

Articles and Sermons :: PREPARING FOR THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH by Richard Wurmbrand

PREPARING FOR THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH by Richard Wurmbrand - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2007/12/7 10:37

On another thread there is a discussion about how to deal with pressure while under persecution. I found this on the web and am posting it here for your inspiration.

ginnyrose

PREPARING FOR THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH

By Pastor Richard Wurmbrand

Christian pastors must learn what an underground church looks like and what it does. I spoke with a bishop in Britain for an hour or so about underground church work. Finally, he said, "Excuse me, but you speak of my hobby; I am very interested in church architecture. Would you please tell me if the underground churches use Gothic styles in the building of churches?"

The Underground Church is comparatively unknown. We have it right next door, but we are not ready to join it and we are not trained for it. Every Christian pastor must know this because we might pass through tragic circumstances. Even if we do not pass through these tragic circumstances we have a duty to help and to instruct those who do pass through them.

In Muslim nations, in Red China and so on, many believers have become victims. Many have gone into prisons and many have died in prison. We cannot be proud of this. The better thing would have been to be well instructed on how to do underground work and not to be captured. I admire those who know how to work so well that they are not caught. We have to know the underground work.

PREPARING FOR SUFFERING

Suffering cannot be avoided in the Underground Church, whatever measures are taken, but suffering should be reduced to the minimum.

What happens in a country when oppressive powers take over? In some countries the terror starts at once, as in Mozambique and Cambodia. In other places religious liberty follows as never before. And so it begins. Some regimes come to power without having real power. They do not have the people on their side. They have not necessarily organized their police and their staff of the army yet.

In Russia, the Communists gave immediately great liberty to the Protestants in order to destroy the Orthodox. When they had destroyed the Orthodox, the turn came for the Protestants. The initial situation does not last long. During that time they infiltrate the churches, putting their men in leadership. They find out the weaknesses of pastors. Some might be ambitious men; some might be entrapped with the love of money. Another might have a hidden sin somewhere, wherewith he may be blackmailed. They explain that they would make it known and thus put their men in leadership. Then, at a certain moment the great persecution begins. In Romania such a clamp-down happened in one day. All the Catholic bishops went to prison, along with innumerable priests, monks and nuns. Then many Protestant pastors of all denominations were arrested. Many died in prison.

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he has done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" -(Acts 9:13, 15 and 16).

Jesus, our Lord, told Ananias: "Meet Saul of Tarsus. He will be My underground pastor, My underground worker." That is what St. Paul was - a pastor of an Underground Church. Jesus started a crash course for this underground pastor. He started it with the words, "I will show (him) how great things he must suffer..."

Preparation for underground work begins by studying sufferology, martyrology. Later, we will look at the technical side of underground work, but first of all there must be a certain spiritual preparation for it.

In a free country, to be a member of a church, it is enough to believe and to be baptized. In the Church underground it is not enough to be a member in it. You can be baptized and you can believe, but you will not be a member of the Underground Church unless you know how to suffer.

You might have the mightiest faith in the world, but if you are not prepared to suffer, then when you are taken by the police, you will get two slaps and you will declare anything. So the preparation for suffering is one of the essentials of the preparation of underground work.

A Christian does not panic if he is put in prison. For the rank and file believer, prison is a new place to witness for Christ. For a pastor, prison is a new parish. It is a parish with no great income but with great opportunities for work. I speak a little of this in my book, *With God In Solitary Confinement*.

In other books I mention Morse code, which is also part of the training for the Underground Church. You know what this is - a code by which messages are conveyed. Through this code you can preach the Gospel to those who are to your right and left.

Free parishioners look at their watch; "Already he has preached for thirty minutes. Will he never finish?" When arrested, watches are taken away from you; you have the parishioners with you the whole week and can preach to them from morning to night! They have no choice. There have never been, in the history of the Romanian or the Russian Church, so many conversions brought about as there have been in prison. So do not fear prison. Look upon it as just a new assignment given by God.

