



Be still.

*"If our hands
that should grasp heavenly
treasures are kept closed
because they are filled with
earthly things, deal with us
Lord, until we stretch out
empty hands, suppliants for
Thy blessings."*

**"HE SUFFERED
THEE TO HUNGER."
DEUT. 8:3**

IN GOD'S UNDERGROUND

Abridged excerpts from "In God's Underground" by Richard Wurmbrand edited by Charles Foley

A MEETING WAS SUMMONED IN MOSCOW TO DECIDE ON THE SHAPE OF THE POST-WAR WORLD. CHURCHILL SAID TO STALIN, "HOW WOULD IT DO FOR YOU TO HAVE 90 PER CENT PREDOMINANCE IN RUMANIA, WHILE WE HAVE HAVE 90 PER CENT OF THE SAY IN GREECE?" A MILLION RUSSIAN TROOPS POURED INTO RUMANIA. THESE WERE OUR NEW 'ALLIES!' "THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING!" WAS NO JOKE-PHASE FOR US.

TOGETHER ALONE

I am a Lutheran minister who has spent more than 14 years in different prisons because of my Christian belief. The prison years did not seem too long for me, for I discovered, alone in my cell, that beyond belief and love there is a delight in God: a deep and extraordinary ecstasy of happiness that is like nothing in this world. And when I came out of jail I was like someone who comes down from a mountain top where he has seen for miles around the peace and beauty of the countryside, and now returns to the plain.

On the day of my conversion I had prayed, "God, I was an atheist. Now let me go to Russia to work as a missionary among atheists, and I shall not complain if afterwards I have to spend all the rest of my life in prison." But God did not send me on the long journey to Russia. Instead, the Russians had come to me.

1948

Knowing that torture lay ahead, I resolved to kill myself rather than betray others. I felt no moral scruples; for a Christian to die means to go to Christ. I would explain and He would surely understand. My duty to protect my friends was higher than life.

The problem was to secure the means of suicide before my intention was suspected. Guards checked prisoners and their cells regularly for possible instruments of death: glass slivers, a piece of cord, a razor-blade. One morning, in the doctor's round, I said I could not remember all the details the interrogators needed because I had not slept for weeks. He



ordered me a nightly sleeping pill and a guard peered into my mouth each time to see that it was gone. In fact, I held the pill under my tongue and took it out when he had left. But where to hide my prize? Not on my body, to which anything might happen. Not in my pallet, which had to be shaken and folded daily. There was the other pallet on which Patrascanu had lain. I tore open a few stitches and every day hid another pill among the straw.

By the end of the month I had thirty pills. They were a comfort against the fear of breaking under torture, but I had fits of black

depression at the thought of them. It was summer. I heard homely noises from the world outside. A girl singing. A tramcar grinding around the corner. Mothers calling sons. Feathery seeds floated softly in to settle on my cement floor. I asked God what He was doing. Why was I being forced to put an end to a life which had been dedicated to His service? Looking up one evening through the narrow window, I saw the first star appear in the darkening sky, and the thought came to my mind that God had sent this light, which had begun its apparently useless journey years ago. And now it passed through the bars of my cell, consoling me.

Next morning the guard came in and, without a word, picked up the spare pallet with my hoarded pills in it and took it for some other prisoner. I was upset at first. Then I laughed, and felt calmer than I had for weeks. Since God did not want my suicide, then He would give me strength to bear the suffering ahead.

THE WALL

At last the torture began. I do not want to make much of it, but it must be told because these things were common to all Secret Police prisons. I was made to stand facing a wall with my hands raised above my head so that my finger-tips just touched it. First I stood for hours, long after my arms had lost all feeling, and my legs began to tremble and then swell. When I collapsed on the floor, I was given a crust and a sip of water and made to stand again. One guard relieved another. Some of them would force you to adopt ridiculous or obscene postures, and this went

on, with short breaks, for days and nights. There was the wall to look at. I thought of the walls referred to in the Bible, recalling a verse from Isaiah which saddened me: God says that Israel's wrong-doings put a wall between Him and the people. The failures of Christianity had allowed a Communist triumph, and that was why I had a wall before me now. Then I remembered a phrase, "*With my Lord, I jump over a wall.*" I, too, might jump over this wall into the spiritual world of fellowship with God. I thought of the Jewish spies who returned from Canaan to report that the cities were great and walled—but as the wall of Jericho came down, so the wall before me must also fall at the will of God. When pain was overwhelming me, I said to myself a phrase from the Song of Solomon: "*My beloved is like a roe or a young hart; behold, he standeth behind our wall.*" I imagined that Jesus stood behind my wall, giving me strength. I remembered that, as long as Moses held up his hands on the mountain, the chosen people went forward to victory; perhaps our sufferings were helping the people of God to win their battle, too.

