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I was born on 4 August 1910. My father worked as a bookkeeper in the railway department in Vilnius, Lithuania. When the First World War started the office he worked in was evacuated and we went to Russia. Though we had little contact with the other Latvian refugees we never forgot our Latvian language and identity. We had taken hardly any Latvian books with us so my first books were in Russian: beautiful volumes, fine Russian poetry, no sign of those bloodthirsty revolutionary songs. We traveled all over Russia, experiencing all the horrors and dangers of both revolutions. When everything was destroyed and my father's office was also closed down, we decided to return to Latvia. It was a hard and dangerous journey. I remember us crossing front lines when they started closing in on us. At last, in 1919, we reached Vilnius. The Poles had driven the Bolsheviks out and I started to attend a Polish school. I grew very fond of my Polish teacher and when at last we were able to return to Latvia I went to say goodbye to her with a small booklet I had compiled as a gift for her. She seemed to be very moved and gave me a book in return. It was a theological book - the first pointer in the direction I would choose years later.

In 1921 we returned to Latvia, to the city of Jelgava. It was strange to attend my first Latvian primary school with the books in my native language. I remember a book of religious instruction called *Gaismas Avots* (The Source of Light).

People sometimes ask me 'When did you say "Yes" to Christ?' I cannot remember anything definite. One significant influence on my religious development was the way my Latvian primary school headmistress taught us religion. In the upper classes she gave us lectures on religion as if we were students. At home we had to write essays; on Sundays we had to attend church - any church — observe everything carefully and write about everything we had seen and heard. During the next lesson it was read and analysed. On one occasion I wrote something about the frescoes in the church of St Anna and the teacher explained their origin. There were also tests, one of which I rediscovered after I had lost all my other belongings. It seemed significant that it should have been on the missionary work of the Apostle Paul when the mission field turned out to be my first area of work after ordination.

By contrast the subject of religion was neglected when I was a student at the teachers' training college, and the effects show even today. The young pastor who was supposed to teach us apparently had nothing to say, much to the scorn of the leftwing young men on our course, some of whom occupied important posts after 1940. I felt very hurt, but this was the atmosphere in which a whole generation of pastors was educated - the atmosphere of liberal theology.

While at the training college I decided that I did not want to become a teacher; I wanted to study theology. I used to take a train to Riga to attend lectures on theology there, returning late at night dead tired.

A person who left an overwhelming impression on me was Pastor Edgars Rumba who came to Jelgava as a youth pastor when he was still a student. He was a person of extraordinary charisma; he had a strong and clear Christian faith and the ability to express it in a unique way. Later, when I was a third-year student, he invited me to come to Riga to work as a vicar in the Church of Christ and organise a Sunday School there. What he meant to my life as a Christian I am not able to put into words. His personality has always had a special place in my life and memory.

Another source of my religious experience was the Christian Student Movement. We often had guests from abroad. I was amazed by the way they treated theological problems - this was quite different from the liberal theology we were taught at the Faculty and it was a revelation to me. Theologians from Finland, Sweden, France and Germany had the message of the living Christ.

I was ordained in 1935 in the town of Alūksne near the Estonian border. The outbreak of the Second World War put an end to church activities. In 1939 I had just returned from a missionary trip to India, where I had visited missionary stations set up by Swedes, Danes, Norwegians and Scandinavian Americans as well as the Latvian missionary station in the land of the Tamils.

When the German army invaded Latvia I was vicar of the city of Riga and also the mission secretary. As mission work was completely paralysed my services were not needed, though I still continued travelling and delivering lectures on mission in local congregations. When the Russian army invaded Latvia for the second time the pastors of many big congregations fled abroad, including some who had sworn to remain. I cannot accept that they were 'exiles', as they were described. They were emigrants. Exiles were those captured and taken abroad against their will.

