



My Beloved Russia

A Story of God's Love for a
Persecuted People

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1

Introducing Professor Dimitry Mustafin

Sometimes a little incident takes place and you know you will never forget it. In July 2002, in the vast tent at the Keswick Convention, I watched with interest as the Chairman brought a gentleman forward to introduce him to the crowd of over 3,000 people. Professor Dimitry Mustafin, we were told, was from Moscow. He was asked just two or three questions, from which we learned that he was a Christian and President of the Moscow Gideon Camp, and that much of his free time was spent distributing Gideon Bibles. My heart burned. Probably all of those present had prayed for Russia for years, asking the Lord to break through the seemingly impenetrable Iron Curtain that separated West from East, the known from the unknown, Christianity from Communism. We had prayed that Russians might be converted and become missionaries to their own people, because missionaries from outside could not get in to tell the good news that Jesus Christ is the Saviour. Now, in Keswick, I was watching and listening to the answer to my prayers! Dimitry Mustafin had been converted, and he was a missionary to his own people! I cannot begin to describe how I felt. Professor Mustafin, a quiet

7





My Beloved Russia

and unassuming man, was the embodiment of answered prayer, and my heart rejoiced. I have no doubt that there were many in the tent that day who remember it as clearly as I do, many who are still thanking God for hearing and answering the prayers of his people. If my eyes shone when I turned and told my husband, Angus, that I wanted to know more about this man, it was with sheer joy and amazement at the majesty of God.

The following day I discovered that Professor Mustafin was speaking in one of Keswick's churches. From the number who were gathered there to hear him, it was clear that not only my heart had been moved. Unfortunately the tape-recording system did not work that day, but what follows in the remainder of this chapter is his testimony as told on another occasion.

When I was young, I expected to meet many British people as I was told at school that Great Britain and the United States of America were going to start a war against my country, and against me. So from my childhood, I was waiting for soldiers to come to my country from Britain and America. That was why I studied English, the language of my enemies, in order to be able to fight against them. I can't say that I enjoyed studying English very much, because every time I got excellent marks in English my schoolmates called me insulting nicknames. They called me 'British spy'. 'Why do you study English so hard; do you want to co-operate with the Intelligence Service?' my classmate, Sasha, used to ask me. I hated such questions. I loved my Motherland, and I never thought that I could have friends in the United Kingdom or in the United States – countries that, I knew from school, were united against the USSR and against me.

I was taught at school that Jesus Christ is a hero of fairy tales, like Pinocchio, like Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood. We learned that the Bible was a collection of fairy tales, forbidden fairy tales. I liked fairy tales and, when I asked my teacher why





Introducing Professor Dimitry Mustafin

these fairy tales were forbidden, she answered that they were forbidden because they were written for stupid and crazy people that did not like their Motherland. I liked my Motherland; I was not stupid, and I believed my teachers because I loved them and trusted them.

As I was a good student, I was awarded a Gold Medal from the Russian Ministry of Education for getting top marks in all subjects at school. Then I never had any good marks during my five years at university, I had only excellent marks in all subjects. When I was still young, I completed my Ph.D. work, published several important investigations in the field of inorganic and physical chemistry, and gained a position as a university professor. While I was working as a professor, I was invited to work at the famous chemical laboratory in the University of Milan. And, most remarkably, I was given permission to go to Italy! At that time it was very rare for Russian scientists to go abroad to work, and I felt very honoured. I also felt that my Motherland trusted me and appreciated my work and behaviour.

It was more than a Nobel Prize for me. It was a great time. I worked in Italy in that famous chemical laboratory with famous scientists – and I was very proud of myself. During the working weeks I was busy with my investigations and very excited with my results. But at weekends the university was closed, and I really suffered during my free time. I had no friends or relatives near me. The Government had not allowed my wife and daughter to go with me, as they were sure that we would never return to Russia. So during my weekends I felt that I was completely forgotten and forsaken by everyone.

Once, when I was having a black Saturday, I went to have lunch at the 'Menza', a cheap restaurant at the university. Near the entrance there was a man standing beside a table covered with books, all of them written in Italian. But then I discovered that one book on that table was in Russian! It was a great





My Beloved Russia

surprise for me. How could there be a Russian book in an Italian university courtyard? In 1986 it was very hard to find Russian books in Italian shops apart from a few prestigious bookstores in the centre of the city.

'Somebody is thinking about me', immediately came into my mind. I picked up the book and read the title – 'Biblia' – 'The Bible'. It was the forbidden book that I had not to read. That's why it seemed very attractive. I opened the book, and the first words that I read in it were like a message for me, 'You are my Father, my God' (Ps. 89).

