

Richard Wurmbrand I Have Seen Beautiful Things

Every parent wants their children to believe and follow Christ. One of our favorite verses is 3 John 1:4. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." John was referring to his spiritual children, but the application is the same for parents. Nothing gives us greater joy than to see our children walking with the Lord and few things bring more sorrow when they stray from Jesus. But we want it to be easy for them. We bring them to church. We might have family devotions at home. We send our kids to AWANA or off to Bible camp. We provide every possible opportunity for them to receive Christ as their Savior. We assume that if we create the right environment and say all the right things, they will come to faith in Christ.

But it was not so easy for Michael Wurmbrand, the son of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand. His father was arrested and presumed dead.¹ His mother was also arrested for her faith in Christ. He was only eleven years old and he was all alone. It was illegal to help the children of prisoners. His father picks up the story.

At the age of eleven, Mihai began to earn his living as a regular worker. Suffering had produced a wavering in his faith. But after two years of my wife's imprisonment, he was allowed to see her. He went to the communist prison and saw his mother behind iron bars. She was dirty, thin, with calloused hands, wearing the shabby uniform of a prisoner. He scarcely recognized her. Her first words were, "Mihai, believe in Jesus. The guards, in a savage rage, pulled her away from Mihai and took her out. Mihai wept seeing his mother dragged away. This minute was the minute of his conversion. He knew that if Christ can be loved under such circumstances, He surely is the true Saviour. He said afterward: "If Christianity had no other arguments in its favor than the fact that my mother believes in it, this is enough for me." That was the day he fully accepted Christ.

No parent would ever choose such suffering as a means for helping to bring their child to faith in Christ but it was god's plan for the Wurmbrand family. This morning I am doing my annual Christian biography. I usually do it at the end of October near Reformation Sunday but I didn't preach the last two Sundays. Two Sundays ago is when I usually do my biography and last Sunday was the international day of prayer for the persecuted church. So this morning I am combining these two and presenting a biography of Richard Wurmbrand who was well known member of the persecuted church in Romania.

Richard Wurmbrand spent fourteen years in a Romanian prison thirty feet underground. During all of that time not once did he ever see the sun, the stars, a bird or anyone besides his captors and a few prisoners. He didn't know if his son and wife were dead or alive. He was told that his wife was dead. He never held a Bible, he never saw anything with color other than a grey cell and a grey uniform. He was cut, burned, beaten, starved, brainwashed and tortured in every way imaginable that entire time.

The reason we even know his name is because he was ransomed from Romania for a \$10,000 payment and lived the remainder of his life in the U.S.² He founded the ministry to the

persecuted church known as Voice of the Martyrs. Our church and especially our SWAP youth have written letters, donated Bibles, sewed parachutes to drop Christian literature into North Korea and other donations as well. He wrote the book, Tortured for Christ in 1967 in a period of just a few days and it has since sold over 10 million copies have been sold. Most of these quotes are from that book.

Speaking of writing letters, please look at the green insert in your bulletin. We are asking as many as possible to write a letter to a persecuted Christian. Ideas and instructions are in the insert and there is a link to Open Doors for more ideas. The plan is to gather all of the letters next week and then we'll mail them all to Open Doors.

I love this quote from David Plat. "Jesus suffered to provide the gospel. We suffer to propagate the gospel." Richard suffered mightily in order that God would be honored and the gospel would be shared with those

We are all just a little more attuned to suffering Christians after the tragedy in Texas last Sunday morning. It's still an incredibly rare event but it makes us think about what we would do if it happened to us. We received an email early this week from our church insurance company. Here's what they suggest that we do.

Here are some great first steps to take:
Safety 101: A Church Leader's Guide to Risk Management
Develop a Volunteer Safety & Security Team
Prepare for Violence in Your Church
Surviving a Violent Attack at Church
Responding to Violence Checklist

Maybe. Maybe some of these are good things to know. Maybe they are necessary but I wouldn't want to over react either. 2 Timothy 3:12 says that "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." I consider that to be a promise to those who would follow hard after the Lord. So as I share a piece of Wurmbrand's story and all of the physical sufferings, I don't want you to think that none of this applies to you. It may one day and if you seek to live for Christ, it will already be true in one way or another.