Acting Archbishop Irbe found himself in a challenging situation: he had to find pastors for the vacant parishes. He entrusted me with the congregation of St John's Church. However, the previous pastor of my new parish, who had gone to Kurzeme in western Latvia, returned when the ashes of the city of Riga had cooled to demand his congregation back, saying he had nothing to live on. The acting archbishop was not impressed; but of course there was plenty of work for everybody. He got his parish back and I was sent to be the pastor of the Jesus Church in 1946. At that time our days were mostly devoted to funeral services; the elderly people, left on their own and disoriented by war, and often living in flats which were occupied by hostile strangers, were dropping like autumn leaves. I worked in the Jesus Church, which had a very good, strong and active congregation and excellent lay workers, until 1950 when, at the end of April, I was arrested. My mother had died two weeks earlier. All the time she had expected this to happen. I was glad she did not live to see it. They wrote down my belongings - a table, some chairs. But nobody wrote down things that would fit into a pocket. I had a very good coin collection, especially silver coins from tsarist Russia, and a stamp collection. It all disappeared into the pockets of the Chekists.

People have often asked me to write about the dangers, torments and difficulties they assume I had to endure. In fact, my experiences were not unbearable. At first I was in Riga, in the cellars of the KGB headquarters. Reading the works of Solzhenitsyn now, I have been shocked about the cruelty and insanity he describes. God kept me away from such things, he carried me on. Of course, the primitive environment, the low quality of human relationships and the lack of suitable clothes and sufficient food made life very hard. I had the advantage of having nothing to hide, because I had never been a member of any political parties or groups. This helped me during interrogations. When Acting Archbishop Irbe was arrested I was called for interrogation. I had nothing to say because I knew nothing. He was a very private person who did not share his thoughts or worries with anyone. I thanked God that he had kept me from any knowledge that by way of a chance remark might have added to his sufferings.

I knew an Orthodox priest who had been deported to Siberia and returned. Some of his colleagues had betrayed him. They had thought he would never come back; but he did, and when he met them again they asked if he knew who had betrayed him. 'Some of you', he answered. They had to be content with that. Those who had betrayed the acting archbishop were also convinced that he would never return. He was sick and no longer young. The irony of Fate was that he did come back; it was his betrayers who did not live to see that day.

Later, I was taken to Riga Central Prison, from there to St Petersburg, and then to the village of Yertsevo in the region of Archangel'sk. Winter, deep snow, frost. We were tramping along a forest road to the camp, an area enclosed by barbed wire, but I had a feeling of elation, even of freedom, after the long months spent in prison and the seemingly endless journey in a crowded train. I had to spend over four years in the camp - from April 1950 to the end of 1954. I experienced God's guidance and grace through all those years, I was protected by him and held in my Father's arms.

At first we were put into 'quarantine' and not allowed to work. Food was poor but not as bad as during the war when many died of starvation. The director of the camp ignored the rules and sent us out

to work all the same. My job was to help the dentist. What did I know about dentistry? It was just a formality.

I met the first Latvians since my arrest and we formed a bond which lasted long beyond our return to Latvia. One of our group of four was a lawyer from Riga who had already spent five years in the camp, and would have starved to death had it not been for his superhuman willpower.

Once in the middle of the night, while I was still in quarantine, a command was given to get up and go to the 'clothing room'. We were given old worn-out clothes to wear. Then at 6 a.m. we were sent out to cut timber, a job which demanded superhuman endurance in the stinging cold of the Siberian winter. I knew I had too little physical strength to master it.

During working hours women prisoners came to work at the rudimentary hospital. There I met a Jewish nurse called Iskra who evidently pitied me. To my surprise, she procured me a sick note which stated that I was unfit for outdoor work and one morning I was withdrawn from the lines of workers and sent to the hospital. I stayed there for some time until I was ordered to take up work in the bookkeeping office of the Division of Material Supplies: my qualification was knowledge of the abacus (which I had used since I was four). I found a way of sorting out the chaos of their existing system, and, as a result I was appointed to do the work of the bookkeeper and even gained a certain status and respect.

Sometimes life was really hard. There were times when I was so emaciated I felt a gust of wind could have blown me away. But I was always provided for. At the most critical moment one of my friends received a parcel from Latvia and gave me a piece of lard - our lifesaver at the camp. It tasted heavenly - I was renewed again.