My father, Isaac Mustafin, was a famous scientist, but he died when I was a child. And all my life I suffered because I had no father, because there was no person who could help me, no one who could answer my burning questions, who could save me from my troubles. I suffered because there would never be a person near me whom I could call my father. All my life I had that deep pain, the pain of my father's absence. And that forbidden book was speaking to me about my father. I closed the book and looked at the man who was standing near the table. He was smiling.

'You can take it if you want; it is a gift for you. It's free of charge,' said the smiling man.

I took the book, put it in my pocket so that nobody could see that I had a forbidden book, and ran away, forgetting that I was going to have my lunch at the university restaurant! I missed my lunch, but I really enjoyed reading the Bible. Reading it was addictive.

What I most enjoyed in it was the idea that I have a Father, and that my Father in heaven will never die, that he will never forsake me or forget about me. It was great! All my life I had suffered because I had no father, but the book told me that I have a Father. It told me that my heavenly Father is rich and strong, and he is always looking after me.





Introducing Professor Dimitry Mustafin

‘...God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope...’ (2 Thess. 2:16).

Reading that forbidden Bible really encouraged me. And then I remembered that I was in such a hurry to run away from the university with the book that I had not thanked the smiling man for such a nice and rare gift. I tried to find him again by going to the university restaurant for lunches and dinners every day, and finally met him again the following Saturday. I wanted to speak to him so much. But my Italian was so awful at the time that the smiling man was not able to understand me. I tried to speak English, but his English seemed so awful that I was not able to understand him. Later I discovered that he was an American! His name was Martin Ditmar.

I was upset that the first man in Italy whom I wanted to be my friend was actually an enemy – an American enemy. And when he invited me to church, I understood that he was an American spy. Only an American spy would invite a Russian scientist to the forbidden place – to a church. I was very disappointed and refused to join him on his trip to the church. But he wanted to recruit me to the American Intelligence Service, or so I believed, and he did not let me go. He started to speak about tasty homemade food prepared by his wife, about American apple-pie and cucumber sandwiches that he had at his house. I remembered about cucumber sandwiches in books by Oscar Wilde, and I had heard about delicious American apple-pie. It all sounded very attractive.

So after a period of temptation I decided, ‘Why not, I will only try their food. Nobody will ever know that I have done this. Anyway, cucumbers are very cheap and maybe I will learn how to make these sandwiches myself, then I could save some money by making my own sandwiches and buy a pair of jeans for someone in my family with the money I save. No, I will never betray my Motherland; he will never be able to recruit





My Beloved Russia

me for the American Intelligence Service. There is nothing bad in once trying American apple-pie and cucumber sandwiches as described by Oscar Wilde.'

So I accepted the invitation and we made an appointment for that evening. The American came with a car to collect me and after a short drive we arrived at his home. His wife, Brenda, prepared a wonderful dinner. She taught me how to make American apple-pie and cucumber sandwiches. After dinner we had a very long conversation and Martin again turned into 'an American from the Intelligence Service'. The American told me about sin. He said that all men are guilty before the Lord, and that we need to be forgiven. His words seemed very strange to me; they did not touch me at all. I knew I was sinless because I was a Communist. I had been brought up to believe that 'Communists are the brain and the purity and the conscience of the age'. I never felt guilty, though maybe I did feel a little guilty that day for agreeing to eat a meal in the home of an American spy. I listened to Martin, but I knew I was not a sinner. The 'bad American' tried to explain about sin and the need for salvation, but I did not really understand what he wanted from me.

Then Martin said that he would like to pray for me, and asked if that would be all right. I said, 'Yes, if you want, you can pray for me.' I knew from all that I had been taught that prayer was something very stupid, crazy and senseless, so I picked up a beautifully illustrated magazine and started to read it. I thought that his prayer was his business and nothing to do with me at all. That was in my mind as I listened to the words of the prayer my American enemy was saying.

Although my eyes were looking at the magazine, my ears were listening to what Martin was saying. He was praying about me. He was asking God to forgive me my sins and to open my heart to the truth. Then I actually felt a physical change in my heart: it was beating so strongly. All of a sudden something





Introducing Professor Dimitry Mustafin

started to happen to me, something I had never experienced in my life before. Something covered me all over, something came upon me, something filled me with peace and joy. I understood with my mind, with my heart, with every cell of my body that the Lord Jesus Christ died for me on the cross. Martin's prayer seemed to be more than just the words he was saying, more than just sounds.

