

Extracts from Tortured for Christ

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HOW THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH WORKED: PARTLY IN THE OPEN

The Underground Church met in secret - in private houses, in worlds, in basements — wherever it could. Under the Communists, we devised a plan of having street preaching which with the time, became very risky, but by this we reached many souls we could not reach otherwise. My wife was very active in this. Some Christians would quietly gather on a street corner and street to sing. People crowded around them to hear the beautiful singing, then my wife would deliver her message. We left the spot before the street police arrived.

One afternoon, while I was active elsewhere my wife delivered a message before thousands of workers, at the entrance of the great “MALAXA” factory, in the city of Bucharest. She spoke to the workers about God and about salvation. The next day, many workers in this factory were shot after rebelling against injustices of the communists. They had heard the message just in time!

We were an Underground Church but like John the Baptist, we spoke openly to men and rulers about Christ.

Once, on the steps of one of our government buildings, two Christian brethren pushed their way to our prime minister Georghiu Dej. In the few moments they had, they witnessed to him about Christ, urging him to turn from his sins and persecution. He had them thrown into prison for their daring witness. Years later, when the same prime minister, Gheorghiu Dej, was very sick, the seed of the Gospel which they had planted years ago and for which they had suffered greatly, bore fruit. In his hour of need, the prime minister remembered the words which had been spoken to him. Those words were as the Bible says, “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.” They cut through the hardness of his heart and he surrendered his life to Christ. He confessed his sins, accepted the Saviour and began to serve Him in his sickness. Not long afterward he died, but went to his new-found Saviour all because two Christians were willing to pay the price. And they are typical of the courageous Christians in the communist lands today.

Thus, the Underground Church worked not only in the secret meetings, but in bold, open proclaiming of the Gospel on the communist streets and to communist leaders. There was a price. We were prepared to pay for it. And the Underground Church is still prepared to pay it today.

The secret police persecuted the Underground Church very much, because they recognized in it the only effective resistance left. And just the kind of resistance, the spiritual resistance,

which, if left unhindered, would undermine their atheistic power. They recognized, as only the devil can, an immediate threat to them. They knew if a man believed in Christ, he would never be a mindless, willing subject. They knew they could imprison men, but they couldn't imprison faith in God. And so they fought very hard.

But the Underground Church also has its sympathizers or members even in the communist governments and in the secret police.

We instructed Christians to join the secret police and put on the most hated and despised uniform in our country, so they could report the activities of the secret police to the Underground Church. Thus, several brethren of the Underground Church did it, keeping their faith hidden. It is not easy to be despised by your own family and friends for wearing the communist uniform and not to tell them your true mission. Yet they did. So great was their love for Christ.

I have been kidnapped from the street and was imprisoned for years in strictest secrecy. To find out my whereabouts, a Christian doctor actually became a member of the secret police! As a secret police doctor, he had access to the cells of all prisoners and hoped to discover me. All his friends shunned him, thinking he had become a communist. But going around dressed in the uniform of the torturers is a much greater sacrifice for Christ than to wear the uniform of a prisoner.

The doctor found me in a deep, dark cell and sent out word that I was still alive. He was the first friend during my first 8 years in prison to discover me! Due to him, word was spread that I was alive and, when prisoners were released during the Eisenhower-Khrushchev "thaw" in 1956, Christians clamoured for my release too and I was freed for a short time.

If it had not been for this Christian doctor, who joined the secret police specifically to find me, I would never have been released. I would still be in prison (or in a grave) today.

Using their position in the secret police, these members of the Underground Church warned us many times and were of very great help. The Underground Church still has men in the secret police today who protect and warn the Christians of impending danger. Some are high up in communist circles, keeping their faith in Christ secret and helping us greatly. One day in heaven they can publicly proclaim Christ whom they secretly serve now.

Nevertheless, many members of the Underground Church were discovered and imprisoned. We had our "Judases" too, who told and reported to the secret police. By beating, drugging, threats and blackmail, the communists tried to find ministers and laymen who would report on their brethren.

UNSPEAKABLE TORTURES

A pastor by the name of Florescu was tortured with red hot iron pokers and with knives. He had been beaten very badly. Then he was put in a cell. Starving rats were driven into his cell

through a large pipe. He could not sleep, but had to defend himself all the time. If he rested a moment or closed his eyes, the rats would attack him.

He was forced to stand for two weeks, day and night. The communists wished to compel him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly. In the end, they brought his son of the age of 14 and they began to whip the son in front of the father, saying that they will continue to beat the child until the pastor says what they wished him to say. He bore it as much as he could. When he could not stand it anymore, he cried to his son: "Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear any more your beating!" The son answered: "Father, don't do to me the injustice to have a traitor as parent. Withstand! If they kill me, I will die with the words 'Jesus and my fatherland'." The communists, enraged, fell upon the child and beat him to death, with blood spattered over the walls of the cell. He died praising God. Our dear brother Florescu was never the same after seeing this.