Here's a similar story from Tortured for Christ.

"You know that thing is a lie," he said to the minister. "It's just a piece of trickery you ministers use to delude the poor people to make it easier for the rich to keep them ignorant. Come now, we are alone! Admit to me that you never really believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God!" The minister smiled. "But, my poor young man, of course I believe it is true." "I won't have you play these tricks on me!" cried the captain. "This is serious. Don't laugh at me!" He drew out his revolver and held it close to the body of the minister. "Unless you admit to me that it is a lie, I will fire!" I cannot admit that, for it is not true. Our Lord is really and truly the Son of God," said the minister. The captain flung his revolver on the floor and embraced the man of God. Tears sprang to his eyes. "It is true!" he cried. "It is true. I believe so too, but I could not be sure men would die for this belief

until I found it out for myself. Oh, thank you! You have strengthened my faith. Now I too can die for Christ You have shown me how."

Wurmbrand was a pastor of the underground church when he was arrested by the secret police. One of the most famous stories in his book is about a fellow pastor.

A pastor by the name of Florescu was tortured with red-hot iron pokers and with knives. He was beaten very badly. Then 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, 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 fourteen year-old son and began to whip the boy in front of his father, saying that they would continue to beat him until the pastor said what they wished him to say. The poor man was half mad. He bore it as long as he could. When he could not stand it any more, he cried to his son; "Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear your beating anymore." The son answered, "Father, don't do me the injustice to have a traitor as a 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.

Wurmbrand and those who suffered with him hated the atheism forced upon the citizens by Communism. Ironically, he was an atheist himself prior to his conversion.

I WAS brought up in a family in which no religion was recognized. In my childhood, I received no religious education. At the age of fourteen I was already a convinced, hardened atheist This was the result of a bitter childhood. I had been an orphan from the first years of life, I had known poverty in the difficult years of the First World War. At fourteen, I was as convinced an atheist as the communists are today. I had read atheist books and it was not that I did not believe in God or Christ. I hated these notions, considering them harmful for the human mind. So I grew up in bitterness toward religion. I knew there was no God, but I was sad that such a God of love did not exist.

An old carpenter in a small village in Romania prayed to the Lord that he might lead a Jewish person to faith in Christ. One day young Richard stumbled upon this old man and his prayers were answered. The gospel broke through his bitterness and unbelief.³

Wurmbrand did not just tell stories about other people suffering. He himself endured unspeakable torture. One was referred to as the icebox torture.

Christians were put in ice-box "refrigerator cells" which were so cold, frost and ice covered the inside. I was thrown into one with 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.

How does one deal with such suffering, not just his own, but the rampant death and suffering of millions of innocents? Wurmbrand knew that the cause was godless atheism of the communists in Romania and in one-third of the world it controlled.⁴

The cruelty of atheism is hard to believe. When a 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. His communist torturers often said, "There is no God, no hereafter, no punishment for evil. We can do what we wish." I heard one torturer 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 not a moral being. So no reproaches can be made to the communists. Communism has destroyed any moral sense in them. They boasted they had no pity in their hearts.

