Society "Through faith we understand" has been created at Samara Orthodox Spiritual Seminary in 1995. Initially the Society involved only Fr Eugene Shestun, Professor Victor Kotlyar of the Image Processing Systems Institute (Russian Academy of Sciences) and the author of this notice. The main TFWU activity is lecturing to believers and non-believers: at the Catechization Courses for adult scientists, engineers, medical workers, administrators, as well as for low educated persons; for students - at Samara Academy of Humanities (which is now the host organization of the Society), Institute of Railway Transportation, Technical University (at these three higher education Institutions the home churches have been recently constructed where the Godservices are regularly conducted), for pupils and - of special importance - for *teachers of secondary schools*, and at short courses at the towns of Samara and neighboring regions (Togliatti, Otradny, Syzran, Melekess etc). Very often such lectures transformed into unconstrained disputes and discussions of different views. Usually such lectures are held two or three times a week. Annually in spring and fall two conferences "Christianity and Science" are held in Samara by the TFWU. The members of the Society participate conferences (local, All-Russian and International): "Bible and Natural Sciences", Moscow, 1991, Biennial Meeting of Association of Christians in Mathematical Sciences, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, 1997, "Faith and Knowledge", Saint-Petersburg, 2000, "Pedagogics and Theology" at the Orthodox Saint Tikhon Theological Institute, Moscow 2001, "Man and Christian world outlook", Simferopol, Crimea, 2001, "Educational Christmas Readings", Moscow 2002, "And the Truth will make you free", Bratislava, 2003.

Protopriest Eugene Shestun has published a 400 page monograph "Orthodox Pedagogics" which is very popular with teachers. The series of popular papers on the

theme "Religious and philosophic aspects of mathematics and natural sciences" was printed by Samara Eparhy magazine "The Spiritual Vis-a-Vis" and by "Samara Orthodox People Newspaper". More than ten brochures were published by Samara Press House (the series named "Way to the Church"), and one brochure, titled just "**Through faith we understand**" - by Sretensky Monastery in Moscow. Many of these publications are presented at the web-site of this monastery www.pravoslavie.ru. The site of the Society itself is now in preparation.

Several programs on natural apologetics have been prepared and broadcast via Samara regional radio. The course of lectures by Fr Eugene on history of Russian religious philosophy was shown by Samara city TV. However there are serious difficulties with TV and radio because general attitude of many Russian mass media to diverse Christian groups is still rather negative (the "heritage" of atheistic education of their leaders). We hope that the support given to us by Metanexus Institute will help to spread our voice to a broader audience.

Biography

Gennady Anatolievich Kalyabin was born Aug 12, 1947 in the city of Kujbyshev (this is the surname of one Communist functionary of Stalin period). The city was a centre of Soviet aviation industry during World War II. Its original name - Samara - was restored in 1992. After graduating from secondary school in 1961 he entered the Kujbyshev Aviation Technicum and after that in 1966 Moscow Physico-Technical Institute which was created in 1946 as a special (top secret!) University to teach researchers and engineers for defence (i.e. military) branches of industry. At the Institute he began to specialize in pure mathematics (Differential Equations & Analysis) which has become his main speciality. Dr. Kalyabin defended his Doctoral Thesis in 1980 at Steklov Institute of Mathematics in Moscow. Since 1973, he has been a teacher at Samara Aerospace University (full Professor since 1985), at the Samara Academy of Humanities (created in 1992) and at Samara Orthodox Spiritual Seminary (re-opened in 1994 after 77 years of atheistic regime). Dr. Kalyabin has published more than 60 papers in math and a dozen in natural apologetics; he has participated in 100 mathematical conferences (including World Congresses at Kyoto, Zuerich and Newark, Delaware) and 10 meetings in theology. He chairs the Samara Local Society, Through Faith We Understand. In 1969, Dr. Kalyabin married Ekaterina Andreevna Kalyabina, and he has two daughters and seven grandchildren.

Answering the question "Why is the history of Russia in 20th century so tragic?" the famous Russian writer, Nobel Prize winner Alexandre I. Solzhenitsin said: "The reason is very simple. The people have forgotten God". The apostasy from the Lord is baneful not only for individuals but also for the large groups of people and for all nations. Since the millenium of the Russia's baptism (1988) the return to God has begun and spiritual rebirth is now a main factor of modern Russian life which is much more important than economic and political reforms. Among other activities, such as reconstruction of demolished churches and monasteries, publishing the Holy Scripture and spiritual literature (it was strictly forbidden for many decades), and educating new clergymen, the dialogue between science and religion is one of the most essential part in restoration of normal spiritual life in Russia.