Handcuffs were put on our wrists which had sharp nails on the insides. If we were totally still, they didn't cut us. But in bitterly cold cells, when we would shake with cold, our wrists would be torn by the nails.

Christians were hung upside down on ropes and beaten so severely that their bodies swung back and forth under the blows. Christians were put in ice-box "refrigerator cells" which were so cold, frost and ice covered the inside. I myself was thrown into one with but very little clothing on. Prison doctors would watch through an opening until they saw symptoms of freezing to death, then they would give a warning and guards would rush in to take us out and make us warm. When we were finally warmed, we would immediately be put back in the ice-box cells to freeze-over and over again! Thawing out, then freezing to within just one minute or two of death, then being thawed out again. It continued endlessly. Even today sometimes I can't bear to open a refrigerator.

We Christians were put in wooden boxes only slightly larger than we were. This left no room to move. Dozens of sharp nails were driven into every side of the box with their razor-sharp points sticking into the box. While we stood perfectly still, it was alright. We were forced to stand in these boxes for endless hours. But when we became fatigued and swayed with tiredness, the nails would go into our bodies. If we moved or twitched a muscle—there were the horrible nails.

What communists have done to Christians, surpasses any possibility of human understanding. I have seen communists torturing Christians and the faces of the torturers shone with rapturous joy. They cried out while torturing the Christians, "We are the devil."

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers of evil. We saw that communism is not from men but from the devil. It is a spiritual force — a force of evil — and can only be countered by a greater spiritual force, the Spirit of God.

I often asked the torturers: "Don't you have pity in your hearts?" They usually answered with a quotation from Lenin that "you cannot make omelettes without breaking the shells of eggs and that you cannot cut wood without making chips fly." I said again: "I know also this quotation from Lenin. But there is a difference. When you cut a piece of wood it feels nothing. But here you are dealing with human beings. Every beating produces pain and there are mothers who weep." It was in vain. They are materialists. For them nothing else than matter exists and a man is for them like wood, like an egg shell. With this belief they sink to unbelievable depths of cruelty.

The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe. When man has no faith in the reward of good or the punishment of evil, there is no reason to be human.

There is no restraint from the depths of evil which is in man. All restraint is gone. The communist torturers often said, "there is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish." I have heard one torturer even say, "I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart." He expressed it in unbelievable brutality and torture inflicted on prisoners.

I am very sorry if a crocodile eats a man, but I can't reproach the crocodile. He is a crocodile. He is not a moral being. So no reproaches can be made to the communists. Communism has destroyed in them any moral sense. They boasted they had no pity in their heart. I learned from them. As they allowed no place for Jesus in their hearts, I decided I will leave not the smallest place for Satan in mine.

One of the really great heroes of the faith was pastor Milan Haimovici. The prisons were overcrowded and the guards did not know us by name. They called out for those who had been sentenced to get twenty-five lashes with a whip for having broken some prison rule. Innumerable times, Pastor Milan Haimovici went to get the beating in the place of somebody else. By this he won the respect of other prisoners not only for himself, but also for Christ whom he represented.

If I would continue to tell all the horrors of Communists and all the self-sacrifices of Christians, I would never finish. Not only the tortures were known. The heroic deeds were known, too. The heroic examples of those in prison greatly inspired the brethren who were still free.

One of our workers was a young girl of the Underground Church. The communist police had discovered that she secretly spread Gospels and taught children about Christ. They decided to arrest her. But to make the arrest more agonizing and as painful as they could, they decided to delay her arrest a few weeks, until the very day she was to be married. On her wedding day the girl was dressed as a bride. The most wonderful, joyous day in a girl's life! Suddenly, the door was pushed open and the secret police rushed in.

When the bride saw the secret police, she held out her arms toward them to be handcuffed. They roughly put the manacles on her wrists. She looked toward her beloved, then kissed the chains and said, 'I thank my heavenly Bridegroom for this the jewel He has presented to me on my marriage day. I thank Him that I am worthy to suffer for Him" She was dragged off with weeping Christians and a weeping bridegroom left behind. They knew what happens to young Christian girls in the hands of communist guards. After five years she was released — a destroyed, broken woman, looking 30 years older. Her bridegroom had waited for her. She said it was the least she could do for her Christ. Such beautiful Christians are in the Underground Church.

Questions

1. What was the "Iron Curtain"?
2. List three characteristics of Communist governments.
3. What is the "Underground Church".
4. In which countries today does an Underground Church still operate?
5. Should we obey all governments? Explain your answer in the light of Acts 5:29.
6. Choose one person from this extract and describe their strength of character.