

CACC

NEWSLETTER

July 18, 1966

COMMUNISM IS MELLOWING?

Dear Friend:

Rev. Richard Wurmbrand spent eleven years in prisons in Communist Rumania. He gave sworn testimony concerning the treatment he received on Friday, May 6, 1966, before the Internal Security Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate. His account of his experiences and the scars on his tortured body provide further evidence, if such is needed, of the true nature of communism.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand is an evangelical minister who was for many years a representative of the World Council of Churches for Rumania. He was a Professor of the Old Testament in the seminary of Bucharest. From 1945 to 1948 he was a pastor of the Norwegian Mission to the Jews.

He was imprisoned in 1948 by the communist government of Rumania. He was released in 1956, and from 1956 to 1959, he preached and exercised his other pastoral functions illegally. He was rearrested in 1959, and remained in prison until July, 1964. In 1964, he became pastor of the Evangelical Church in Orshova, a Rumanian town.

His story cannot be consigned to the "bad days of Stalinism" but reveals communism up the present day.

Light out of Darkness

The testimony is voluminous and illuminates many facets of communism. I will quote directly from the testimony but will take the liberty of editing the syntax when necessary. Every effort will be made to retain the precise meaning.

The Positive Approach

When Rev. Wurmbrand was leaving Rumania, the communists came to him and said, "You may preach Christ as much as you like. Don't speak against communism. If you speak against communism, we can find a gangster who will liquidate you for \$1,000. We can have you brought back from the West to prison. We can destroy you morally. We will tell some story about you and a girl or about your misuse of money and people will be stupid enough to believe it. We will destroy you if you touch us."

Rev. Wurmbrand: Under these conditions I was allowed to come out. Very sorrowfully I found people in the West, even religious leaders, who told me the same thing, "Preach Christ as much as you like but don't touch communism." (Pages 2 and 3)

In Rumania you are allowed to say as much as you like that God is good. You are not allowed to say that the devil is bad. John the Baptist could have saved his life if he had said, "Repent because the kingdom of heaven is near." Nobody would have touched him. He was touched when he said, "You, Herod, are bad."

If Christ had delivered 1,000 sermons on the mount, they would not have crucified Him. They crucified Him when he said, "You vipers."

In Rumania you can say, "God is good," but you can't say, "Communism is cruel. They commit atrocities. It is a crime to poison children with atheism." If you do this, you go to prison. (Page 18)

Comment: The so-called positive approach is frequently a mask for cowardice. It is impossible to be truly Christian without being anti-communist.

Torture

Some of the incidents related in the testimony are too gruesome to reprint. I will give you a few quotations:

Rev. Wurmbrand: They tortured by all means; they beat until they broke the bones; they used red hot irons; they used knives; they used everything. It is not only what they did, but how they did it. They interrogated you very politely, and if you did not wish to say what they asked, they said, "Well, this is the first. On the fifteenth you will be beaten and tortured at 10:00 o'clock in the evening."

Imagine the next fourteen days. We have had prisoners, who during this time knocked on the door and said, "I can't bear it. I will say everything before the torture." (Page 9)

I was in solitary confinement for the first two and one-half, almost three years. It was in the most beautiful building in Bucharest, the headquarters of the Secretariat of State for Internal Affairs. Foreigners all stand before this building and admire it; and there, ten meters beneath the earth are the cells. There are no windows in the cells. Air enters through a tube. There were a few desks with a straw mattress. You had but three steps for a walk. We were never taken out from these cells except for interrogations when prisoners were beaten and tortured. For years I did not see the sun, moon, flowers, snow, stars, nor any man except the interrogator who beat me, but I can say I have seen heaven open; I have seen Jesus Christ; I have seen the angels; and I was very happy. (Page 4)

In Philadelphia there was a great meeting. A Presbyterian pastor, wearing clerical clothes, delivered a speech in which he praised the communists and said that communists are all right and that it is stupid to fight against them. I have learned something from the communists. A minute after the pastor left the pulpit, I was in it. I said, "Now, I will speak about communism, and I will show you my credentials, how I have studied communism." I undressed myself to the belt and I showed them my body. "This is what communists do to Christians. Pastor, if you are a Christian and have youth and vigor, why don't you demonstrate before the Soviet and Rumanian Embassies against torturing Christians?" (Page 21)

Heroism

Rev. Wurmbrand: I am a very insignificant and a very little man. I have been in prison among the weak and the little ones, but I speak for suffering country and for a suffering church and for the heroes and saints of the twentieth century. We have had such saints in our prison to whom I did not dare to lift my eyes.

