Nicolas and Militza Zernov

Tuija and I first set foot in the church in January 1977.

As soon as we entered a man with white hair and a kindly disposition walked across the church, greeted us and introduced himself as Nicolas Zernov. I knew his name from a contemporary of mine at St Hughs who was living in St Gregory House while doing a teaching diploma before going on to become a teacher and an Anglican priest. I also recognised him from the high table in Keble.

Nicolas and Militza drew us into the church community and invited us to meetings at their flat in Northmoor Road where they regularly invited people like ourselves to informal gatherings. They both attended our first house blessing at a cottage we bought on Witney High Street and I remember Militza holding Sophia, our second daughter, at a reception at our present house in Cogges after her baptism by the then Fr Kallistos.

I continued to visit Militza after Nicolas’ passing in August 1980 until her passing in 1994 by which time I was a deacon.

They were a very special couple, quite different in some ways from the other Russians, with a very clear mission to bring the Orthodox faith to the west and we talked about the publication of one of Nicolas’ manuscripts on William Palmer, who tried unsuccessfully to bring the the Anglican and Orthodox Churches into communion.

This was the main thrust of Nicolas’ work for the churches. Militza told me just before her passing that when he arrived in the west he wanted nothing to do with ’those heretics’. However, when he observed the depth of faith of those from other churches he met over the years he became utterly changed and dedicated his whole life to the reconciliation of the different confessions. The extensive list of donors to the purchase of the House of St Gregory is ample proof of this.

As ever,

Fr Seraphim and Tuija Vanttinen-Newton

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