"Walk!" ordered the guard. I tried to pull my shoes on, but my feet were too swollen. "Come on! Hurry! Keep going round! I'll watch you from outside."

The cell was twelve paces round. I shuffled around it in torn socks. The spy-hole clicked. "Faster!" shouted the guard. My head began to spin. "Faster—or do you want a beating?" I bumped painfully into a wall. My eyes stung with sweat. Round and round, round and round. Click! "Halt, turn about! Walk!" Round and round in the opposite direction. "Faster!" I stumbled and picked myself up. "Keep moving!" When I fell, the guard charged in and cracked me across the elbow with a club as I struggled up. The pain was so agonising that I fell again. "Get up! Get moving! This is the *manège*!"

Nearly everyone had to go through the *manège*, or training ring as it was known. Hours went by before you got a cup of water or anything to eat. The thirst drove out hunger. It was even fiercer than the stabbing of hot knives that ran up your legs. Worst of all was having to start walking again after being allowed a few minutes' rest, or a few hours at night in a stupor on the floor. Stiff joints, cracked muscles, lacerated feet would not support the body's weight. You clung to the walls, while the guard screamed orders. When you could no longer stand, you went on all fours. I do not know how many days and nights I spent in the *manège*. I began to pray for the guards as I moved. I thought of the Song of Songs, in which we are told of the holy dance of the bride of Christ in honour of her bridegroom. I said to myself, "I will move with as much grace as if this were a dance of divine love, for Jesus." For a while it seemed to me that I did. If a man will to do everything that he has to do, then he does only the things which he wills—and the hardest trials, being voluntary, become easier. I could no longer distinguish one wall from another, or a wall from the door, just as in divine love one does not distinguish between good and evil men and can embrace everyone.

MOCKERY

Perhaps waiting was the worst torture: to lie there, listening to screams and weeping, knowing that in an hour it would be my turn. But God helped me never to say a word which harmed another. I lost consciousness easily, and they wanted me alive. A doctor was present to take the pulse and check that the victim was not about to escape into the next world while the Secret Police still had need of him. It was an image of Hell, in which torment is eternal and you cannot die.

It was hard to remember the Bible. Notwithstanding I tried to keep in mind how Jesus could have come to earth as a king, but chose instead to be condemned as a criminal and whipped. A Roman whipping was horrible, and I thought with every blow I received that He also knew such pain, and there was joy in sharing it with Him.

The mockery and humiliation were also more than many could support. Jesus often said that He would be scourged, mocked and crucified. I used to think that mockery, compared with scourging and crucifixion, was nothing. That was before I knew that a man could be forced to open his mouth so that others could spit or urinate in it, while our masters laughed and jeered.

SILENCE

I was kept in solitary confinement for the next two years. I had only my thoughts for company, and I was not a meditative man, but a soul that had rarely known quiet. I had God—or was it simply my profession? People expect pastors to be models of wisdom, purity, love, truthfulness; they cannot always be genuinely so, because they are also men: so, in smaller or greater measure, they begin to act the part. As time passes, they can hardly tell how much of their behaviour is play-acting.

I remembered what Savaronola wrote on the fifty-first Psalm, in prison, with his bones so broken that he could sign the self-accusatory paper only with his left hand. He said there were two kinds of Christian: those who sincerely believe in God and those who, just as sincerely, believe that they believe. You can tell them apart by their actions in decisive moments. If a thief, planning to rob a rich man's home, sees a stranger who might be a policeman, he holds back. If, on second thoughts, he breaks in after all, this proves that he does not believe the man to be an agent of the law. Our beliefs are proved by what we do.

