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## Bishop reflects on journey to Lutheranism

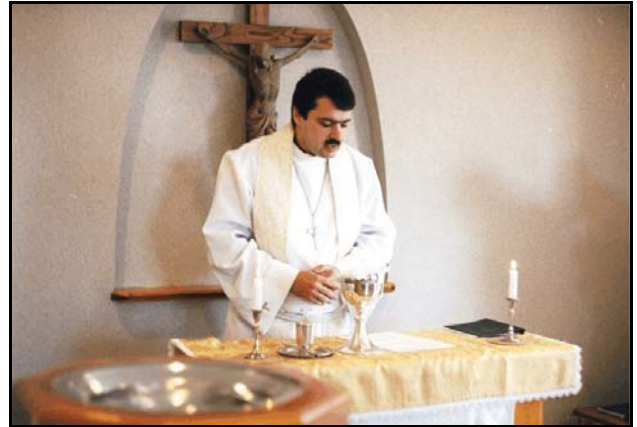
By Valerie Kister

Bishop Vsevolod Lytkin's first lessons in religion didn't come from a church or a Lutheran school. Instead, he considers that in some ways those first lessons came when he was a child, falling asleep to the sound of his parents listening to the radio broadcasts of Voice of America.

"My parents taught me to study by myself, in my own mind; not to trust official propaganda," Lytkin said. "The intelligentsia were not Soviet-minded."

Born into a scientific research community in Novosibirsk (both of his parents held doctorates in mathematics), Lytkin was consecrated bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church on May 6, 2007.

The Church was never fully rooted out in the former Soviet Union. "Many old religion-groups were somewhere underground," Lytkin explained, **Continued on page 3**



## Catechism available in Khakassian language

by Pavel Zayakin

translated by Alexei Streltsov

A true historical event happened in Sayanogorsk, second largest town in Khakassia. The first edition of the Luther's Small Catechism in Khakassian language was presented at the conference hall of Aylans Center of Khakassian Culture. The Catechism was published by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation in cooperation with the parish of Saint Luke (Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, SELC).

Government officials, visitors from local community, journalists, and representatives of different Christian churches gathered on that day to hear about this new book and receive a free copy.

Pastor Pavel Zayakin, senior pastor of Saint Luke parish in Abakan and Ascension parish in Sayanogorsk, opened the presentation. He spoke about history of Small Catechism, its value, and shared with people how this idea of translating this little book to Khakassian language came about.

"There are our Lutheran parishes both in big cities and in the rural areas. In some of these villages our parishioners are Khakassian nationals. The Khakassian language serves as language of their social communication. So I had this thought that it would be right to deliver the basics of Christian faith to these people in their own language", said Pavel Zayakin.

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*The following sermon was preached by Vsevolod Lytkin, May 6, 2007, in Tallinn, Estonia at the Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on the occasion of his consecration as Bishop of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church.*

## SERMON ON CANTATE SUNDAY

Fathers, brothers and sisters, I would like to begin my sermon with a quote from the song of a famous bard of the Soviet time:

*I remember, I was silly and young,  
I heard from my parent  
How my parent destroyed  
The Church of Christ the Saviour.*

You know, this is not black Russian humour. There is history in these words, history of my country of Russia as well as history of your country of Estonia, since by the evil destiny you were forced to share our sufferings with us. For over 50 years you were part of the Soviet Union, the country that was founded by hangmen and czar-murderers.

This country is no more. We now live in free democratic countries. Still, almost all of us have “come out” of that Soviet time. Some people were touched more by this, others less. Somebody tried to oppose the regime, others have realized all the terror of the Soviet system only after its fall.

“I remember I was silly and young.” From Christian perspective, one realizes that the most terrible thing was that such a great multitude of people was born in unbelief. They lived all their life in unbelief and the most terrible thing is that they also died in unbelief. I don't like to speak about politics, particularly while preaching, but it's impossible to forget those times. I remember them especially when I visit Estonia, as it was here that all my Christian life began at that time.

Just like many others, I was looking for God. I remember how “silly and young” I was, yet, gradually, little by little, I began to seek answers to *eternal questions*. My family was not Christian. Nevertheless, my parents taught me not to trust Soviet propaganda, and so I did not. Since Soviet propaganda said that God does not exist, it seemed quite likely that He does. Thus my Christian faith began due to my parents, though they did not tell me about God directly.