I am a Protestant, but we have had near us Catholic bishops and monks and nuns about whom we felt that the touching of their garments heals. We were not worthy to untie their shoelaces. Such men have been mocked and tortured in our country; and even if it means going back to a Rumanian prison, being kidnapped by the communists and going back and being tortured again, I cannot be quite. I owe it to those who have suffered there. (Page 6)

We had hundreds of bishops, priests, and monks in prison. My wife, who was near me, was in prison with Catholic nuns. She tells me that they were angels. Nearly all Catholic bishops died in prison. Innumerable Orthodox and Protestants have been in prison too. (Page 5)

Anti-Semitism

Rev. Wurmbrand: The Jewish religion has been persecuted just as the Christian religion. In the prison of Gherla, we had a whole room with rabbis who were in prison. We also had Moslem representatives in prison.

Sen Dodd: Were the rabbis subjected to the same kind of torture that you suffered?

Rev. Wurmbrand: Yes, there was no difference. I had a discussion with the commandant of the prison in Targulacna, and he said, "We are not like the fascists who made racial differentials and persecuted the Jews and Hungarians. Look around you, we keep Rumanians, Hungarians, and Jews in prison in exactly the same manner. We don't make racial differences." (Page 14)

There is anti-semitism in Rumania. Just before we left the country, wherever Jews were in high positions as chief engineers or doctor in some industry, there were silenced and reduced in rank. (Page 14)

This is purely a racial measure. If they were of Jewish origin, they were reduced in rank. They could have been atheists. Some were even members of the Communist Party. All Jews have been driven out of the secret police. (Page 14)

Communist Use of Religion

Rev. Wurmbrand: The communists have used three great instruments with respect to religion:

Firstly, persecution to make everybody afraid. They always find political motives for imprisoning pastors. They never admit religious motivation. Here is an illustration of a political motive:

A Unitarian pastor, a friend of mine, was put in prison and sentenced to seven years on the charge that on Christmas Eve he had said that when Jesus was a baby, Herod wished to kill Him, but His holy

mother fled with him to Egypt. The communists charged, "You meant us by Herod, and you hope Nasser will be on the side of the imperialists, therefore, you mentioned Egypt."

Another pastor, a friend of mine, was sentenced to 15 years in prison. The charge against him was that he preached on a Sunday morning in a village from John, Chapter 21, where it says that the Lord walked on the seashore and saw the apostles and asked them, "Have you anything to eat?" They said, "We have not." Jesus then said, "Throw your nets on the right side."

When the pastor asked them from the pulpit, "Have you anything to eat?", everybody began to weep because with us, since the collectivization of agriculture, peasants have nothing to eat. Peasant children do not see milk and fruit. Everything goes to the collective and from the collective perhaps to Vietnam. Nobody knows where it goes. To the weeping congregation, the pastor said, "Dear children, you have nothing to eat because you throw your nets on the left side. You must throw them on the right side." He meant the side of clemency and of the goodness of God.

The next day the secret police came and said, "Aha, you said not to go to the left wing with the communists but with the right side, the imperialists." The man was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Secondly, the method of corruption. The Central Committee of the Communist Party decides who must be patriarch, who must be a Baptist preacher, and Pentecostal preacher and so on. They have always been able to find weak men susceptible to sin. They have put such men in the leadership of the churches. As a result you could hear in our theological seminary in Bucharest that God has given three revelations—once through Moses, secondly through Jesus, and thirdly through Karl Marx.