Did I believe in God? Now the test had come. I was alone. There was no salary to earn, no golden opinions to consider. God offered me only suffering—would I continue to love Him? My mind went back to one of my favourite books concerning fourth century saints who formed desert monasteries when the Church was persecuted. Christian books are like good wine—the older the better.

A brother asked his elder, "Father, what is silence?" The answer was, "My son, silence is to sit alone in your cell in wisdom and fear of God, shielding your heart from the burning arrows of

thought. Silence like this brings to birth the good. O silence without care, ladder to heaven! O silence in which one cares only for first things, and speaks only with Jesus Christ! He who keeps silent is the one who sings, "My heart is ready to praise Thee, O Lord!"

I wondered if I could praise God by a life of silence. At first, I prayed greatly to be released. But as days passed into weeks my only visitor was still the guard, who brought wedges of black bread and watery soup, and never spoke a word. Perhaps in this silence I was coming closer to God. Perhaps, too, it would make me a better pastor; for I had noticed that the best preachers were men who possessed an inner silence, like Jesus. When the mouth is too much open, even to speak good, the soul loses its fire just as a room loses its warmth through an open door.

Slowly, I learned that on the tree of silence hangs the fruit of peace. I began to realise my real personality, and made sure that it belonged to Christ. I found that even here my thoughts and feelings turned to God and that I could pass night after night in prayer, spiritual exercise and praise. I knew now that I was not play-acting, believing that I believed.

ROOM FOUR

At a railway siding we were loaded into a special wagon for transporting prisoners. We found that all of us had tuberculosis and decided we must be bound for Tîrgul-Ocna, a 200-mile journey...

During the next days, two men died who had been in the cart from the station. I heard another of them pleading hoarsely with Dr. Aldea, "I swear, I'm better, doctor. The fever's going, I know. Today I coughed blood only once. Don't let them put me in Room Four!"

I asked the man who brought my watery gruel what happened in Room Four. He put the plate down carefully and replied, "That's where you go when they know there is no hope."

During the next fortnight, four men who entered the room with me died. Sometimes I was not sure myself whether I was alive or dead. At night I slept in snatches, woken by stabs of agony. Other prisoners turned me on my side an average of forty times to ease the pain. Pus was running from a dozen sores. My chest was swollen with it, and the spine was also affected. I spat blood constantly. My mind and body were linked by the feeblest ties, and I moved to the borders of the physical world...

I survived the first crisis. Dr. Aldea's look of pity began to change to puzzlement as I clung to life. I received no medicine, but for an hour in the morning the fever fell slightly and my mind was clearer. I began to take stock of my surroundings.

The room contained twelve beds, close together. It was very quiet. There were no warders here—they feared infection and kept away from patients as much as possible. We wore the clothes in which we had been arrested, patched together over the years with whatever could be found. A few prisoners who were well enough dug the plot outside the building. The rest lay on their plank beds and gossiped the

hours away. But in Room Four the atmosphere was different, because no one ever left it alive. Scores of men died, and their places were taken by others in the thirty months I lay in this room. But here is a remarkable fact. Not one died an atheist. Fascists, Communists, saints, murderers, thieves, priests, rich landowners and the poorest peasants were shut together in one small cell. Yet none of them died without making his peace with God and man. Many entered Room Four as firmly convinced unbelievers. I saw their unbelief collapse, always, in the face of death. A true conviction must survive enormous pressures, and atheism does not.

CUSTOMER OR DISCIPLE

Soteris was proud of his atheism while he could joke and hope for life: but as death approached he cried out for help from God. His body was prepared for burial by a prisoner from outside who often came to help us. He was known respectfully as "The Professor." Rarely did his stooped and scholarly figure appear unaccompanied by someone to whom he was teaching history, French or some other subject. I asked how he managed without writing materials. "We rub the table with a piece of soap and scratch the words with a nail. I used to think I taught for a living. In prison I've learnt that I teach because I love my pupils! Here we are shown what we are worth!"

When I asked if he was a Christian he looked upset. "Pastor, I have had too many disappointments. At my last prison, the church was turned into a storeroom and they asked for someone to tear down the cross on the steeple. No one cared to do it. In the end it was the priest who volunteered."