Like many other people at that time, we also understood that it was impossible for God not to exist. What would one live for if one's life is limited to earth, not even in a sense that we are just temporary dwellers on this earth, but, as one priest once wrote, “if there is no God... then all humankind is found collectively not on earth, but in the earth, in our common grave.”

I understood little of religion, but I knew that there must be something besides this material world, in which we live, only to die.

I purchased books, atheistic books, for there were no other ones at the time, and I tried to find quotations from the Bible in them, words about God, and I found them and tried to understand. Obviously, the atheists quoted the Word of God only for critique. But, after all, we were *Soviet* people – we got used to interpreting all things official backwards.

Finally, God's grace led me to Estonia. Here I met Christians for the first time in my life. I will never forget how I talked to an old man who was the guard at the Holy Spirit Church. Then I spoke with the wife of Pastor Jaan Kiivit, and finally with the pastor himself.

I was 20 when I came here for the first time in order to find the Lutheran church. I did not know anybody. I had virtually no money, and I lived at the train station for a week and memorized Luther's Catechism.

I would never dare do that now. But then I came back to the train station every evening and tried to find a seat on a bench in the waiting hall area. There were a limited number of seats. I was surrounded mostly by similar poor travelers, and also alcoholics and homeless

people. It is so strange to recall it now. But I learnt the Catechism, and then Jaan Kiivit baptized me. This is how my Christian life began here in Estonia during the old Soviet era.

*I remember, I was silly and young,  
I heard from my parent  
How my parent destroyed  
The Church of Christ the Saviour.*

You know, these words are perfectly descriptive of the Soviet life! Certainly, *my* parents did not participate directly in the destruction of Christianity, but a number of people participated on a *global scale* in the construction of society with no room for God. Wily rulers deceived them by promises of earthly paradise, and they gullibly followed them.

Afterwards it was too late. Millions of Christians were tortured in prison camps;

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# Bishop addresses challenges

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noting that there were also official or “open” Russian Orthodox and Baptist churches.

These congregations stemmed from decisions made by Josef Stalin in 1943 in order to receive American aid.



**Lytkin and mother at age 2**

The U.S. government required demonstration of visible religious freedom before giving the funds. Stalin selected some Orthodox congregations (representing typical Russian religion) and a few Baptist (representing what he saw as typical American religion) to prove religious freedom existed. Lytkin said these

congregations were similar to the “open” Catholic churches in today’s China—Christian in name, but controlled by the Communist leadership.

Still, for Lytkin, theological education started by using official, atheistic books. Many of these books used biblical quotes with the intention of refuting them. The trick was to read the books as many Soviets did—“You must understand the opposite of what is said,” Lytkin explained.

When visiting Soviet Republic of Latvia on a vacation with his mother at 16, Lytkin was interested in the many churches he saw. He began looking for information on denominations, often getting it from a Soviet atheistic dictionary on religion. He attended an Orthodox congregation, but said, “This was not a way of Christianity I understood.”

When Lytkin finally looked for a Lutheran congregation in 1987, he tried to return to Latvia for baptism. Since no train tickets were from Leningrad to Riga in Latvia, he headed to Tallinn in Estonia instead and met a Lutheran pastor’s wife who told him, “Lutheranism is the religion of well-educated people.”

The pastor (who later became the Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church) gave Lytkin his first Small Catechism—which was a binder of photographed pages from a Russian language catechism. After studying it for two days at the train station, Lytkin was baptized. “He must have had some foreknowledge,” Lytkin said, laughing. “If a young man came to me like that today, I don’t know if I would do that.”

Very few of Lytkin’s friends shared his interest in Lutheranism. Although many were interested in spiritual things, some of them turned to cults instead of Christianity.

Gradually, though, a group gathered around Lytkin to study the Bible. Lytkin was ordained as a pastor in Estonia at 1993, and passed his theological exams in 1996 and received his pectoral cross [Ed. note—This is an Estonian tradition, similar to when a man receives a stole at his ordination in this country].

Lytkin was eventually elected as bishop-elect of the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was several years before he could be consecrated, as the bishop who was to consecrate him died. Lytkin’s consecration was also opposed by the Lutheran World Federation, as the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church does not practice the ordination of women.

New challenges have arisen for the Church since the collapse of communism in Russia. “There are many difficulties because of our Soviet past,” Lytkin said. Some people don’t think their children need to be taught differently than they were. Others, although officially members of various denominations, simply don’t come to church.

