



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

ROAD TO EMMAUS

Help support
Road to Emmaus
Journal.

The *Road to Emmaus* staff hopes that you find our journal inspiring and useful. While we offer our past articles on-line free of charge, we would warmly appreciate your help in covering the costs of producing this non-profit journal, so that we may continue to bring you quality articles on Orthodox Christianity, past and present, around the world. Thank you for your support.

Please consider a donation to Road to Emmaus by visiting the Donate page on our website.



ORTHODOX MISSIONARY OUTREACH

Foma – A Magazine for Doubters

In this second issue, the *Road to Emmaus* staff introduces our readers to Vladimir Legoida, Assistant Professor of Religion at the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations and co-editor of his own Russian missionary journal, *Foma* (Thomas).

RTE: Vladimir, can you tell us something about your background, and how you came to Orthodoxy?

Top: Asst. Prof. Vladimir Legoida.

VLADIMIR: I am twenty-seven years old and recently married. I was born and raised in northern Kazakhstan, one of the former Soviet republics, which today is an independent country. As a university student I moved to Moscow where I studied public relations for five years at the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations. During my senior year at the Institute I was offered a job teaching a special course called “Spiritual and Intellectual Fundamentals of Western Culture.” I agreed, as I had already made up my mind to try to work for God in whatever profession I finally entered. Officially, I’ve been teaching at the Institute since 1997, but defacto from 1994. I now teach courses on “The History of Religion” and “The Philosophy of Culture.” In the former class I give an overview of the world’s major religions. This isn’t easy, particularly for me, because although I am supposed to be rather neutral, I certainly do not hide my Orthodox views. Of course, I cannot openly propagate Orthodoxy, but if I don’t agree with something in another religion I don’t hide the fact.

RTE: Have you had problems by being so open?

VLADIMIR: It might sound strange, especially for Western readers, but I haven’t had any problems so far. I see my position as a unique kind of missionary work. It is difficult at times because there is a temptation to show Islam, for example, in a rather undesirable light. I can feel this inside of me. I have to try to be... well, objective is not the right word, because nobody is ever purely objective. Everything is somewhat subjective. If you are a Buddhist and are teaching a course on the History of Religion, sooner or later your own views become apparent. I can say that I am trying to be fair in my presentations. In addition to my work at the Institute, I also lead a seminar on journalism at the St. John the Theologian Russian Orthodox University here in Moscow.

RTE: The Institute of Foreign Relations has always been considered the most prestigious of the Moscow institutes and only a handpicked group of students is admitted each year. The Institute was formerly known for graduates who went on to represent the ideas of an officially atheistic state. How did this dramatic change come about that you are now teaching religion?

VLADIMIR: The Institute began teaching the philosophies of world religions during the perestroika years when I was a student there. It was understood that future diplomats had to have an understanding of the various cultures

and religions they would be working with. The course is now a regular part of the Institute's curriculum. Actually, this sort of course exists in almost every school in Russia today. The only problem is – who is teaching it? Very often the instructor is an old atheist, who continues to propagate his own views. Today, the Russian Ministry of Education is even thinking of offering theology as a major in all Russian universities, but I'm not in favor of this. What kind of theology would it be: Orthodox, Protestant, or something else? If it is a mish-mash of theologies, then we will run into definite problems.

RTE: How did you come to Orthodoxy?

VLADIMIR: My first step came as a child. I was baptized in the Orthodox Church when I was seven months old, but it was done secretly, not in my native town and under someone else's last name. My parents decided to baptize me not because they were religious, but because it was a cultural tradition. It might be hard for Christians from the West to understand this, because it sounds like hypocrisy: my folks didn't believe in God, but they did want me to be baptized, although they could have lost their jobs if anyone had found out.

My next step was more or less a conscious one. My grandparents were Baptists, and unlike most of the children of that period, I was acquainted with the Bible because they had one that I read when I visited them in the summer. I liked it and I liked going with them to their "meetings" – that was what they called their services. Although I knew something about God, I knew nothing about Orthodoxy. My grandparents came from a little village in Ukraine and their impression was that Orthodoxy was serving people, not God. At the same time, my parents were very much against my grandparents taking me to their church meetings. This was one of the reasons why my "Baptist childhood" brought forth no fruit. Also, because of widespread Soviet propaganda, I soon stopped paying any attention to religion.