Men can accept this. But what about the terrible tortures which are inflicted on prisoners? What will we do about these tortures? Will we be able to bear them? If I do not bear them, I put in prison another fifty or sixty men whom I know because that is what the oppressors wish from me, to betray those around me. Hence comes the great need for preparation for suffering, which must start now. It is too difficult to prepare yourself for it when you are already in prison.

TRUTH ABOUT THE TRUTH

How much each one of us can suffer depends on how much he is bound up with a cause, how dear this cause is to him, and how much it means for him.

In this respect we have had in Communist countries very big surprises. There have been gifted preachers and writers of Christian books who have become traitors. The composer of the best hymnal of Romania became the composer of the best communist hymnal of Romania. Everything depends on whether we have remained in the sphere of words or if we are merged with the divine realities.

God is the Truth. The Bible is the truth about the Truth. Theology is the truth about the truth about the Truth. A good sermon is the truth about the truth about the truth, about the Truth It is not the Truth. The Truth is God alone. Around this Truth there is a scaffolding of words, of theologies, and of exposition. None of these is of any help in times of suffering. It is only the Truth Himself Who is of help, and we have to penetrate through sermons, through theological books, through everything which is 'words' and be bound up with the reality of God Himself.

I have told in the West how Christians were tied to crosses for four days and four nights. The crosses were put on the floor and other prisoners were tortured and made to fulfill their bodily necessities upon the faces and the bodies of the crucified ones. I have since been asked: "Which Bible verse helped and strengthened you in those circumstances?" My answer is: "NO Bible verse was of any help." It is sheer cant and religious hypocrisy to say, "This Bible verse strengthens me, or that Bible verse helps me." Bible verses alone are not meant to help.

We knew Psalm 23 - "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want... though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." When you pass through suffering you realize that it was never meant by God that Psalm 23 should strengthen you. It is the Lord who can strengthen you, not the Psalm which speaks of Him so doing. It is not enough to have the Psalm. You must have the One about whom the Psalm speaks. We also knew the verse: "My Grace is sufficient for thee." But the verse is not sufficient. It is the Grace which is sufficient and not the verse.

Pastors and zealous witnesses who are handling the Word as a calling from God are in danger of giving holy words more value than they really have. Holy words are only the means to arrive at the reality expressed by them. If you are united with the Reality, the Lord Almighty, evil loses its power over you; it cannot break the Lord Almighty. If you only have the words of the Lord Almighty you can be very easily broken.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

The preparation for underground work is deep spiritualization. As we peel an onion in preparation for its use, so God must "peel" from us what are mere words, sensations of our enjoyments in religion, in order to arrive at the reality of our faith. Jesus has told us "that whosoever will follow" Him will have to "take up their cross," and He, Himself, showed how hea

by this cross can be. We have to be prepared for this.

We have to make the preparation now before we are imprisoned. In prison you lose everything. You are undressed and given a prisoner's suit. No more nice furniture, nice carpets or nice curtains. You do not have a wife or husband any more and you do not have your children. You do not have your library and you never see a flower. Nothing of what makes life pleasant remains. Nobody resists who has not renounced the pleasures of life beforehand.

I personally use an exercise. I live in the United States of America. Can you imagine what an American supermarket looks like? You find there many delicious things. I look at everything and say to myself, "I can go without this thing and that thing; this thing is very nice, but I can go without: this third thing I can go without, too." I visited the whole supermarket and did not spend one dollar. I had the joy of seeing many beautiful things and the second joy to know that I can go without.

DOUBT MAKES TRAITORS

I am Jewish. In Hebrew, the language which Jesus Himself spoke and in which the first revelation has been given, the word "doubt" does not exist. To doubt is as wrong for a man as it would be for him to walk on four legs - he is not meant to walk on four legs. A man walks erect; he is not a beast. To doubt is subhuman.

To every one of us doubts come, but do not allow doubts about essential doctrines of the Bible such as the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the existence of eternal life to make a nest in your mind. Every theological or philosophical doubt makes you a potential traitor. You can allow yourself doubts while you have a nice study and you prepare sermons, and you eat well - or you write a book. Then you can allow yourself all kinds of daring ideas and doubts. When you are tortured these doubts are changed into treason because you have to decide to live or die for this faith.

