



Ernest and Zelma Klotinsh with their children.

Photo courtesy of Andris Pešelis.

## Klotinsh, Ernests (1905–1995)

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Andris Pešelis, M.A., is a pastor in the Latvian Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds a B.A. in religion from Griggs University, an M.A. in geography from the University of Latvia, and an M.A. in leadership from Andrews University. He is the author of a book on the history of the Adventist Church in Latvia and many articles in the Latvian Conference publications.

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Ernest Klotinsh (Klotiņš) was an Adventist pastor and administrator who led the Church during the oppressive years of the Soviet Communist regime.

### Early Years

Ernest Klotinsh (Klotiņš) was born to farming parents on November 12, 1905, in the town of Veclaicene, Līfland Province, Latvia (formerly in Russia). He finished high school in Valmiera in 1924 and in the same year he became a Seventh-day Adventist. His father was very angry over this decision and disinherited him. In later years, however, they were reconciled, although there were still some issues that remained unsettled between them.

In 1924 Ernest went to Riga and became one of the first students to enrol in the Adventist Mission School in Suzhi, which had recently opened. Shortly before finishing at this school he was enlisted in the Latvian Army. As it so happened, however, when he finished at the school in 1928 he was called to ministry as a Bible worker. In the local Adventist newspaper *Adventes Vēstnesis*, he was described as *“a young man with a golden consciousness and perseverance to live according to the fundamentals, who is tender-hearted towards everybody”*.

## Marriage and Early Ministry

In 1929 Klotinsh married Zelma Kunkulis and they had two sons and one daughter. From 1928 onwards, Ernest served as an assistant to the pastors in the city of Riga. Then in 1930 he was ordained to the ministry and served as a pastor in many Latvian Adventist churches. In 1932 he became a teacher in the Adventist Mission School Suzhi, Riga. Klotinsh later served as principal of this Mission school and an officer in the Latvian Conference from 1938 to 1940, during which time he regularly published articles in the local conference periodicals.

In 1940 Latvia became a part of the Soviet Union and the Soviet administration appropriated the Mission school for use as a Red Army military base. At this stage the Latvian Conference existed without the proper recognition of the Soviet state.

In 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union and their occupation of Latvia, their military administration permitted the Latvian Conference to hold a session and Klotinsh was re-elected as its president. During the German occupation, all the denominations in Latvia were forced to supply the German troops with humanitarian help in the form of food, clothing, and money. The Adventist Churches couldn't refuse this help without risking the danger of repression from the military administration.

In 1944 Red Army forces entered Riga. At first there were no threats, however, things started to change in 1949 when the Soviet administration asked Klotinsh to hand over the main church building in Riga, located at 11 Brīvības Street. The Soviet administration decided to use this building as a club for policemen, but Klotinsh initially refused to comply. In early Autumn, however, a deadline was issued to which the Adventist Church submitted. The building was then handed over and its members were moved to the Baptist Church building.

Later the state's Security Committee officials came to arrest Klotinsh, who was accused of supporting the German army and of having been elected to church office at a session held during the Nazi occupation. In addition, it was claimed that Klotinsh was the president of a religious organization that had occupied the following address: 11 Adolf Hitler Street. This renaming had happened during the Nazi occupation, and had

nothing to do with Klotinsh. That notwithstanding, he was now “a public enemy” and was exiled to the Arkhangelsk region of northern Russia.

In the prison camp he survived because he had an education, and the prison administration entrusted him with the position of secretary in the camp’s archive. There he had an opportunity to correspond with Latvia. In 1954 he was released and could return to Riga. Unfortunately, however, he could no longer minister as a pastor in Riga because of the decision made by the Soviet administration.

## Later Years

After his time in the prison camp, Klotinsh was eventually elected as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church All-Union Committee in Moscow in 1956. From 1957 he ministered as a pastor outside Riga, where church members loved him, and people still remember him as a “preacher of God’s love”. He tried to reconcile members during difficult times and brought peace among the flock. He supported the private publishing of Adventist literature – especially of the works of Ellen G. White.

There were restrictions imposed by the Soviet administration that Klotinsh was to obey. For example, he did not have permission to live closer than 100 km from Riga City. He saw these demands, however, as the short-term oppression of “Babylon” which would soon come to an end. His last place of residence was the city of Cesis, where he passed away in 1995.

## Contribution

Pastor Klotinsh was steadfast under difficult circumstances and willing to administer the Seventh-day Adventist Church during those times when no one else wanted to lead it. He shared the love of Christ wherever he went and comforted those who were disheartened and fearful.

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### SOURCES

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Pešelis, Andris. *Sept?t?s dienas adventistu Latvijas draudžu m?c?t?ji*. Riga: Patmos, 2021.

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