Then I was in high school, and it was already the eighties, the time of perestroika. That was when it first became possible to obtain the Bible and books on religious philosophy. I especially read Russian literature. Writers like Dostoyevsky made me think about the deeper questions that each of us faces, like what happens after we die.

RTE: Would you recommend Dostoyevsky to people who want a deeper understanding of life?



Heavenly Realm Orthodox Bookstore, Chico, California.

VLADIMIR: He is one of the most interesting writers we have, in his psychological penetration of the human soul. There are different opinions, however, as to whether his books can be seen as Orthodox. For example, the Russian philosopher Leontiev, who later became a monk at Optina Pustyn, thought that Dostoyevsky's books were Protestant in nature, because there was no outward church life his books. Only in his novel "The Brothers Karamazov" is there a monastery and the figure of Elder Zosima. In his other books he doesn't speak of Orthodoxy and you don't have characters like priests. Of course, many people, including monks from Optina, didn't share Leontiev's viewpoint. I personally believe that Dostoyevsky's books are the most Christian of all Russian classical literature. He has influenced countless people of this century to examine questions of mortality and eternity.

RTE: So what happened when you moved to Moscow?

VLADIMIR: Many things changed when I first came to Moscow. It was a completely different world for me because I came from a small town and suddenly here I was in one of the world's largest cities, with many churches and different kinds of people. There was much more freedom. Books were readily available and you had a much wider opportunity to be exposed to

religious ideas. Vladimir Lisovoy, a professor at my institute, was a graduate of the Moscow Conservatory of Music and taught a special course on music history. He was very Orthodox and it was from him that I first heard about Fr. Seraphim Rose and read his two books that were available in Moscow at the time: “Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future” and “The Soul After Death.” My professor didn’t come out and say, “You should read this.” While talking about music history, he would also talk about culture in general and make interesting observations on the way different cultures perceive life. He was a specialist on the Orient and South America, and he spoke about how Fr. Seraphim came to Orthodoxy after being strongly influenced by eastern cultures. He often quoted passages from Fr. Seraphim’s books.

I remember that when the first Orthodox bookstore officially opened here in Moscow, I bought these two books by Fr. Seraphim, as well as a book by Fr. Thomas Hopko called “The Orthodox Faith,” and later “The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom.” That was my first Orthodox reading. Although I read, I didn’t go to church. Perhaps it was the influence of my past, but I didn’t feel that it was important. I knew absolutely nothing about the Sacraments and the Divine Liturgy. I wanted to know more about God, but it was really more of an intellectual curiosity.

I finally came to the Church through people – teachers and friends. One day my music professor said, “It means absolutely nothing to read these books if you don’t go to church and practice what they are talking about.” So, I thought that I should try. After a period of preparation, I went to Confession and then began receiving Holy Communion. Although I still had some strong sinful habits that were hard to break, I felt Divine grace enter my life. I read the Bible every day. Every morning and every evening I would say the prayers from the Prayerbook, and I slowly began to feel that something was very right. For the first time I began to really love people. All this had to do with church. It was not because of any particular guidance I was receiving from a priest – I didn’t yet have a spiritual father – but just the fact that I was going to church and establishing a habit of prayer.

RTE: Was there anything that you remember from those days that made you feel that God was close, a signal that you were on the right path?

VLADIMIR: Although this is a rather simple incident and might sound silly, it was important for me. I was taking a major English exam. At the time I was very nervous about it. There was a section where we had to fill in

missing words, and in one place, I simply couldn't think of the right word. I was at a complete standstill. Nevertheless, I sat there in the classroom smiling to myself – I felt an inner assurance that help would come, that I would think of the word. I can't say that I was praying or asking God for help, but I knew that somehow everything would be all right. The professor of that class was the strictest at the Institute, but suddenly she walked over to me and did something that she had never done before for anyone. She said, "Vladimir, the word you are thinking about is "firmly." I took it almost for granted, because I was so convinced that something was about to happen. I looked at her and said, "Alright. Thank you." It was absolutely amazing!