One of the most important things about the spiritual preparation of an underground worker is the solution of his doubts. In mathematics, if you do not find the solution you may have made a mistake somewhere, so you continue until you find out. Don't live with doubts, but seek their solution.

TEST OF TORTURE

Now to come to the very moment of torture. Torture is sometimes very painful. Sometimes it is a simple beating. We have all been spanked as children and beating is just another spanking. A simple beating is very easy to take. Jesus has said we should come to Him like children, which is rather like candidates for spanking!

However, with us, Communists did not stop at beatings - they used very refined tortures. Now torture, you must know, can work both ways. It can harden you and strengthen your decision not to tell the police anything. There are thieves who resist any torture and would not betray those with whom they have co-operated in theft. The more you beat them the more obstinate they become. Or, torture can just break your will.

Now I will tell you of one very interesting case which was published by the Czech Communist Press. Novotny, who was the predecessor of Dubcek and who was a Communist dictator, had arrested one of his intimate comrades, a Communist leader, a convinced atheist, and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. (Not only Christians, Jews or patriots were in prison. One Communist arrested another and tortured him just as they would do anybody else.) They arrested this Communist leader and put him in a prison cell alone. Electromagnetic rays, which disturb the mind, passed through this cell. A loudspeaker repeated day and night: "Is your name Joseph or not Joseph?" (His name was not Joseph.)

They tried to drive him mad. Day and night. He felt that he would lose his mind. At a certain moment, he got an illumination. "I have now met unmitigated evil. If Communists torture a Christian, it is not absolutely evil because Communists believe that they will construct an earthly paradise. Christians hinder them, so it is right to torture Christians. But when a Communist tortures a Communist, it is torture for torture's sake. There is absolutely no justification for it. But wait a little bit. Every coin has two sides, every electric cable has two poles. If there is an unmitigated evil, against whom does this unmitigated evil fight? There must be an unmitigated good. This is God, and against Him they fight."

When he was called to the interrogator, he entered smiling into the room and told him that he could switch off the loudspeaker now because it had attained its result. "I have become a Christian." The officer asked him, "How did it happen?" He told him the whole story. The officer said, "Wait a little bit." He called a few of his comrades and said, "Please repeat the story before my comrades." He repeated the story, and the captain told the other police officer, "I told you that this method will not work. You have overdone it."

The Devil is not all mighty and all wise like God. He makes mistakes. Evil torture is an excess which can be used very well spiritually.

MOMENT OF CRISIS

Torture has a moment of explosion, and the torturer waits for this critical moment. Learn how to conquer doubt and to think thoroughly. There is always one moment of crisis when you are ready to write or pronounce the name of your accomplice in the underground work, or to say where the secret printing shop is, or something of that kind. You have been tortured so much nothing counts any more; the fact that I should not have pain also does not count. Draw this last conclusion at the stage at which you have arrived and you will see that you will overcome this one moment of crisis; it gives you an intense inner joy. You feel that Christ has been with you in that decisive moment. Jailers today are now trained and refined, aware that there is a moment of crisis. If they cannot get anything from you in that moment, then they abandon torturing: they know its continuation to be useless.

There are a few more points in connection with torture. It is very important to understand what Jesus said: "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for itself." I have had fourteen years of prison. Brother Hrapov had twenty six, Wong MingDao had twenty-eight. It seems impossible to bear long years of prison. You are not asked to bear it all at once. Do not bear even one day at a time - bear an hour at a time. One hour of pain everybody can bear. We have had a terrible toothache, a car accident - passing, perhaps, through untold anguish. You are not meant to bear pain more than this one present minute.

What amplifies pain is the memory that I have been beaten and tortured so many times and that tomorrow they will take me again, and the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow, I might not be alive - or they might not be alive. Tomorrow, there can be an overthrow, as in Romania. Yesterday beating has passed: tomorrow's torture has not come yet.

LOVE SUPREME

The Bible teaches some words very hard to take: "Whosoever does not hate father, mother, child, brother, sister - cannot be My disciple." These words mean almost nothing in a free country.