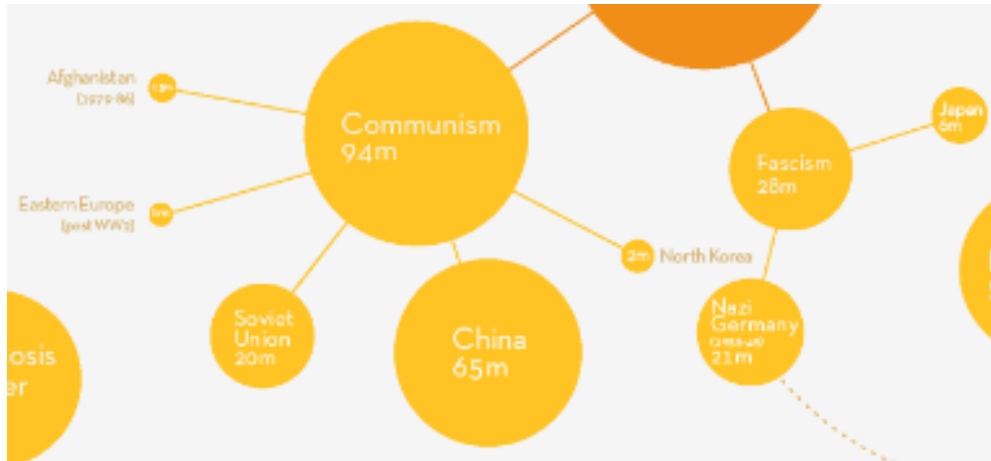
Other things simply cannot be told. My heart would fail if I should tell them again and again. They are too terrible and obscene to put in writing. That is what your brothers in Christ went through and go through now.

Tortures were sometimes horrible. I prefer not to speak too much about those through which I have passed. When I do, I cannot sleep at night It is too painful.

Let me read you a poem and a short paragraph and see what you think of it.

Lord Jesus Christ, God's only son,
O step down from Thy heavenly throne
And save my soul for me.
Come down in all Thy blessedness.
Light of Thy Father's holiness,
Grant that I may choose Thee.
Lovely, splendid, without sorrow is the joy
with which we raise, Saviour, unto Thee our praise.

“Through love of Christ we turn our hearts at the same time toward our brethren who are inwardly bound to us and for whom He gave Himself in sacrifice. Union with Christ could give an inner elevation, comfort in sorrow, calm trust, and a heart susceptible to human love, to everything noble and great, not for the sake of ambition and glory, but only for the sake of Christ.”



The first could be put to music and sung as a hymn and the second could be lifted from any Christian book. But in reality, the poem was written by Friedrich Engels and the second by Karl Marx who

together wrote the Communist Manifesto. You see, both were professing believers in their youth who walked away from their faith and turned their hatred toward the God in whom they had formerly believed. Conservatively speaking, Communism killed at least 90 million people in the 20th century. You probably heard the Texas shooter was also an atheist. We must never say that all atheists are evil but the core of these 90 million murders was a godless shaking of fists against the God who created them.

Pastor Wurmbrand knew his enemy well:

*It is essential at this point to state emphatically that Marx and his comrades, while anti-God, were not atheists, as present-day Marxists claim to be. That is, while they openly denounced and reviled God, **they hated a God in whom they believed.** They challenged not His existence, but His supremacy.*

Lest you doubt that, listen to the poem Marx wrote later in his life, to which he gave the title, "Human Pride."

With disdain I will throw my gauntlet
 Full in the face of the world,
 And see the collapse of this pygmy giant
 Whose fall will not stifle my ardour.
 Then will I wander godlike and victorious
 Through the ruins of the world
 And, giving my words an active force,
 I will feel equal to the Creator.

It's time to turn to the positive lessons that Wurmbrand saw in all of this suffering.

1. I have seen beautiful things.

This is a phrase that he used at least two times in his book.⁵

I don't feel frustrated to have lost many years in prison. I have seen beautiful things. I myself have been among the weak and insignificant ones in prison, but have had the privilege to be in the same jail with great saints, heroes of faith who equaled the Christians

of the first centuries. They went gladly to die for Christ. The spiritual beauty of such saints and heroes of faith can never be described.

2. Light, momentary afflictions.

Wurmbrand quoted from the wonderful passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, a passage than many Bible quizzers already have memorized.

Notwithstanding, the Bible calls the sufferings of martyrs "light afflictions." To pass fourteen years in prison was a long period for us. The Bible calls it "but a moment, which works for us a weight of glory." This gives us the right to suppose that the fierce crimes of the communists, which are inexcusable for us, men, and against which we righteously have to fight to the utmost, are lighter in the eyes of God than they are in our eyes. Their tyranny, which has lasted already half a century, may be before God, for whom a thousand years are like one day, only a moment of erring astray. They still have the possibility of being saved.