The next thing that really changed my understanding was the year I spent in America at Chico State University in California. The American Council of Teachers of Russian had an exchange student program, and I applied and was accepted. Although they could have sent me to any one of a number of universities around the States, I was assigned to Chico. Before going to the U.S. I went to my priest here in Moscow and asked for his blessing. I told him that just as I was getting used to church life, I was going to America, and was afraid that there wouldn't be any Orthodox contact for me there. He told me not to worry, that God would bless me and that I would find people to help me along the way. Frankly speaking, I wanted to believe him but I couldn't – it sounded too unrealistic from what I knew about the States. But just a few days after my arrival in California, I found out that there was an Orthodox bookstore in Chico! The first thing that I saw when I went in was a book on the life of Fr. Seraphim Rose called "Not of This World." For me this was a miracle... this was the same man who had so helped me in my early days of coming to Orthodoxy.

Russia's Response to Fr. Seraphim Rose

RTE: Fr. Seraphim is one of the most popular Orthodox writers in Russia today. What do Russians find so attractive in his writings?

VLADIMIR: I think the most important thing about his message is that you feel that it is real and it comes from his own spiritual experience – his life and blood, something he really struggled for. Although he was one of the more intellectual Orthodox writers of the twentieth century, I wouldn't say that he is incomparable. We have books written by other Orthodox philosophers

that are equally as deep and even deeper, but the remarkable thing about Fr. Seraphim is that his message is trustworthy. Many Orthodox people in Russia – particularly younger people – see in him a person who is their contemporary and who practiced a life that is barely lived in Russia now.

I can't say that I've been to every monastery in Russia, but in those that I have been to, I didn't experience anything similar – either in spirit, or in the way of life – to what I experienced in Platina, where Fr. Seraphim labored for Christ. That is why now, almost ten years after I first read Fr. Seraphim's works, of all of his books, the most important to me is the book about him – "Not of This World." As far as I can tell, Fr. Seraphim never saw himself as a big theologian or intellectual. That is why his theological works are not the most important for us. What is more important is his life and who he was.

RTE: He remains rather unappreciated by many American Orthodox who see him as too strict or too traditional. What do you think causes this discrepancy between the way he is perceived in Russia and in America?

VLADIMIR: For one thing, the way Fr. Seraphim lived is totally foreign to the way most Americans live. I mean, living in the mountains of northern California without any of the conveniences the rest of us take for granted: electricity, central heating, running water, and phones for communication. Many people in Russia today are deprived of the same things, so this lifestyle is not at all foreign to them. However, when I was in America, many people who felt drawn to Fr. Seraphim were drawn precisely because his lifestyle was so radically different from their own. It was something new. As far as Russians are concerned, the actual lifestyle is not so much what attracts them, but rather the fact that this was a real person who was living, suffering, and dying for Christ and for the Truth.

I visited Platina on several occasions, especially for the big feasts. I was there at Pascha and this was probably the most wonderful and memorable part of my whole time in the States. Words cannot express what I felt there! When I look back at my time spent in America, I think immediately of Pascha in Platina. It was there that I felt, for the first time in my life, that Christianity is first of all joy, not sorrow, that Paradise does exist and that God gives us a taste of it here, upon this sinful earth. When I returned to the campus after having spent four or five days in the monastery, I felt physically bad being back at the university – I don't know how else to describe the feeling. It was as if I had come from a totally different world.

I liked the campus and the different activities, but after experiencing Pascha at Platina, it was a terribly difficult struggle, both physically and morally.

The Revival of Orthodoxy in Russia

RTE: With the great revival of Orthodoxy in Russia, what do you think has been influential in bringing people to the Church? Orthodox literature? Good spiritual fathers? The availability of the sacraments?

VLADIMIR: All of these are important, but who can say for sure? God works in His own mysterious ways. Of course, the biggest turning point came back in 1988 with the celebration of 1,000 years of Christianity in Russia. I have spoken with Orthodox people who are five or ten years older than I am and who were already Orthodox before 1988, but their time was very different. They've told me how they had hand-typed copies of Fr. Seraphim's books at home – which, if discovered, could have landed them in jail for several years. They read them at night behind closed curtains, by candlelight. It was a frightening time.