You probably know from The Voice of the Martyrs literature that thousands of children had been taken away from their parents in the former Soviet Union because they were taught about Christ. You must love Christ more than your family. There you are before a court and the judge tells you that if you deny Christ you may keep your children. If not, this will be the last time you will see them. Your heart may break, but your answer should be, "I love God."

Nadia Sloboda left her house for four years of prison. Her children were taken from her, but she left her house singing. The children, for whom the police waited with a truck to take them as she left, told their singing mother, "Don't worry about us. Wherever they put us, we will not give up our faith." They did not.

When Jesus was on the cross He not only suffered physically; He had His mother in front of Him, suffering. His mother had the Son suffering. They loved each other, but the glory of God was at stake and here any human sentiment must be secondary. Only if we take this attitude once and for all can we prepare for underground work.

Only Christ, the Great Sufferer, the Man of Sorrows, must live in us. There have been cases in Communist countries when Communist torturers threw away their rubber truncheons with which they beat a Christian and asked, "What is this halo which you have around your head? How is it that your face shines? I cannot beat you anymore." It is said of Stephen in the Bible, that "his face shone." We have known cases of Communist torturers who told the prisoner, "Shout loudly, cry loudly as if I would beat you so that my comrades will know that I torture you. But I cannot beat you." Thus, you would shout without anything happening to you.

There are other cases when prisoners really are tortured, sometimes to death. You have to choose between dying with Christ and for Christ or becoming a traitor. What is the worth of continuing to live when you will be ashamed to look into the mirror, knowing that the mirror will show you the face of a traitor?

LEARN TO BE SILENT

In the Underground Church, silence is one of the first rules. Every superfluous word you speak can put somebody in prison. A friend of mine, a great Christian composer, went to prison because Christians had the habit of saying, "How beautiful is this song composed by Brother _____." They praised him, and for this he got fifteen years of prison. Sing the song, but do not mention the name of the one who has written it.

You cannot learn to be silent the very moment the country is taken over. You have to learn to be silent from the moment of your conversion.

The secretary to Solzhenitsyn was put under such pressure by the Communists (and she had been denounced by Solzhenitsyn's wife) that she finished by hanging herself. If Solzhenitsyn had kept silent, this would not have happened.

Another question which is very important: I thank God for the years which I passed in Solitary confinement. I was, for three years, thirty feet beneath the earth. I never heard a word. I never spoke a word. There were no books. The outward voices ceased. The guards had felt soled shoes; you did not hear their approach. Then, with time, the inner voices ceased.

We were drugged, we were beaten. I forgot my whole theology. I forgot the whole Bible. One day I observed that I had forgotten the "Our Father." I could not say it any more. I knew that it began with "Our Father...," but I did not know the continuation. I just kept happy and said, "Our Father, I have forgotten the prayer, but you surely know it by heart. You hear it so many thousand times a day, so you assign an angel to say it for me, and I will just keep quiet." For a time my prayers were, "Jesus, I love You." And then after a little time again, "Jesus, I love You. Jesus, I love You." Then it became too difficult even to say this because we were doped with drugs which would destroy our minds. We were very hungry. We had one slice of bread a week. There were the beatings, and the tortures, and the lack of light, and other things. It became impossible to concentrate my mind to even say so much as, "Jesus, I love You." I abandoned it because I knew that it was necessary. The highest form of prayer which I know is the quiet beating of a heart which loves Him. Jesus should just hear "tick-a-tock, tick-a-tock", and He would know that every heartbeat is for Him.

When I came out from solitary confinement and was with other prisoners and heard them speaking, I wondered why they spoke! So much of our speech is useless. Today men become acquainted with each other and one will say, "How do you do?" and the other answers, "How do you do?" What is the use of this? Then one will say, "Don't you think that the weather is fine?" and the other thinks, and says, "Yes, I think it is fine." Why do we have to speak on whether the weather is fine? We do not take earnestly the word of Jesus Who says that men will be judged not for every bad word, but for every useless one. So it is written in the Bible.