I said that not all who called themselves Christians were disciples of Christ in the true sense of the word. "A man who visits a barber to be shaved, or who orders a suit from a tailor, is not a disciple, but a customer. So one who comes to the Saviour only to be saved is the Saviour's customer, not His disciple. A disciple is one who says to Christ, 'How I long to do work like yours! To go from place to place taking away fear: bringing instead joy, truth, comfort and life eternal!'"

LIKE JESUS

Dr. Aldea told me his name was Josif. "A nice lad," he said, "but he'll be scarred for life by an ulcer on the face. He's another bone tuberculosis case." He told me that four years before, when only fourteen, Josif had been arrested while trying to reach Germany, where his sister was living. Suspected of being a pawn in some political game, Josif was taken to Bucharest and tortured for information which he did not possess. Then he was sent with a forced labour gang to the canal, where he starved and fell victim to T.B.

Josif often helped out in Room Four. He was shivering in his new shirt, which was already growing threadbare. I took the woollen jacket which my relatives had sent and tore out the lining for myself. I persuaded him to take the

jacket. He clasped his arms over his narrow chest to show how warm he was.

Josif's conversion began on that day. Yet something was needed to lift him into faith. It happened during the distribution of bread rations. Each portion was supposed to be three and a half ounces, but some were a shade larger, some smaller. There were often disagreements over whose turn it was for first choice, and quarrels over who had to be last. Men asked each other's advice: which was the biggest portion left? Having acted on it, they suspected they were being misled, and friendships turned sour over a mouthful of black bread. When a surly prisoner called Trailescu tried to cheat me, Josif was watching.

I told Trailescu, "Take mine, too. I know how hungry you are." He shrugged and stuffed the bread into his mouth.

We sat translating New Testament verses into English that evening and Josif said, "We have read nearly everything Jesus said now, but still I wonder what He was like to know as a man."

I said, "I'll tell you. When I was in Room Four there was a pastor who would give away everything he had—his last bit of bread, his medicine, the coat from his back. I had given these things also sometimes, when I wanted them for myself. But at other times when men were hungry and sick and in need I could be very quiet; I didn't care. This other pastor was really Christ-like. You felt that just the touch of his hand could heal and calm. One day he talked to a small group of prisoners and one asked him the question you have asked me: 'What is Jesus like? I've never met anyone like the man you describe, so good and loving and truthful.' And the pastor replied, in a moment of great courage, simply and humbly, 'Jesus is like me.' And the man, who had often received kindness from the pastor, answered, smiling, 'If Christ was like you, then I love Him.' The times when one may say such a thing as that, Josif, are very rare. But to me that is what it means to be Christian. To believe in Him is not such a great thing. To become like Him is truly great."

"Pastor, if Jesus is like you, then I love Him too," Josif said. There was innocence and peace in his gaze. On the day of his departure, he embraced me. There were tears in his eyes. He said, "You've helped me as though you were my own father. Now I can stand by myself, with God."

1956

It seemed that the denunciation of Stalin did indeed herald another 'thaw'. It could not last; yet many prisoners were being released under the terms of an amnesty. Would I be one of them? The thought only saddened me: if they let me go now, what use would I be? My son had grown up and could hardly remember his father. Sabina was used to going her own way. The church had other pastors, who made less trouble.

"Interrogation at once! Move!" Back to the bullying, the fear, the questions to which I had to find false answers! I started to gather my things, while the guard bellowed, "Come on,

come on! The car's waiting," I hurried with him through the corridors and across the yard. One after another the steel gates were unlocked as we climbed the steps. Then I was outside. There was no car in sight, only a clerk who handed me a slip of paper. I took it. It was a court order and it declared that under the amnesty I was free. I stared at it stupidly. All I could say was, "But I've got nearly twelve years yet to serve."

"Don't argue! Get out!"

My ragged shirt was grey with dirt. My trousers were a map of coloured patches tacked together. "I'll be arrested by the first policeman."

"We've no clothes here for you. Do get off!"

Outside the prison walls there was not a soul to be seen; I was alone, in an empty, summery world. I called out, so that the guards could hear behind their walls, "God, help me not to rejoice more because I'm free than because You were with me in prison!"

It is three miles from Jilava to Bucharest. I heaved my bundle on my shoulder and set off across the fields. It was only a collection of smelly rags, but they had been so precious to me in jail that I never considered leaving them.