During seventy years of communist regime atheism and materialism were the only official ideological doctrines in Russia. A huge army of propagandists existed, to convince audiences that "science has established firmly that there is no God". Many scientific results were declared false, bourgeois or "top secret". Other doubtful investigations were advertised as confirmation of materialism. This strange mixture of incomplete knowledge, falsifications, and distortions of science results have filled the minds of Soviet people and it remains the case until recently.

In order to correct this situation the Local Society "Through Faith We Understand" (TFWU) was created at Samara Orthodox Spiritual Seminary in 1995. Initially, the Society involved only Fr Eugene Shestun, Professor Victor Kotlyar of the Image Processing Systems Institute (Russian Academy of Sciences) and Dr. Gennady A. Kalyabin. The main TFWU activity involved speaking to believers and non-believers at the

Catechization Courses for adult scientists, engineers, medical workers, administrators, as well as for lay persons; presentations for students - at Samara Academy of Humanities (the host organization of the society), the Institute of Railway Transportation, Technical University. Of special importance to us are our presentations to the teachers of secondary schools, and short courses offered in the towns of Samara and neighboring regions (Togliatti, Otradny, Syzran, Melekess etc). At the three higher education institutions, home churches have been recently constructed where services are regularly conducted. Very often, such talks transform into unconstrained disputes and discussions of different views. Usually, talks and discussions are held two or three times a week. Annually, in spring and fall, two conferences "Christianity and Science" are held in Samara by the TFWU. The members of the Society have also participated in many All-Russian and International conferences to broaden the perspectives shared.

Members of the group have produced several articles and works. Protopriest Eugene Shestun has published a 400-page monograph entitled "Orthodox Pedagogics" which has proven very popular with teachers. The series of popular papers on the theme "Religious and philosophic aspects of mathematics and natural sciences" was printed by Samara Eparhy magazine, "The Spiritual Vis-a-Vis", and "Samara Orthodox People Newspaper". More than ten brochures were published by Samara Press House (the series named "Way to the Church"), and one brochure titled after the society itself: "Through faith we understand" by Sretensky Monastery in Moscow. Many of these publications are presented at the website of the monastery www.pravoslavie.ru. The site of the Society itself is now in preparation.

Several programs on natural apologetics have been prepared and broadcast via Samara regional radio, for the purpose of further outreach.

The course of lectures by Fr Eugene on history of Russian religious philosophy was shown by Samara city TV. However, there are serious difficulties with TV and radio because general attitude of many Russian mass media to diverse Christian groups is still rather negative; the apparent "heritage" of the atheistic education of their leaders. We hope that the support given to us by Metanexus Institute's Local Societies Initiative will help to spread our voice to a broader audience.

Gennady A. Kalyabin is a lecturer of Natural Apologetics at Samara Academy of Humanities, and Samara Orthodox Seminary. He formerly taught Mathematics at Samara State Aerospace University. Dr. Kalyabin serves as chair of the Samara Local Society "Through Faith We Understand".

Photo Credits: Gennady A. Kalyabin



pict1 The dispute "Faith, doubt, unbelief" with the students of Samara Academy of Humanities <Nov 19, 2003>



pict2 Chair of the Orthodox Pedagogics: in the centre
 - Archbishop Sergy of Samara and Syzran. Left of him
 - Fr Eugene Shestun



pict3 Archbishop Sergy sanctifies the home church
 at Samara Academy of Humanities <March 2002>



pict4 Eric Weislogel - Metanexus Institute (left) and
 Gennady Kalyabin (right) at Moscow conference dedicated
 to 150-th anniversary of Russian religious thinker
 Vladimir Soloviev <Sept 2003>



pict5 Left to right - Profs Alexandre Yuschchenko, Gennady Kalyabin
 and Ivan Tsekhmistro at Bratislava conference <Febr 2003>



pict6 The conference at Bratislava is over <Febr 2003>



pict7 Head of the Joint Committee on religious education
hieromonk Fr Cyprian Yaschenko at Kremlin State Palace
(opening ceremony of the Christmas Readings, Jan 2003)



pict8 Samara Academy of Humanities. Administrative building
(former kindergarten)



pict9 Samara Orthodox Spiritual Seminary. Built in 1908.
During Soviet was used as secondary school and
Pioneers' Palace. Re-opened in 1994.