Useless talking in some countries means prison and death for your brother. A word of praise about your brother, if it is not necessary, may mean catastrophe. For example, somebody comes to visit you and you say, "Oh! I'm sorry you were not here before - brother W. has just left." The visitor could be an informer of the secret police. Now she will know that brother W. is in town! Keep your mouth shut. Learn to do it now.

PERMISSIBLE STRATAGEMS

You cannot do underground work without using stratagems. I know of one case which happened in Russia. The Communists suspected that the Christians were gathering somewhere and they surveyed a street. They knew that the meeting must be there somewhere. They saw a young boy going toward the house where they supposed the meeting would be. They stopped the boy and the police asked him, "Where are you going?" With a sad face, he said, "My oldest brother died, and now we gather the whole family to read his testament." The police officer was so impressed that he patted the boy and said, "Just go." The boy had not told a lie.

We are not obliged to tell an atheist tyrant the truth. We are not obliged to tell him what we are doing. It is indecent for his side to put questions to me, an impertinence.

RESISTING BRAINWASHING

One of the greatest methods is not only physical torture; it is brainwashing. We have to know how to resist brainwashing. Brainwashing exists in the free world, too. The press, radio and television brainwash us. There exists no motive in the world to drink Coca-Cola. You drink it because you are brainwashed. Water is surely better than Coca-Cola. But nobody advertises, "Drink water, drink water." if water were advertised, we would drink water. Some have driven this technique of brainwashing to its extreme. The methods vary, but brainwashing in my Romanian prison consisted essentially of this: we had to sit seventeen hours on a form which gave no possibility to lean, and you were not allowed to close your eyes. For seventeen hours a day we had to hear, "Communism is good, Communism is good, Communism is good, etc.; Christianity is dead, Christianity is dead, Christianity is dead, etc.; Give up, give up, etc." You were bored after one minute of this but you had to hear it the whole seventeen hours for weeks, months, years even, without any interruption.

I can assure you, it is not easy. It is one of the worst tortures. Much worse than physical torture. But Christ has foreseen all things because with Him there is no time. Future, past, present are one and the same: He knows all things from the beginning. Communists invented brainwashing too late! Christ had already invented the opposite to brainwashing - heart washing. He has said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Stephen, the first martyr for Christ, had around him hundreds with big stones in their hands to throw at him. He said: "I see." And the wife of Stephen probably thought he saw the danger he was in and would run away. But he said: "I see JESUS standing at the right hand of God." Perhaps she said (it is not recorded), "Don't you see all the mob around you ready to throw stones at you?" "Oh yes! I see some little ants there below not worth mentioning. I look to JESUS." He did not

to look to those who wished to kill him. Blessed are the pure in heart.

I had passed through brainwashing for over two years. Now the Communists would have said that my brain was still dirty. In the same rhythm in which they said, "Christianity is dead," I and others repeated to ourselves: "Christ also has been dead, Christ also has been dead." But we knew He rose from the dead. We remembered that we lived in the communion of saints.

OVERCOMING SOLITUDE

One of the greatest problems for an underground fighter is to know how to fill up his solitude. We had absolutely no books. Not only no Bible, but no books, no scrap of paper, and no pencil. We never heard a noise, and there was absolutely nothing to distract our attention. You looked at the walls, that was all. Now normally a mind under such circumstances becomes mad.

I can tell you from my own experience how I avoided becoming mad, but this again has to be prepared by a life of spiritual exercise beforehand. How much can you be alone without the Bible? How much can you bear to be with yourself without switching on the radio, or a record player, etc.?

I, and many other prisoners, did it like this. We never slept during the night. We slept during the day. The whole night we were awake. You know that a Psalm says, "...bless you the Lord,... which by night stand in the house of the Lord." One prayer at night is worth ten prayers during the day.

All great sins and crimes are committed during the night. The great robberies, drunkenness, reveling, adultery - this whole life of sin is a night life. During the day everyone has to work in a factory, college, or somewhere. The demonic forces are forces of the night, and therefore, it is so important to oppose them during the night.