In Novosibirsk, a city of 1.7 million people, there are only about 60 churches. Of these, only four are Lutheran of some type. Lytkin said one big challenge facing the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church is finding ways to bring non-religious or non-practicing people to the church. “You have to change your mentality. The Soviet Union took it (church attendance) out of our heads,” Lytkin said. “It’s difficult to change after living your whole life with no church.”

Another difficulty within the Church is the lack of trust. For example, Lytkin said confession and absolution are hard to understand after a lifetime of keeping things secret from nearly everyone. “It was dangerous to speak,” he said.

Yet, Lytkin said Western denominations like Lutheranism appeal to those coming from intelligentsia backgrounds. The people understand what is being said in a congregation where the liturgy is linear (moving from point to point) rather than circular, as with Orthodox congregations.

Lytkin hopes to see continued growth in the Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church, both in terms of congregations and membership.

But the growth must happen, he said, with Christ remaining at the heart of the Church’s teachings. “If it will be so, I will feel satisfied, that it will not be for nothing,” he said. ☒



**Lytkin with wife, Daria, on visit to Tallinn, Estonia in 1990s**

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**IF IT WILL BE SO, I WILL FEEL SATISFIED,  
THAT IT WILL NOT BE FOR NOTHING**

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# Cantate Sunday

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thousands of churches were blown up and demolished. To be sure, the Orthodox Church suffered the most, but other confessions also shared in that horrible slaughter. You know, we have no Lutheran church buildings left in Siberia. All that could be destroyed was destroyed. The last Lutheran church building – St. Peter's in Barnaul – was destroyed in the early '70s.

So, what a grace has been given to us that this regime did not outlive us, but, rather, we outlived it! And we have not become only passive witnesses of its end but rather participants of building a new life.

It is so, because God placed us in the ministry in His Church. We save people's souls through the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments. Can there be anything more wonderful than this task? But all this is not of us; it is only due to Christ. It is He who came to us with His Word. However little this word was to be seen in the articles in the atheistic books, nevertheless, God helped us to see His Word there.

And He called us through this Word, just as we read in today's Gospel:

**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden...** (Mt. 11: 28a)

The Word of God always fulfills that, for which God sends it.

One believed secretly, and then he began to believe openly. Another remembered the faith of his parents. And yet another began to seek and he found. You can meet such people, laymen and priests, in every parish. One of my colleagues almost joined the Communist Party, but he heard the Gospel and was captivated by this news to such an extent, that he finally left everything, took his wife and children and a box of potatoes, and went to work as a missionary, and then he became a priest. This is how miraculously God acts in our lives.

Today's sermon is based on the Old Testament reading in our church lectionary. It is taken from the twelfth chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah. This chapter describes the joy of deliverance, but it is not limited to *description*; it is rather a praise song of God's people, gratitude to God for His miraculous gifts.

It is obvious that this song of praise had a liturgical meaning, because one may see a number of parallels here with the other hymns of praise, most notably with the *Hallel* psalms that the Old Testament Church was singing at the Passover (and other celebrations) while thanking God for the gift of deliverance.

Our chapter has much in common with Psalm 118. As you may remember, we sang this Psalm on Easter Sunday.

**The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. ...I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation.** (Ps. 118: 14, 21)

Salvation is a major theme of both the Psalter and today's text from Isaiah. The key word here is *yoshuakh*, which is related to the name of our Saviour:

**Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.** (Is. 12: 2)

We also sing another part of Psalm 118 every Sunday. We sing "Blessed is he who comes in the names of the Lord!" when we greet Christ who comes to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

God comes to save us. Just as the people of old had been saved from Egyptian slavery, so also we have been saved from the slavery of sin and death through the death and Resurrection of the Son of God Jesus Christ.

Christ – Joshua – has become our salvation. He has come to us in order to bring liberty to the oppressed and to give rest to all who labor and are heavy laden:

**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.** (Mt. 11: 28- 30)

That is:

Come to me, all who carry heavy burdens of life,  
And I will give you rest...

Take *my* yoke, not yours. Take *my* burden, not yours.

The "yoke" that our Lord gives to us is quite unlike those yokes to which we are accustomed to bearing in this world. There is no violence and oppression here, as Christ is gentle and lowly in heart.

It is not difficult to see here an idea of *blessed exchange*, so loved by Luther. Those carrying their burdens may take them off their shoulders and take another one, which is of Christ. Those tired and looking for rest may find it with Christ, Son of God who humbled himself, took the form of a servant, and also took our sins upon himself so that he could present his righteousness to us.