A great desire grew in my heart to repeat the words of the prayer after my 'enemy'. Without my willing it, I began to say the prayer word by word after Martin. Not knowing what I was doing, I asked the Lord to forgive me my sins, to come into my heart, to be my Saviour and my Protector. I spoke these words with my mouth, although my mind did not really understand what I was saying. But I felt that something very important had happened in my life. I felt that my whole world was changing. When we finished praying, I saw that Martin was crying. And the strangest thing of all was that I was crying too. I embraced Martin and realised that he was not my American enemy, but my beloved friend.

I gave my life to the Lord, joined the church and was baptised at the Bible Church of Milan on Corso Lodi, before leaving for Moscow at the end of my year in Italy. While I was very satisfied with the scientific results of my time in Milan, I know that God's reason for me being there was that I should discover my heavenly Father and receive his Son, Jesus Christ, as my Lord and Saviour.

There grew in me a great desire to share about the Lord with my friends and relatives in Moscow. So I put a few Bibles in the bottom of my suitcase and experienced all the feelings of a smuggler. I am not a very brave man; I was afraid of the customs examination. I understood that it was forbidden for a Soviet scientist to have illegal books in his suitcase. And I knew that I was doing forbidden things. I could not sleep in the train





My Beloved Russia

at all because I was very nervous as I waited for the customs control. When the customs official looked into my pale face and asked me, 'Do you have something forbidden in your bags?' I was silent. I did not know what I should answer.

There were only two answers, and both answers were bad. I could say truthfully, 'Yes, I do. I have forbidden Bibles in my case.' But that would mean I would lose my position at the university; I would have problems keeping my flat because it belonged to the Government. I also realised that my daughter, my wife, my mother, brother, all of us would have very big problems if I answered truthfully. The only other answer was a lie. I could say, 'No, I have no forbidden things in my case.' But I felt that as I was a Christian now I was not allowed to lie. I was absolutely lost, but the Lord saved me again and helped me. The customs official looked at me and repeated his question, 'Oh, boy! I have asked you, do you have forbidden stuff in your bag? Do you have pornography?'

'No, I have no pornography, you can check it, if you want,' I said, and that was true. I had no pornography.

He looked into my heavy bags full of scientific papers and articles, gave a deep sigh and went away. My Bibles were saved and I was saved too. I was so happy to enter my Moscow house with my first illegal Bibles. But when I gave the Bible to my mother she became very pale and very serious. And she told me a sad story from my family history that I had never heard before.

My grandfather, Fedor, was a Christian. In 1936 many Christian churches were closed and became forbidden. The Bible was declared to be dangerous and many active believers were put in prison, among them my grandfather Fedor. It was rather strange; he did not look like a criminal at all. Fedor was an old nobleman, absolutely non-aggressive. He was honest and peaceful, very friendly and kind. But he was a Christian, and the Government considered him to be a danger to Communist





Introducing Professor Dimitry Mustafin

society. My mother's father was killed as a criminal with words from the Bible on his lips. As he died, he was praying about his executors. My mother, who is now in her eighties, is still afraid when somebody knocks loudly at the door. It still reminds her of KGB people knocking at their door during the night in order to make a search. She was always afraid that they would find her Bible and confiscate it. It was dangerous to have Bibles at home. So she took the cover off her Bible and it was hard to know whether it was a Bible or an ordinary old book. Because of that it was possible for her to keep her Bible tucked between her textbooks. All my life it had been there and I knew nothing about it.

For many, many years this old Bible was kept in a secret place in our house. But now it shines in my flat. We keep it in the most important place in our home, near the Gideons International lamp. This old Bible without its cover reminds me about my past, about my dear grandfather Fedor and about many other Russian martyrs who were killed only because they were Christians. I am thankful to the Lord that now I am his child and part of a great Christian family with brothers and sisters all over the world, even in America and Britain where, when I was a child, I thought I only had enemies.

As soon as it became possible for us to speak openly about the Lord, I started to preach about salvation in Moscow with my brothers and sisters in Christ. We got permission to preach the Bible at the biggest Russian jail, Butirka Prison, which is situated just across the road from my university. We were able to establish very good relations with the warden of that prison, Colonel Alexander Volkov. He considered that we were doing useful work for the prison and he treated us just like members of his staff. As we participated in the everyday life of the prison, we were invited to take part in staff picnics, outings and parties.