In 1988 everything changed. The government recognized Orthodoxy, and Orthodox feast days began to be celebrated as national holidays. It was no longer “the opium of the masses,” but was officially acknowledged to be an important part of Russian culture. This meant that people could publish religious writings, read books on spirituality, go to church openly – they no longer had to hide their religious beliefs. An important figure from this period was Professor Alexey Losev, who suffered a lot under the Soviet regime and spent many years in the Gulag camps. He was probably our only true Russian philosopher – definitely the most gifted one – who wasn't killed or expelled from Russia. Of course, after his time in the camp he was prohibited from publishing his brilliant works. He was even forbidden to teach at Moscow State University, so he taught ancient Greek to Ph.D. candidates at Moscow Pedagogical Institute. People didn't know much about him, although some close friends were aware that he had known Father Paul Florensky. But then it turned out that Losev had been a secret monk; that he had been taught the Jesus prayer by monks from Mount Athos and had practiced it all his life; and that the woman, Aza Taho-Godi, who was with him for many years, was only his secretary, not his wife as she was officially known – it was such a revelation! Aza Taho-Godi later said that she herself

hadn't known much about her "husband" and his spiritual life! Of course, no one knew this before, and he could not talk about it. He died in 1988 and that was when we first learned that he was secretly tonsured.

Also, tremendous numbers of people began going to church in 1988. New churches were opened and the government began to return Church property. But a lot of that change was external. Everything seemed dazzling at first, but then people began to fall away. This was only to be expected. Many people went to church simply because religion had been taboo for decades, and was now considered fashionable. Those who went to church for the wrong reasons soon lost interest. Today, those who go to church do so out of conviction. The late eighties was also a time when many New Age philosophies and sects began sprouting up around Russia.

According to current statistics fifty percent of Russians say that they're Orthodox, but less than ten percent go to Holy Communion, or even to church regularly. Of course, these are only figures. It takes time. You can't expect to draw everyone back to the Church overnight. In general, however, Russian culture is getting back to its roots. In Soviet textbooks, Orthodoxy was equated with the Tsarist period, but if you read the history textbooks used today, you will find that they admit that Orthodoxy was a conscious choice of Russian culture, and that the two are bound up together. Even Soviet literature, particularly fiction, has many Christian elements. The things they wrote about often concerned moral, human questions of life – questions that arose specifically out of an Orthodox history.

RTE: Considering Russia's one thousand years of Orthodoxy, do you think that there exists a remnant of that history "in the blood," so to speak, of Russians, even non-believers, that can help them through this time when many distinctly national characteristics are being absorbed by secular Western culture?

VLADIMIR: Although it is true that Russia has known one thousand years of Orthodox Christianity and this is "in the blood," I wouldn't idealize the situation. Russia has an Orthodox culture and heritage, but is far from being a real Orthodox society. Even back in 1917, at the time of the Provisional Government, an order went out saying that Confession was optional for soldiers. They could go, but they didn't have to. Only ten percent of the soldiers ended up going to Confession, whereas ninety percent didn't. That means that at that time it was already clear that the Russian army was no longer

really Orthodox. Although Orthodoxy is now again in the forefront of public life, most of society remains about as Orthodox as French society has remained Catholic. Because of its Orthodox roots, I would say that there is Divine grace helping to keep the light of faith burning. If we Orthodox have survived the Turkish yoke in Greece and over seventy years of atheism in Russia, I think God will somehow give us the strength to deal with the influences of today's secular pop culture. I am proud of our traditions. I am proud that Dostoyevsky was Russian, and I somehow feel linked to all of this, but I think it is important to remain worthy of these traditions that we have been given by doing something.

Foma Magazine

RTE: Then, let's talk now about what you've been doing. Can you tell us about how you started *Foma* magazine?

VLADIMIR: Yes. When I returned from the States, I knew I wanted to start a missionary journal here in Russia, but I couldn't find the right people to work on it. I finally began collaborating with another student on an idea, but it didn't work out. However, God's hand was evident here. My friend went on to found a new newspaper aimed at university students, and instead of having one bad publication, we ended up with two good ones: *Tatiana's Day* and *Foma*.