He brings salvation to us as a gift. He does not require from us to redeem our own sins, but grants forgiveness to repentant sinners at every liturgy. And it is only in Him that a soul of a sinner who is thirsty for forgiveness and reconciliation with God may find rest:

**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.** (Mt. 11:29-30)

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**ONE OF MY COLLEAGUES ALMOST JOINED THE COMMUNIST PARTY, BUT HE HEARD THE GOSPEL AND WAS CAPTIVATED BY THIS NEWS TO SUCH AN EXTENT, THAT HE FINALLY LEFT EVERYTHING, TOOK HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN AND A BOX OF POTATOES, AND WENT TO WORK AS A MISSIONARY, AND THEN HE BECAME A PRIEST. THIS IS HOW MIRACULOUSLY GOD ACTS IN OUR LIVES.**

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As children we were taught that only obedient children receive the gifts. However, the gifts of *God* are given to us without any qualifications or conditions. God does not postpone His grace until *people* do something. God freely gives His blessings. (If I have to become somebody or do



**Archbishop Jaan Kivit awards Lytkin his pectoral cross after theological exams, Oct 25, 1996.**

something for my salvation, if I have to *earn* salvation, then there is no grace here but only unrealizable Law.)

We can do nothing to be saved. Lord, nevertheless, does not require it from us. He came and died for us and rose even before we were born. He still continues to come and serve to us by giving His true Body and Blood to us at the Eucharist. Through these He strengthens our faith and gives us power to follow Him into the Kingdom of His Father.

**With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.** (Is. 12: 3)

Remember your baptism now. Remember how God accepted you and how you become a Christian. Maybe, we do not remember it often, but today God gives us a new opportunity to thank Him and rejoice that water from the wells of salvation was poured also on us, that we are saved, and that nobody may snatch us from the hands of Christ.

**And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name; make known his deeds among the nations, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth."** (Is. 12: 4- 5)

God always make great things, even if it seems to us at times that He is idle. Isaiah wrote at a terrible time, when [Israel's] enemies were threatening to destroy God's people. The strong ones of this world attempted to destroy the chosen nation and her monotheistic faith. The hearers of Isaiah may have found it difficult to believe that their God would be known in all the earth. The ancient prophesies are, generally speaking, an unusual thing. They

are spoken, and then time seemingly stops for ages until it finally wakes up and resumes moving. The powerful ones think that all the power is in their hands. Therefore they create empires and call cities in their honour, they build monuments and mausoleums for themselves. But in the end, it turns out that time is not in their hands. Time is in God's hands.

A day comes when that which seemed indestructible and unshakeable is destroyed. People in all the earth are given knowledge of God, acquire faith, come to Church, get baptized, bring their children. The Church grows – this is how God acts in our lives.

**Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.** (Is. 12: 6)

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is in the midst of us. We are able to hear His Word and partake of him. He comes so close to us in the sacrament of Eucharist that we can even touch him. Eucharist does not only connect us to Christ, but also unites us with each other.

It is so wonderful to have spiritual fellowship with the brothers with whom we share a common faith. However, the special character of this day for us Siberian people is that not only have we been *one in faith* with the Church of Estonia for a long time, but we have also been a part of her. Now we become the autocephalous church. Still, though we are independent, Church of Estonia will always remain a spiritual mother to us. No matter what happens, we will always remember the many years in which you cared for us.

No matter what happens... We went through a number of things together. And who knows what else we will have to go through? We know how the church buildings, even those that are large and sturdy are destroyed. We know also how fragile temples of human lives are destroyed. It



**Lytkin's ordination, Feb. 11, 1993, in Estonia**

happened often – and who knows? – it may happen again. Who knows what the future has in store for us. Global warming, materialism, street extremism, Islamic terrorism, liberal theology – there are so many terrifying and deadly things around us! Christ is among us, both now and forever. Neither death nor hell nor the devil may change that. We will receive forgiveness of sins, rest, and a blessed eternity in Christ. Amen. ✕

# Catechism

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Mr. Elijah Topoyev, who translated the Catechism into Khakassian language, told the people also about the history of translation of New Testament translation into



**Khakassian musician**

Khakassian language. "Through the Word of God I came to faith and now I know that it is beneficial also to my brothers to be able to read the Gospel in their native language", he said.