I walked on until I reached a tram stop on the outskirts of the capital. People crowded around me, knowing at once where I had come from. They asked after brothers, fathers, cousins—all had someone in prison. When I boarded the tram, they would not let me pay. Several stood to offer me a seat. Released prisoners in Rumania, far from being outcasts, are highly respected men.

At last I reached my own front door and hesitated a moment. They were not expecting me, and I was a fearful sight. Then I opened the door. In the hall were several young people, among them a gawky young man who stared at me and burst out: "Father!"

It was Mihai, my son. He was nine when I left him: now he was eighteen. Then my wife came forward. Her face was thinner, but her hair was still black; I thought she was more beautiful than ever. My eyes blurred. When she put her arms around me, I made a great effort and said, "Before we kiss, I must say something. Don't think I've simply come from misery to happiness! I've come from the joy of being with Christ in prison to the joy of being with Him in my family. I'm not coming from strangers to my own, but from my own in prison to my own at home." Later, I sang softly a little song I had made for her years before in prison to sing if we ever met again.

SEVEN HERB TEA

The news that I had promised to deliver a series of talks at Rumania's ancient university town was at once reported to the authorities, with the warning that my real purpose was to attack Marxism and make trouble among the students under the guise of lecturing on Christian philosophy. The warning was taken up at once by an official spy called Rugojanu, a fanatic who went from church to church, tirelessly sniffing out 'counter-revolutionaries'. He attended my lectures himself.

As Darwin and his evolutionary theories were always to the fore in theological classes, I tried to deal with them. I said that the new Rumania, advanced and Socialist, rejected all capitalist ideas; was it not odd that an exception was made for the English Bourgeois, Sir Charles Darwin?

Rugojanu, hunched forward in a pew, was staring at me.

I started my lectures on a Monday. On Tuesday the audience had doubled. By the end of the week more than a thousand faces looked up at me—the whole university, it seemed, was crowding in to the cathedral. I knew that many of them were eager to hear the truth, but feared the consequences of embracing it; so I told them of the advice given me by a pastor who died for his faith at the hands of the Fascists: “you give your body as a sacrifice to God when you give it to all who wish to beat and mock you.”

I looked out at the silent congregation. It was, for a moment, as if I were back in my church during the war on the day when the Iron Guard bullies filed in with their guns. Menace was around us; not only in the place where Rugojanu was taking notes.

“Don’t let suffering take you by surprise! Meditate on it often. Take the virtues of Christ and His saints to yourself, by thought. My teacher who died for his faith gave me a recipe for a tea against suffering, and I will give it to you.” I told them the story of a doctor of early Christian times who was unjustly imprisoned by the emperor. After some seeks his family were allowed to see him, and at first they wept. His clothes were rags, his nourishment a slice of bread with a cup of water every day. His wife wondered and asked, “How is it you look so well? You have the air of someone who has just come from a wedding!” The doctor told his family:

“I have discovered a tea which is good against all suffering and sorrow. It contains seven herbs.

“The first is called contentedness: be satisfied with what you have. I may shiver in my rags as I gnaw on a crust, but how much worse off I should be if the emperor had thrown me naked into a dungeon with nothing at all to eat!”

“The second herb is common sense. Whether I rejoice or worry, I shall still be in prison, so why repine?”

“The third is remembrance of past sins: count them, and on the supposition that every sin deserves a day in prison, reckon how many lives you would spend behind bars—you have been let off lightly!”

“Fourth, the thought of the sorrows which Christ bore gladly for us. If the only man who ever could choose his fate on earth chose pain, what great value He must have seen in it! So we observe that, borne with serenity and joy, suffering redeems.

“The fifth herb is the knowledge that suffering has been given to us by God as from a father, not to

harm us, but to cleanse and sanctify us. The suffering through which we pass has the purpose of purifying us, and preparing us for heaven.

“The sixth is that no suffering can harm a Christian life. If the pleasures of the flesh are all, then pain and prison bring an end to a man’s aim in living; but if the core of life is truth, that is something which no prison cell can change. Prison cannot stop me from loving; iron bars cannot exclude faith. If these ideals make up my life, I can be serene anywhere.

“The last herb in the recipe is hope. The wheel of life may put the emperor’s physician in prison, but it goes on turning. It may put me back into the palace, and even put me on the throne.”