3. Love for enemies.

A Christian was sentenced to death. Before being executed, he was allowed to see his wife. His last words to his wife were, "You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don't know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don't have bitterness in your heart because they kill your beloved one. We will meet in heaven."

As I said, he was ransomed from the Romanian Communists for \$10,000. Here he related what he did before leaving Romania.

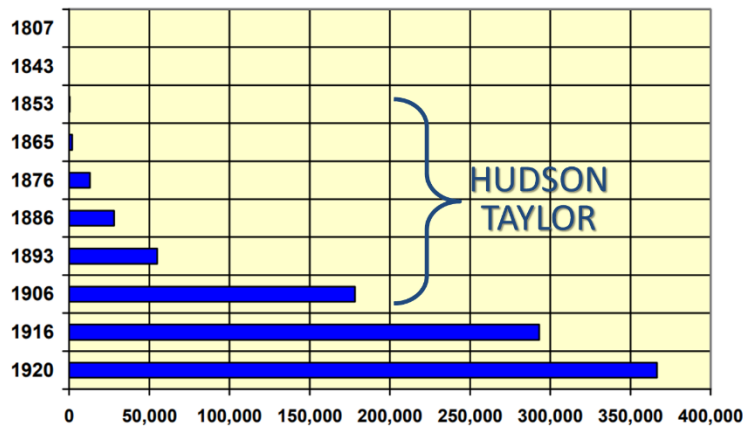
My last deed before leaving was to go to the grave of the colonel who had given the order for my arrest and who had ordered my years of torture. I put a flower on his grave. By doing this I dedicated myself to bringing the joys of Christ that I have to the communists who are so empty spiritually. I hate the communist system, but I love the men. I hate the sin but I love the sinner. I love the communists with all my heart. Communists can kill Christians, but they cannot kill the love they have toward even those who killed them. I have not the slightest bitterness or resentment against the communists or my torturers.⁶

4. Conversion of their captors.

But looking at men like this—not as they are, but as they will be—I could discover also in persecutors like Saul of Tarsus future St. Pauls. And some have already become so. Officers of the secret police to whom we witnessed became Christians themselves and were happy to suffer afterward in prison for having found our Christ. In the jailors who whipped us we saw the possibilities of the jailor of Philippi who first whipped St. Paul and then became a convert. We dreamed that soon they would ask, "What shall I do to be saved?"

5. Millions converted.

Hudson Taylor arrived in China in 1853. Fifty years later there were about 170,000 believers in China. Communism took over in 1947 and the church began to grow. Now conservative estimates have the Christian population in China at over 100 million. Persecution doesn't always lead to conversions but it often helps propel it forward.



6. Disciples multiplied.

Like them, many others were not only converted. We should never stop at having won a soul for Christ. By this, you have done only half the work. Every soul won for Christ must be made to be a soul-winner. The Russians were not only converted, but became "missionaries" in the Underground Church. They were reckless and daring for Christ, always saying it was so little they could do for Christ who died for them.

As I have been saying as we work through the book of Ephesians, the fruit of a disciple is not another disciple but rather a disciple-maker. It's not enough to reproduce ourselves but instead, to multiply ourselves; to produce disciple who will make other disciples.

It must be understood that there are no nominal, halfhearted, lukewarm Christians in Russia or China. The price Christians pay is far too great. The next point to remember is that persecution has always produced a better Christian—a witnessing Christian, a soul-winning Christian. Communist persecution has backfired and produced serious, dedicated Christians such as are rarely seen in free lands. These people cannot understand how anyone can be a Christian and not want to win every soul they meet.

7. Abounding joy.

I myself was later in prison together with souls whom God had helped me to win for Christ. I was in the same cell with one who had left behind six children and who was now in prison for his Christian faith. His wife and children were starving. He might never see them again. I asked him, "Have you any resentment against me that I brought you to Christ and because of this your family is in such misery?" He said, "I have no words to express my thankfulness that you have brought me to the wonderful Savior. I would never have it another way."