Then "Altyn sustar" local folk music band of Khakassian State University Music College also took part in presentation. They performed several Khakassian songs accompanied by folk musical instruments.

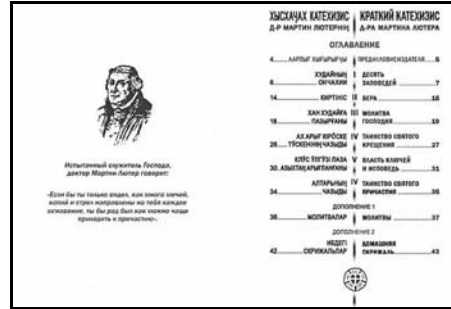
Professor Alan Ludwig (Lutheran

Theological Seminary, Novosibirsk) expressed his comment about the Small Catechism edition in the Khakassian language: "The catechism is one of the great treasures of the Christian Church. For Lutherans, the Small Catechism serves as a bridge between the public liturgy and private prayer and meditation. It is a summary not only of biblical doctrine, but also of the liturgy of word and sacrament. When we read the Catechism, we repeat many of the same words and prayers that we hear and speak during the Divine Service, Matins and Vespers, and at baptisms and in private confession. Thus the Small Catechism is not meant only for children. As Dr. Martin Luther said, adults also will find in it more than enough to learn, believe, and pray throughout life.

"During Holy Week, Christians meditate particularly on their sins, and also on the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. Here the Small Catechism can be of help. 'Who can discern his errors?' No one. But from the Ten

Commandments we begin to understand the horror of our sins and of our sinful condition, and we see the wrath of God caused by sin. In the Creed we learn of God's mercy

toward sinners, and how he sent his Son into the world. 'Jesus Christ ... true God ... and also true man ... is my Lord, who has redeemed me ... purchased and won me ... not with gold and silver, but with

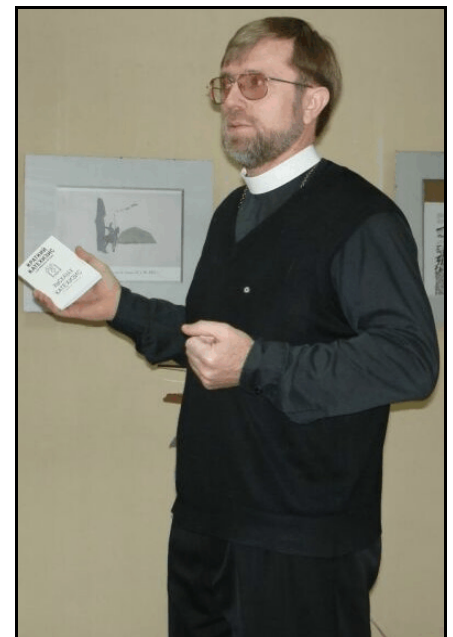


his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.' And so for us the passion of Christ becomes not only sorrow, but above all a cause of rejoicing--for we believe that Jesus Christ died 'for us.' In the words of the 'Our Father' we correctly ask for help and forgiveness.

Further on in the Catechism we see how God answers our petition: through Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar Jesus comes to us, cleanses us, clothes us in his own

righteousness, and abides in us and we in him as he nourishes us with his own body and blood--in a word, he bestows upon us all the good fruits of his death. All of this is included in the Small Catechism. In it is found the true meaning of Holy Week."

We ask you to pray for the spread of the Christian faith among the nations in Siberia. May God bless you, dear friends! ✠



**Rev. Pavel Zayakin**

From the Editor: The Siberian Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC) continues to grow and be a place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the Holy Sacraments provided for sinners seeking forgiveness and healing of body and soul. In the newsletters of [THE SIBERIAN LUTHERAN MISSION SOCIETY \(SLMS\)](#) the members of the SELC reveal their faith and hopes. They are Russians seeking an answer to challenges and problems in their lives. They are a people who have been called by Christ in the healing waters of Holy Baptism and fed by the holy precious food of His body and blood. They may speak a different language but they are all baptized in the name of the same LORD and eat and drink the same Jesus. These are a people who know the mission of the Church – a mission which begins and finds its conclusion in the Word and Sacraments properly administered. We invite you to read this newsletter with a prayer of divine grace for our Lutheran brothers and sisters in Siberia. Their challenges in a land of pagan Buddhism, shamanism, and atheism is great. Your prayers and continuing support is appreciated.

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