Religion is corrupted from within. Religion has been widely used and is still used as the tool of communist politics. The priests everywhere had to propagate the collectivization of agriculture; and everywhere, when communists have had something important to do, knowing the influence of religion, priests and pastors are ordered to preach these things. (Page 13)

Thirdly, religious disguise for communist agents in the West. We had a Professor Justin Moisescu. He had never been a priest. He was a professor of church history but a layman. He was known in the whole country as a whoremonger and a drunkard. Suddenly we heard that in a few weeks he had become a priest, a bishop, and the metropolitan of a town called Yasi. This is the highest position below the patriarch.

He has personally denounced a group of 400 church peasants from his own bishopric. He has denounced the priests whom he ordained whenever they said some counterrevolutionary word.

He has a very impressive beard, and he came out to the free world and was accepted as a bishop. Religious leaders in the West believe they are speaking with the Orthodox Church of Rumania when they are speaking with the secret police of Rumania. (Page 15)

Improved Conditions

Rev. Wurmbrand: Restrictive measures on the exercise of religion are not as stringent today as they were 10 or 15 years ago. They are not necessary as the people have the apathy of despair. That situation is illustrated by this story:

I was with a very poor family with five little children, and I caress the youngest child. The mother said to me, "This child is so good, it doesn't weep even when it is hungry. It had given up weeping because the child knew it was useless to weep. You can't get any food, so this child was not beaten because it did not weep anymore.

The Rumanian people do not weep anymore so they do not need to be beaten. They have abandoned hope that they will ever be released. They are desperate. For years we heard a broadcast, "Rebel against communism; rebel against communism." When we rebelled, we were abandoned. (Pages 16 and 17)

Comfort for the Enemy

Rev. Wurmbrand: See, our oppressors are helped! While in the prisons of Gherla, the Commandant Major Alexandrescu, gathered us together and made a speech, "You fools, you sit for 15 or 20 years in prison and expect the Americans to come. You expected the Americans would come and release you. Now, I will give you the news. The Americans have come but not to release you. They come to help us; do business with us; to trade with us. You fools have not known. If you beg them, the Americans give nothing. If you insult them, if you mock them, they give you money. We have been cleverer than you." (Page 17)

Political Underground

Rev. Wurmbrand: Our people have given up the fight. Political underground movements don't exist anymore with us. As a result, everything has quieted down in the country, and they don't need the same terror anymore. In this sense there is a relaxation with us, but it is not an essential one. We continue to have the avowed dictatorship of an atheistic party. We have only one party. There can be no religious freedom where there is only one party. We have elections, and we have a joke which says that when God created Adam, He created only one woman, Eve, and He said to Adam, "You are free to choose as a wife whoever you wish." (Page 17)

Youth

Rev. Wurmbrand: Our government doesn't mind old women coming to church, but our children and youth are poisoned with atheism. We are not allowed to counteract this, and what bitter fruit will come from this seed, nobody knows. (Page 17)

Demonstrations

When asked if Rumania had anything like the demonstrations so prevalent in this country, Rev. Wurmbrand said, "Such a thing doesn't even enter into the mind of anybody. Nobody can say a word of criticism. I will tell you something which may be funny to you but it is tragic to us:

"A man was in a barbershop in a little town, Sibiu. While the barber was shaving him, he said, 'What should I do, my hair is falling out?' The barber said, 'Very well, I will give you something to rub on it, but you should not worry about it. The most intelligent people in the world have been bald.'

"On the other side there was an officer of the secret police, and he said to the barber, 'What have you said now?'

"I said that the most intelligent people of the world are bald.'

"So you assert that Stalin has not been intelligent.'

"That make you laugh but not us. Nobody dares say a word." (Page 20)

Nationalism

Rev. Wurmbrand: Rumanian communists are very interested in the fact that you have here in the States something like 300,000 American of Rumanian origin who speak the Rumanian language and are Orthodox.

These Rumanians have a bishop, Bishop Viorel Trifa, who is anti-communist, and the communists wish to win them for a left-wing Christianity which supports communism. They have sent several men to the United States. These don't come with communist slogans but with the words, "You must love the Rumanian Fatherland. You must have connections with the Rumanian patriarchy."