My Beloved Russia

Every year on Victory Day, Russian people bring greetings to their veterans and military retirees. Once I was invited to such a celebration in Butirka Prison. Delicious food, tasty fruits, vodka and wine were prepared for retired people and prison staff. I was seated near Alexander Volkov, who was a big man with a nice smile. He was very friendly with me. When the concert programme was over, Alexander Volkov turned to me and said, 'Dimitry, I want to introduce you to a very special man. He is our honoured veteran. He worked in the prison for 30 years as ... an ... executioner.' The warden pronounced his position very slowly and very quietly, and then he showed me an old, skinny man with a red face and small eyes, who was in his eighties. It had been his job to kill people, and among his victims might have been my innocent grandfather Fedor, who was killed in the prison because he was a Christian.

I condemned this old ex-executioner. I blamed him. I hated him with all my heart.

I did not want to shake his hand; I was ready to punch him.

I could not speak to him; I had so many bad words for him.

I was not able to look at him because I saw the noble faces of my dear relatives who were killed by the executioners of the Soviet times.

I did not know how to behave myself, so I prayed and then I remembered that I was a Gideon and he was a military man. I always have a few Gideon Bibles with me, so I decided to start Bible distribution right then and there. I gave the ex-executioner a Bible. Although I did not want to communicate with this man, he wanted to speak with me. He started to ask me questions. I tried to remain calm as I told him about the most powerful book in the world, about the Bible. I told him that he could find all the answers to his questions in the Gideon Bible that I had given to him.

I really was not ready to communicate with that ex-





Introducing Professor Dimitry Mustafin

executioner. He had killed so many people. By then it had been discovered that a lot of his victims were absolutely innocent men and women. So the ex-executioner knew for sure that he had killed many people for nothing.

‘I know that I am a terrible sinner,’ said the veteran. ‘But how can I be forgiven by the Lord?’

It was such an ordinary question – one that I had been asked many times during Scripture distributions – but it was so difficult for me to give him an ordinary answer. It was so hard to tell him that our Lord loved him and was ready to forgive him. I myself was not able to forgive that man. Although I was speaking to him about the love of Jesus, I did not believe that it was possible to love a former executioner. Then I told him about the two bandits that were crucified with Jesus and about the prayer that makes us closer to the Lord.

‘Please, pray for me,’ asked the ex-executioner.

‘No,’ I answered immediately. I did not want to pray for him. But then I felt confused and told him, ‘A prayer is a conversation with the Lord. You have to pray by yourself.’

‘I do not know any prayer,’ said the ex-executioner. ‘Teach me how to pray. Please, lead me in a prayer.’

So I was forced to lead that ex-executioner in prayer. I agreed to do it. I closed my eyes, but was not able to open my mouth. With closed lips I asked the Lord to come into my heart and fill it with love. Then I started to pray about myself because I realised that I myself was very bad, that I myself needed to be forgiven. Starting to pray loudly, I heard an old man near me repeating the words of the sinner’s prayer word by word. I asked the Lord to bring peace into his life and forgive him, to become his Saviour and Protector. I asked the Lord to be with that old man always, in his every day, in his every step, in his every moment.

When we finished our prayer, for the first time I was able to look at the veteran’s face. He was crying. His eyes were full





My Beloved Russia

of tears, but he looked happy. Then he shook my hand. He gave me a hug and he kissed me. That was really a burning kiss for me. I felt that my face was flaming after that kiss, the kiss of an ex-executioner, the kiss of my present brother in Christ. Only our Lord knows what is going on in our hearts. I have never seen this ex-executioner again. But I hope that man was sincere in his desire to be with the Lord, and in the words of his prayer. I hope that he is forgiven and saved. Probably I will meet him one day in heaven near our Lord. And we'll all be together: my brother-executioner, my grandfather Fedor and I myself. And all three of us will be happy and joyful, full of love and peace.

That experience was a great lesson for me. I realised very clearly that I am not a good preacher at all. Many people can preach and speak about the Bible much better than I can. There are many people with really loving hearts, bigger than mine. I do not know why our Lord used me to bring that ex-executioner to a knowledge of salvation, but I am very thankful that he used me as his instrument for his purpose. And I am very thankful that our Lord called me to be a member of the great Christian family of Gideons.

Over the last six years, my Moscow Gideon Camp has distributed 337,000 Bibles in prisons, universities, hospitals, hotels, military camps and schools. We would not be able to do it without your help, with our own money. In order to buy 337,000 Bibles I would have to work 300 years in my university and spend all my salary purchasing Bibles. So I want to thank you for all your support and donations for Bibles that are fighting for new souls in my beloved Russia.