It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing; this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were! happy beating us, so everyone was happy.

8. Sanctification of the free believers.

The value of the Bibles smuggled in by these means cannot be understood by an American or an English Christian who "swims" in Bibles. My family and I would not have survived without the material help I got from praying Christians abroad. The same with many other underground pastors and martyrs in communist countries. I can testify out of my own experience about the material and even greater moral help which has been given to us by special missions formed for this purpose in the free world. For us, their men were like angels sent by God!

I'd like to close with a challenge for all of us. Though this was written sixty years ago, it rings as true today as it did then.

I have been called "the voice of the Underground Church." I do not feel worthy to be the voice of such an honored part of the Body of Christ. However, in communist lands I led for years a part of the Underground Church. By a miracle I survived fourteen years of torture and imprisonment, including two years in a prison "dying room." By an even greater miracle, God somehow saw fit to reach into the prison and take me out; delivering me to the West to speak to the free Church.

I speak on behalf of my brethren who lie in countless nameless graves. I speak on behalf of my brethren who now meet secretly in forests, basements, attics and other such places. It was decided by the Underground Church in Rumania that I should try to leave my country, and bring out a message to the free Christians of the world. By a miracle, I have now been able to come out, and I fulfill the charge given me by those who remain behind laboring, risking, suffering and dying in communist lands.

The message I bring out from the Underground Church is:

"Don't abandon us!"

"Don't forget us!"

"Don't write us off!"

"Give us the tools we need! We will pay the price for using them!" This is the message I have been charged to deliver to you. I speak for the silenced Church, the Underground Church, the "dumb" Church, which has no voice to speak.

Rich Maurer

November 12, 2017

¹ For over eight years, no one knew if I was alive or dead. My wife was visited by the secret police who posed as released fellow-prisoners. They told her they had attended my burial. She was heart-broken.

² In May 1966 he testified in Washington before the Senate's Internal Security Subcommittee and stripped to the waist to show eighteen deep torture wounds covering his body.

³ At this time of inner turmoil—as I discovered after-ward—in a village high up in the mountains of Rumania, an old carpenter prayed like this: "My God, I have served you on earth and I wish to have my reward on earth as well as in Heaven. And my reward should be that I should not die before I bring a Jew to Christ, because Jesus was from the Jewish people. But I am poor, old and sick. I cannot go around and seek a Jew. In my village there are none. Bring Thou a Jew into my village and I will do my best to bring him to Christ"

But the Bible he gave me was another kind of Bible. As he told me afterward, he prayed for *hours* together with his wife for my conversion and that of my wife. The Bible he gave me was written not so much in words, but in flames of love fired by his prayers. I could scarcely read it I could only weep over it, comparing my bad life with the Ufe of Jesus; my impurity; my hatred with His love; and He accepted me to be one of His own.

⁴ And then—seeing all this—I hated communism as I had not hated it under their tortures.

I hated not because of what it had done to me, but because of the wrong it does to the glory of God, to the name of Christ and to the souls of one billion men under its dominion.

⁵ The following scene happened more times than I can remember: A brother was preaching to the other prisoners when the guards suddenly burst in, surprising him half way through a phrase. They hauled him down the corridor to their "beating room". After what seemed an endless beating, they brought him back and threw him—bloody and bruised—on the prison floor.

Slowly, he picked his battered body up, painfully straightened his clothing and said, "Now, brethren, where did I leave off when I was interrupted?" He continued his Gospel message!

I have seen beautiful things!

⁶ Several Christians have asked me how we could resist brainwashing. There is only one method of resistance to brainwashing. This is "heartwashing." If the heart is cleansed by the love of Jesus Christ, and if the heart loves Him, you can resist all tortures. What would a loving bride not do for a loving bridegroom? What would a loving mother not do for her child? If you love Christ as Mary did, who had Christ as a baby in her arms, if you love Jesus as a bride loves her bride- groom, then you can resist such tortures. God will judge us not according to 'how much we endured, but how much we could love. I am a witness for the Christians in communist prisons that they could love. They could love God and men.