When I come out from Rumania, I saw for the first time a Rumanian newspaper which appears in Bucharest and which nobody in Bucharest has ever seen. It is called "The Voice of the Fatherland" but nobody in the fatherland sees this newspaper. It is seen only by American Rumanians and in France. In this newspaper you read about priests and churches. You have pictures of priests and monasteries. In our newspapers you will never find a word about the church.

At midnight in Rumania they have a broadcast of religious services. I do not know what hour that is in the United States. No one in Rumania can listen to these broadcasts because they are jammed. No religious services are broadcast to the people of Rumania. These broadcasts are only so that the American should know how fine the communists are and that they have religious services. (Page 21)

Internal Espionage

Asked if reprisals would be taken if a groups of people gathered to tune into the broadcast above the jamming, Rev. Wurmbrand replied, "There would be no reprisals at present. No reprisals are taken today if somebody hears foreign broadcasts, but everything is noted.

"We have waves of terror. We had a great wave of terror from 1948 to 1955. Then we had a bit of relaxation until 1958, when nobody was arrested but everything was noted.

"Another wave of terror came in 1959, and all those who had been noted during the previous years were arrested.

"The whole spy network continues with us. You are not arrested, but everybody knows that he is spied upon and that everything is noted. How far this inner spy network goes is unimaginable. In a little townlet of ours, there is a little

Baptist Church with only 22 members. The pastor of that church told me that he is an informer of the secret police and that he knew three members of his church who informed on him. It was the same way in the church where I was pastor. The custodian of the church was ordered to inform on those who came to see me. I had no salary so usually men who came brought a little parcel with food, clothing, etc. The custodian had to spy on those who came with parcels. In the smallest churches there are five or six who spy on what the others do. One neighbor spies on another. Children spy on their parents. It is without end so nobody dares to think." (Page 22)

Coexistence

Rev. Wurmbrand: I have asked Christian leaders, "Why have you sat at banquets with our inquisitors?" I was answered, "We are Christians and must have friendship and fellowship with everybody, with the communists, too. Don't you agree?"

I said, "I can't argue with you. I have not read the Bible for 14 years. You must know Christianity better than I. I seem to have a faint recollection that it is written in the Bible that friendship with the world is hatred towards God, but supposing you must have friendship and fellowship with everybody, how is it that you have had friendship and fellowship with only our inquisitors and never with us?"

These great men of the West have never been in the houses of Christian martyrs. I have an only son, and I love him. I can't bear to look at him. He looks like a skeleton. He has suffered so from hunger that he will never be healthy. So many of our children have died.

I ask them, "Why do you go to see the Pope who is all right, who does not need your visit? When you have been in Rumania, why have you not visited the tombs of Catholic bishops killed by torture? Why have you not shed a tear? Why have you not placed flowers on their graves? Why have you not left \$30? Thirty dollars would have been the salvation of a Catholic family."

I must say we are very sad about these compromises with communism. We do not understand. It may be right for a state to have peaceful coexistence with communism. I do not know, but the church can never have peaceful coexistence with atheism. Everybody would laugh at us if I said that health can peacefully exist with tuberculosis, that the F.B.I. can peacefully coexist with gangsters, that the church can peacefully coexist with drunkenness, but communism and atheism are much worse than drug addiction and drunkenness. You drink a little wine and the next day it passes, but communism has poisoned our youth and our children for 50 years. (Pages 10 and 11)

Communist Self Destruction

Rev. Wurmbrand: When I was being interrogated they said to me at one time, "You are all right. You are not a counterrevolutionary, but then show your loyalty towards our government. Tell us who the counterrevolutionaries are. Are you disposed to do so?" So I said, "Yes, I am disposed. As you know, I have worked on an international scale so I can tell you the counterrevolutionaries, not only in Rumania, but in Russia.

"In Russia you had as Secretary of State for Internal Affairs, Yagoda. Yagoda killed thousands of people as counterrevolutionaries; then you discovered Yagoda was a counterrevolutionary and he was shot.