I paused for a moment. The crowded church was still. “I have drunk barrels of this tea since then, and I can recommend it to you all,” I said.

Rugojanu stood up and pushed his way out of the cathedral without a backward glance.

Next day I was summoned by my bishop, who told me that Rugojanu was making trouble. While he was telling me about protests from the Ministry of Cults, Rugojanu himself strode into the room. “Ah, you!” he cried. “What excuses are you trying to make? A torrent of sedition—I heard it!”

I asked the man what in particular had displeased him. Everything had—but particularly my cure for suffering. “The wheel will not turn, my friend; Communism is here forever!” His face was distorted with hatred.

“I didn’t mention Communism,” I replied. “I said simply that the wheel of life keeps turning. For instance, I was in prison, now I am free. I have been ill, now I am better. I lost my parish, now I may work...”

“No, no, no! You meant that Communism would fall, and they all knew what you meant. Don’t imagine you’ve heard the last of this!”

Rugojanu called church leaders to a meeting where I was denounced for trying to poison youth with concealed attacks on the government. “You may be sure that he will never preach again!” shouted Rugojanu, working himself into an ugly rage. At the end he cried, “Wurmbrand is finished! Wurmbrand is finished!” He gathered up his coat and hat and walked out of the building.

A hundred yards from the door a car, swerving to avoid a dog, mounted the pavement and crushed him against the wall. He died on the spot. The story of Rugojanu’s last words and their sequel spread through the country. Often during these years God showed His sign.

CHRISTIANITY IS DEAD

For a long time I remained in the ‘special block’; how long I am not sure. Time has telescoped all days of certain periods in my prison life into

one enormous day. The brainwashing increased in its intensity, but changed little in method. The loudspeakers now said:

Christianity is dead.

Christianity is dead.

Christianity is dead.

I recall one day clearly. They had given us postcards to invite our families to come and bring parcels. On the day named, I was shaved and washed and given a clean shirt. Hours passed. I sat in the cell staring at the glittering white tiles, but no one came. I was not to know then that my postcard had never been sent.

Nobody loves you now.

Nobody loves you now.

Nobody loves you now.

I began to weep. The loudspeaker said:

They don’t want you any more.

They don’t want you any more.

They don’t want you any more.

I could not bear to hear these false words and I could not shut them out. Day after day:

Christianity is dead.

Christianity is dead.

Christianity is dead.

And in time I came to believe what they had told us for all those months. Christianity was dead. The Bible foretells a time of great apostasy, and I believed that it had arrived.

Then I thought of Mary Magdalene, and perhaps this thought, more than any other, helped to save me from the soul-killing poison of the last and worst stage of brainwashing. I remembered how she was faithful to Christ even when He cried on the cross, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” And when He was a corpse in the tomb, she wept nearby and waited until He arose. So when I believed at last that Christianity was dead, I said, “Even so, I will believe in it, and I will be at its tomb until it arises again, as it surely will.”

THE FACE

I have described why I decided I must leave my country, and how I came to the West. Now I have only this to add. On the wall of a civic building in Washington, D.C., there is a large plaque containing the Constitution of the United States, skillfully engraved in copperplate. When you first look at it, you see only the engraved words of the Constitution; then, on stepping back, so that the angle of the light changes, the face of George Washington appears, carved into the text.

So it should be with this book, which contains episodes from a man’s life, and the story of those who were with him in prison. Behind them all stands an unseen being, Christ, who kept us in faith and gave us strength to conquer.

RICHARD WURMBRAND 1909-2001

The Christian landscape is strewn with the wreckage of derelict, half-built towers—the ruins of those who began to build and were unable to finish. For thousands of people still ignore Christ’s warning and undertake to follow him without first pausing to reflect on the cost of doing so. The result is the great scandal of Christendom today, so-called ‘nominal Christianity.’ In countries to which Christian civilisation has spread, large numbers of people have covered themselves with a decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity. They have allowed themselves to become somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable. Their religion is a great, soft cushion. It protects them from the hard unpleasantness of life, while changing its place and shape to suit their convenience. No wonder the cynics speak of hypocrites in the church and dismiss religion as escapism.

—JOHN STOTT