One day, a close friend gave me a newspaper article written by another young Russian and said, "This is the person you are looking for." When I read the article I knew that he was right. I called the author, Vladimir Gurbolikov, and at our first meeting we realized that we could work together. We both had journalism experience, we wanted to work for God, and we had similar thoughts on how to do it. We started *Foma* as a way to reach people outside the Church. At that time there was absolutely nothing available for those who were afraid, for whatever reason, to go to church. This was in 1996, when the majority of books being published were reprints of pre-Revolutionary material from the beginning of the twentieth century. Everything was rather outdated and very "churchy," if you know what I mean. For those who had little or no experience in the Church, these publications were hard to understand. We knew that we needed a journal that would be interesting, that would respond to people who had

doubts, who hesitated about coming to church, and who needed answers to their thoughts and struggles about the Faith. It also had to be written in understandable language. We weren't so interested in it being "attractive" because we didn't want to "sell" Orthodoxy. We just wanted to make its contents important and useful, to show that a human being isn't really human without some sense of religious feeling. I remember watching an American film once where the *maitre d'hôtel* in a famous restaurant told his waiters not to smile, but to let the food smile for itself. That was how we wanted to approach this magazine. We wanted to write articles in such a way that the reader would say, "This is beautiful."

We also try to avoid any mentor-type preaching in our articles. Our journal is an attempt at dialogue. It's not a monologue; it's a dialogue. Also, our articles are not just about church life, they are also about everyday things in general: about life and death, suffering, if God is love why do people go to hell, etc. This helps people to think about Christianity.



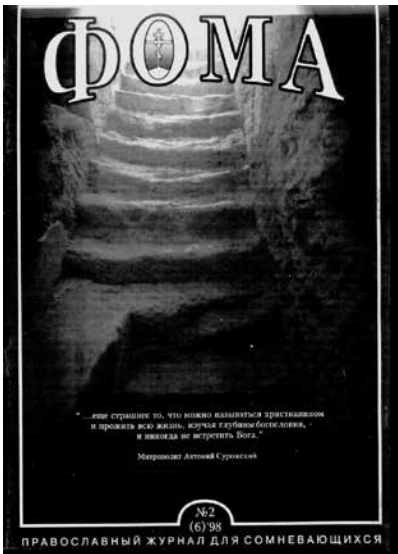
Early FOMA cover.

RTE: How did you arrive at the name Foma? Is it because of the Apostle Thomas who had doubts?

VLADIMIR: Yes and no. After we had done a lot of groundwork, we still hadn't found a name for the journal. I was thinking of something like "Transfiguration," but it sounded too pushy, as if, "after reading our magazine you will change." Also, one day I saw a magazine called *Transfiguration*, for Russian feminists, and I knew the name wouldn't do. "Foma" actually came to my co-editor's wife in a dream. My coeditor, Vladimir, phoned me to ask what I thought. Like his own, my initial reaction was rather negative. But after letting it sit for a while, it became more and more interesting.

Yes, of course, it is named after the doubting Apostle, Thomas, but in Russia "Foma" has a double meaning. During the Soviet times there was a cartoon character called "Doubting Thomas." He was a Young Pioneer who didn't believe anything he was told. People kept telling him that there were

alligators in the river, but he didn't believe them so he went in and was eaten. Non-churchgoers here don't necessarily relate the name immediately to the Apostle, but rather to this cartoon character that didn't believe. We explained the name in the first issue – about the Apostle Thomas and how he doubted, that this is a journal for those who doubt.



RTE: Who do you reach? Are your readers mainly students?

VLADIMIR: Our readership varies a lot. Many people call us a magazine for youth, but I don't agree with this definition. I don't think it is possible to publish a magazine only for young people, unless, of course, you only write about rock music or similar things. But we write about matters that affect everyone and we also receive letters from people who are fifty and sixty years old. I suppose you could say that we are a journal for young people only in the sense that young people are generally more active.