I returned from the camp on the first Sunday in Advent 1954. I stood on the platform at Riga Central Station wondering where to go. I had no home, no relatives. I went to St John's Church. After the service Pastor Kauliņš invited me to his flat until I found something suitable. That same evening I went to the Church of St Gertrud where Archbishop Turs was holding a service. He welcomed me and encouraged me to start work as a pastor again immediately. I was elated. Turs was a clever man. He did not wait for the Security people to veto me but visited the office for religious and cult affairs personally, proposing me as prospective pastor of the Anglican Church in Riga. However, the functionary he spoke to showed him a letter signed by a person who declared vehemently that the Church did not need former prisoners, traitors of the Soviet state, criminals and so on. The letter had been sent directly to the office for religious affairs, avoiding the archbishop. Turs had never been as furious as he was then; he never forgot the incident. But I was offered the church at Katlakalns on the outskirts of Riga; later I was also given the church at Olaine. They were both small, sparsely attended churches far off the beaten track. But my work there was richly blessed: we were able to repair the fabric at a time when the Church was persecuted, when churches were nationalised, turned into clubs, storehouses, tractor stations, sports halls. We had no money, no materials, nothing. But we did not give our church away, we did not allow it to be taken. I oppose the assertion that the churches were forcefully nationalised. In eight cases out of ten the pastors and the congregation allowed them to be nationalised. We needed initially to repair the roof of the church at Katlakalns, and then we set about the capital renovation of the whole building. For neither project did we have sufficient funds when the work started, but enough was available in time to pay the bill for the roof without my having even to ask for donations. Nobody could say that sort of thing was not possible. We negotiated a very much reduced advance on the renovation with the workmen from Estonia but by the time we had paid it our cash box was empty. Yet again we were able to pay what was due when it was completed. How? I do not know. I cannot explain. The church had no benefactors from abroad, no wealth either in America or elsewhere. All foreign contacts were forbidden.

I can tell a similar story about the church at Olaine, which had been plundered again and again by local hooligans until only the bare walls were left. The local council ordered the church to be repaired, but it was beyond our means. I knew nothing about building work, yet by an amazing series of

wonderful coincidences the first stage of restoration was completed in four months. Cement, for instance. I had heard that it was hard to get, but I remembered seeing some in an open space outside the city. I found the place from memory: it was a big square with a wooden hut in the middle. I told the workmen there that I needed cement. They replied that I could take some as long as I could transport it away that same day. I set off to find a lorry. At the third place I tried a lorry driver agreed to help me and we got our cement. The next time we ran out I went to a completely different place where I hoped to get cement. I got off the bus and saw the same lorry driver standing there. 'Pay me straight away, and I'll start loading,' he said, without a word of greeting, without asking what I needed. It almost seemed as if he had been waiting for me. And so the series of miracles went on. It took me twenty or so trips to Estonia to get enough stone to repair the church. Meanwhile our poor orphan - the church at Olaine - was being robbed like a princess.

Miracles continue to the present day. Recently we needed an organ, but we simply had no one to ask. Then the phone rang and a stranger from Sweden offered us an organ. I have seen so many miracles that the hardships of life fade when I think about them. I am used to having no wishes because everything happens in a much better way than I could ever wish.

In 1969 one more church - the Gustav Adolf Church in Mežaparks, a district of Riga - was also entrusted to me. I had the feeling that I could get ready to retire, that no more major tasks lay ahead of me. How wrong I was. At the beginning of the 1980s more and more young people - some of them very odd - started to attend this church. Some of them were quite ignorant about Christianity. After the services they began to ask questions and our discussions gradually turned into a kind of catechism class. Later they wanted to be baptised. We saw the sacrament coming to life, we saw the effect - a complete change of personality, even of physical features. On one occasion a mother came up to me and said that she did not recognise her own son who had changed from a useless tramp to a loving son. She wondered how I had achieved this transformation. I want to stress from my own experience that the most effective form of evangelisation is the church service if it is the real thing. It is my deepest conviction that every sentence in our Lutheran service book has a deep meaning and cannot be discarded at the pastor's convenience. The pastor must proclaim the word of God and that only. If he is not sure of himself he ought to read a ready-made sermon but not expound his own subjective ideas. If he prays, let it be a prayer to God; if he reads the liturgy, let him speak it not only with his lips but with deep reverence as well. The congregation is a sensitive living organism, and there is no doubt that it senses the attitude of the pastor.

Many young pastors and theology students have come out of the church at Mežaparks, and the trend still continues: the stream is alive, it is in motion. I had never dreamed that I would be part of all this. Our Latvian Church today is badly in need of young people; the older generation is dropping off one by one. We need more theologians — and, I would like to stress, pastors.