"The you had Beria as Secretary of State for Internal Affairs. Beria killed thousands of people as counterrevolutionaries. Then you found out that Beria was a counterrevolutionary.

"Why do you seek the counterrevolutionaries in the church? Seek them in your own body. It has been the same thing in Rumania."

Communists are not only anti-Christian, they are anti-everything. They are anti their own comrades.

I was in prison with Lucretia Patrascanu, the great communist leader who brought communism to power in our country. He was put in prison and tortured until he was mad.

My wife was put in prison with Gheorghe Cristescu. Everybody in Rumania knows the founder of communism in Rumania who had been imprisoned for communism by the bourgeoisie. He said to my wife, "40 years ago I fought for the 8-hour labor day, and now my Communist Party has come to power and I have to work 14 hours a day." (Page 23)

Triumph

Rev. Wurmbrand: I want to say something. I owe it to those with whom I have been in prison. I have told you so many sad things. I do not wish to end on this note. I must tell you that in these great tortures and this great suffering, Christians have shown themselves as saints and heroes. May I conclude by reporting one scene which I witnessed:

150,000 men had been arrested to build a Danube Canal. My wife has worked and shoveled the earth. At this canal there was a religious brigade of 400 men, bishops, priests, and peasants who loved Christ and who were in prison for religious reasons. One Sunday morning the whole brigade was

gathered and the political officer of the prison selected a young man at random and said, "What is your name?" He gave his name. "What are you by profession?" He said, "A priest." Then mockingly the communist said, "Do you still believe in God?" The priest knows that if he says "yes," this is the last day of his life. We all looked at him. For a few seconds he was silent and then his face began to shine, and with a humble but very decided voice, he said, "Mr. Lieutenant, when I became a priest, I knew that during church history thousands of Christians and priests had been killed for their faith and notwithstanding I became a Christian, and I became a priest. I knew what I became and as often as I entered the altar clad in this beautiful ornate which priests wear, I promised God, 'If I will wear the uniform of a prisoner, then also I will serve Him.' Mr. Lieutenant, prison is not an argument against religion. I love Christ with all my heart."

I am sad that I cannot give the intonation with which he gave these words. I think Juliet spoke like that when she spoke of Romeo. This man loved Christ as a bride loves the bridegroom. This man has been beaten and tortured to death.

Rumania is a country which is mocked, which is oppressed, but deep in the hearts of the people is a great esteem and great praise for those who have suffered. The love of God, the love of Christ, and the love of the fatherland has never ceased. My country will live. (Page 24)

Concluding Comments

How do you comment on such a story which overflows with brutality, torture, and injustice, but which reveals the sublime heights that can be attained by the human spirit when the body is tortured beyond endurance? Words are puny vehicles to convey the emotional response.

An attempt to analyze my emotions reveals a mixture of compassion, anger, gratitude, and elation.

COMPASSION: The mental, physical, and emotional torment of the millions of victims of the dread communist disease should move the hardest heart. Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.

ANGER: The anger is primarily directed to the evil doctrines of communism which turn men into beasts and justify such vile measures in the name of an alleged historic purpose.

The beasts who carry out the tortures are also the victims of communism and merit pity rather than anger.

The anger embraces those individuals who close their eyes and their ears to the record of communist cruelty, their minds to the evils of communist doctrine, and who apologize for the excesses of communist conduct while they fraternize with the tyrants and ignore the victims.

GRATITUDE: I am so grateful that I have not been called upon to face the treatment experienced by the Rev. Wurmbrand and millions of others. I ask myself how I would respond under such tortures. My own sacrifices have been so small by comparison.

ELATION: How good it is to know that many retained their human dignity and faith and Christian joy despite all the pressure and torture applied against them. They experienced the fulfillment of the promises:

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Isaiah 59:19

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5

Can we not dedicate ourselves to greater efforts in this battle? If we spend all our material wealth and all our energy but keep our freedom and our physical, mental, and spiritual health, we will be rich beyond measure.