Most of our journals are sold in church bookstores. This means, unfortunately, that it often doesn't reach people who are totally outside the Church. But on the other hand, we are not only directed at people outside the Church. We are directed, rather, to those who are on the fringe, who might catch sight of a book or journal in the window as they pass by. Our journal is also sold at secular bookstores in Moscow, but I can't say that it does exceptionally well in such places. A lot of this has to do with its presentation. When placed next to a fancy, full-color, glossy popular magazine, *Foma* isn't as eye-catching. Because of financial difficulties, the quality of paper we use is not as good as we would like it to be, but we can't let finances prevent us from trying to reach people.

Ten years ago when there were few Orthodox publications available, people would buy everything that came out. Today, however, with the abundance of books and magazines and fewer financial resources, they have to choose. Everyone understands this. Most of the time people will be drawn towards buying things that look nice. Of course, they buy for content too,

but they usually reach for a cover that catches their eye. We sell our journal primarily in Moscow, although it is for sale in a few other large cities, and we hope that copies trickle out to the countryside. I was surprised to learn a few days ago that someone saw our journal being read in the Theological Department of the University of Riga in Latvia. We were happy to hear this.

Many people send us letters by e-mail. We also have a web site (www.fomacenter.ru) for our journal. Internet access has been very good for us. Some responses have even come in from the States, as we have an English-language section on our site. Nevertheless, most letters come from people asking for copies of the journal and how to subscribe. We are hoping that more people will write with suggestions of things they would like us to address. We have received a few critical letters, but nothing constructive. They were usually just taking issue with a certain article.

RTE: Do you have a sense of how readers have been affected by *Foma*?

VLADIMIR: Every now and then we hear stories of how our journal helped people, such as an article in one of our early issues by Fr. Dimitry Struyev, about a young journalist from Voronezh named Oleg, who died. Fr. Dimitry decided to write about Oleg because he knew people who had begun going to church after reading Oleg's articles. When he saw that *Foma* had the same effect, he decided to write the article for us, as the two had much in common.

At the same time, we realize that if we, or any other journal or TV or radio program help someone come to the Church, we have no right to leave the person – the “we’ve done our job” mentality. I think that this is one of the most important questions in Russian church life today: what to do with people who begin coming to church, how to instruct and catechize them in the faith? There are cases of people who have come to Orthodox churches after spending a considerable amount of time in various sects. They find it intellectually deeper, spiritually more fulfilling and authentic, but after spending some time in church, they return to their former sect. Why? Because they don't find the kind of human relationship that they need in church. There is very little *social life*, let's put it this way. Orthodox people should have an opportunity not just to pray together – which of course is the most important thing – but also to do things together... discuss different problems, watch interesting movies, organize parties for kids, start coffee houses maybe – things like that. This does exist in some parishes in Moscow, but not enough.

Protestant groups have achieved some measure of success by showing personal concern for their parishioners, yet they have cut themselves off from Church tradition. On the other hand, we have the fullness of Orthodox tradition, but many people don't feel personal concern and support on a human level. This is not only the job of priests – many of them are already terribly overworked with daily services and the need for the sacraments. It has to be done by all of us.

Feeding Spiritual Hunger

RTE: How would you like to see *Foma* fill this need?

VLADIMIR: Something we have done to make our outreach more personal is to organize meetings for our readers in Moscow. We began advertising these meetings in small brochures that we publish monthly and give away as an advertising effort for our journal. At the first meeting we had thirty-five people show up, at the second, fifty. The most important thing we saw was how thirsty people are for simple contact and information. The first meeting was dedicated to *Foma* as a journal. The second meeting was called: "Orthodoxy – A World-Wide Experience." Some priests attended and we spoke about Orthodoxy in different countries and cultures. Despite the general theme of the talk, people just began asking anything that popped into their minds. It is because they don't have a chance to ask these questions of priests or friends outside of church.

Earlier this year there was a large Orthodox symposium attended by hundreds of people from dioceses all over Russia. I was attending one group that dealt with problems of publishing Orthodox literature. Even with this specialized topic, one girl stood up and asked a priest, "What is the Apocrypha?" At first I felt irritated, and thought, "This is a symposium on publishing and editing Orthodox literature, not a forum for asking such questions." But then I realized that this is very symptomatic of the situation here. People need this. They will go to any meeting, wherever they can, to find answers. This is something I have seen happen time and again at every conference I've attended. It shows that there is still a lack of communication. Of course, there are priests and churches who give regular talks where people can ask any question they like, but our readers are people who are often not ready to take the step of going to church, even if they know of such a gathering.