In solitary confinement we awoke when the other prisoners went to bed. We filled our time with a program which was so heavy, we could not fulfill it. We started with a prayer, a prayer in which we traveled through the whole world. We prayed for each country, for where we knew the names of towns and men, and we prayed for great preachers. It took a good hour or two to come back. We prayed for pilots, and for those on the sea, and for those who were in prisons.

After having traveled through the whole world, I read the Bible from memory. To memorize the Bible is very important for an underground worker.

THE JOY OF THE LORD

Just to make us laugh also a little bit, I will tell you one thing which happened. Once while I lay on the few planks which were my bed, I read from memory the Sermon on the Mount, according to Luke. I arrived at the part where it is said, "When you are persecuted... for the Son of man's sake, rejoice you, in that day and leap for joy...." You will remember that it is written like this. I said, "How could I commit such a sin of neglect? Christ has said that we have to do two different things. One to rejoice, I have done. The second, to 'leap for joy,' I have not done." So I jumped. I came down from my bed and I began to jump around.

In prison, the door of a cell has a peep hole through which the warden looks into the cell. He happened to look in while I jumped around. So he believed that I had become mad. They had an order to behave very well with madmen so that their shouting and banging on the wall should not disturb the order of the prison. The guard immediately entered, quieted me down and said, "You will be released; you can see everything will be all right. Just remain quiet. I will bring you something." He brought me a big loaf of bread. Our portion was one slice of bread a week, and now I had a whole loaf, plus cheese. It was white. Never just eat cheese; first of all admire its whiteness. It is beautiful to look upon. He brought me also sugar. He spoke a few nice words again and locked the door and left.

I said, "I will eat these things after having finished my chapter from St. Luke." I lay down again and tried to remember where I had left off. "Yes, at 'when you are persecuted for My Name's sake, rejoice... and leap for joy because great is your reward.'" I looked at the loaf of bread and the cheese. Really, the reward was great!

So the next task is to think of the Bible and to meditate upon it. Every night, I composed a sermon beginning with "Dear brethren, and sisters" and finishing with "Amen." After I composed it, I delivered it. I put them afterwards in very short rhymes so that I could remember them. My books, *With God In Solitary Confinement* and *If Prison Walls Could Speak*, contain some of these sermons. I have memorized three hundred and fifty of them.

Out of bread I made chessmen, some of them whitened with a little bit of chalk and the others gray. I played chess with myself. Never believe that Bob Fisher is the greatest chess master of the world. He won the last match with Spassky. He

won eight games and lost two. I, in three years, never lost a game; I always won either with white or gray!

Never allow your mind to become distressed because then the Communists have you entirely in their hands. Your mind must be continually exercised. It must be alert, it must think. It must, everyone according to his abilities, compose different things, etc.

I have told you all these things because they belong to the secrets of the underground worker when he suffers. May God bless you.

Richard Wurmbrand

Re: PREPARING FOR THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH by Richard Wurmbrand - posted by enid, on: 2007/12/7 12:14

This is quite an article, quite gripping.

It seems almost alien to western churches to consider suffering, torture, imprisonment, etc.

However, we should, for it is coming our way, or can we not see that?

I can't believe that bishop who asked if underground churches had a gothic style! What planet was he from?

One thing that stands out is the battle the mind has. It is there that we make or break.

If our trust and confidence in God fails then, we are doomed.

As it tells us in 1 Peter 1 to gird up the loins of our minds, it is not something to overlook.

God help us if we suppose western society is always going to be like this.

Look up, for our redemption draws nigh.

God bless.

Re: PREPARING FOR THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH by Richard Wurmbrand - posted by HIServant (), on: 2007/12/8 7:30

Thank you for this posting. It is so clear that we do not understand as a whole...what the time truly is. A friend recently told me about how many believe the reuniting of Israel as a country was the beginning of the season where in 1 Thessalonians he said, that GOD says this generation will not pass until I come. He stated 1948 +120 years would mean roughly a round 2068 MIGHT well be the outside of HIS tarrying.

ONLY GOD KNOWS THE DATE AND TIME,hallelujah!! But such reminds me to press in...knowing that suffering for HIS NAME is most likely our future before HE comes. Praise the LORD!