We also helped organize – along with *Tatiana’s Day* [the Orthodox student newspaper of Moscow State University’s home church] and *Vstrecha* [the student journal of the Moscow Theological Academy] – several meetings between the diplomatic students from my Institute with students from Moscow State University and seminarians from the Moscow Theological Academy and Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra Seminary. For both the secular students and professors, and their theological counterparts, it was an eye-opener. Our students realized that seminarians were also “alive” and not some kind of “weird guys”. At the same time, they came to a better understanding of why these young men decided to become priests. The seminarians also realized that, in the near future, they would no longer be dealing with books and lives of saints, but with such students and other people who have very different problems and questions about life. The meetings were mutually beneficial.

Also, we have to look at going beyond our magazine in practical ways. For example, one Orthodox editor was speaking to me of journals that come out strongly against abortion. Her comment was, “I don’t think they should write articles like that. If you write and say it is a terrible sin, then it means that you



FOMA readers gather at literature table after meeting.

should be ready to help the woman bring up her child if she doesn’t have an abortion on your advice.” I don’t think that she’s one hundred percent right. A sin should be called a sin. But she does have a point: it’s easy to write, but you should also realize that there are real consequences to your words, and that you have to be responsible and at least willing to try to help. This is my dream for *Foma*. I don’t want it to remain just a source of information. Eventually, I want to see us bring people together and help them find assistance in solving these problems. A good example of people already doing this is a television program here called *Vzglyad* (Opinion). It is not a religious program, but they try to help. Recently, for example, they showed a little boy who had no home, no parents, nothing. They didn’t just run it as



Meeting between future diplomats and seminarians at Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra.

a tragic story, but they actively asked for people to help change the child's situation, and they did. This is the kind of thing I envisage for our journal.

RTE: *Foma* hits at the level of the mind and heart. Do you think it also affects souls?

VLADIMIR: I know it hits the soul. Even when I reread certain stories we have printed, I almost cry. Other people have told me that they feel the same. Recently we received a letter from a young girl about the article on the death of the journalist Oleg, which I mentioned earlier. She said that when the journal came out she read everything except about Oleg – it seemed too sad at the time. But not long ago, when everything in her life seemed to lose sense she read and reread the article about Oleg's death, and saw it as a very inspiring example of contemporary Christian life. We receive such letters very often.

RTE: Are you trying to reach out to non-Russians as well? Do you think that there are specific cultural differences between the Russian and Western mindsets that you will have to overcome to do this successfully?

VLADIMIR: Of course, we would like to reach out to non-Russians as well – that is why we translated *Foma* into English. Two years ago I was able to attend a work-related symposium in England, and while I was at Oxford I interviewed several British Orthodox converts, whose stories later appeared in *Foma*. One that was particularly interesting was an interview with a man named Johnny, who looked like a punk and talked like a philosopher. Another interview was with an Englishwoman, an Orthodox psychologist. I've also done interviews with American monks and nuns on their conversions to Orthodoxy.

We are presently working on a French translation that we hope to have on our web site soon. As for the cultural differences, they certainly exist, but most of them are not very important – it is the work of the translator and editor to make the translations reflect the spirit of the original.

RTE: How were your articles on Orthodox foreigners received by your Russian readers?

VLADIMIR: Very well. They've all been received with great interest. It's another means of breaking down barriers.

RTE: What are some of the things in the Russian Church today that particularly give you hope?

VLADIMIR: I'd have to say that so many young people are going to church, not because it is in fashion, but rather out of conviction. It is not easy to be Orthodox. It requires personal sacrifice and struggle. I see many young people who are serious about Orthodoxy and who are trying to put it into practice in their lives. Another encouraging thing is the increasing number of very good priests. More and more young priests are being ordained; priests who are not just career oriented, but who really love serving God through the Russian Orthodox Church. It is inspiring to see this.

RTE: If you could point to any one thing that Orthodoxy has given you, what would it be?

VLADIMIR: Love. Not that I always display the love I should have as a Christian, but in those moments when I know that God Himself is Love. This has made all the difference in my life. ✦