

Richard Wurmbrand and His Letter

Because his story is about a Christian who suffered for his faith, and because of a letter he later wrote to our General Conference, we will here tell part of the Richard Wurmbrand story. His book, *Tortured for Christ*, is well-known and you may already have read it. But few know the following story:

Richard Wurmbrand died on February 17, 2001 in Whittier, California, at the age of 91. A Romanian Jew, he and his wife converted to Christianity in 1936. When World War II ended, Wurmbrand pastored a church of 1,000, mostly of Jewish converts. He also printed and organized the distribution of a million Russian Gospels to the Russian troops that occupied Romania. He was fluent in nine languages, including English.

In 1947, two years after the war ended, Wurmbrand was arrested and imprisoned for 14 years for leading an underground Christian church and smuggling Bibles into Russia. His wife, also a Christian, was imprisoned for three years.

While in prison he converted several high-ranking secret police officers who helped provide his eventual release. In 1964, the Communist Government allowed him and his family to be ransomed for \$10,000 by Norwegian Christians—and leave Romania.

In December 1965, the Wurmbrands arrived in Oslo, Norway. Not understanding Norwegian, on their first Sunday, they attended the American Lutheran Church. Impressed by the freedom of worship, they both cried uncontrollably during the entire service. The Lutheran pastor opened his home to the refugee family while he was checking through the U.S. embassy government connections, to verify Wurmbrand's strange account of suffering and torture. People in the West did not know what was happening behind the newly formed Iron Curtain.

Wurmbrand's contacts answered, "fully reliable," and so he was invited to speak at the largest NATO base chapel meeting in Oslo. When the meeting was opened for questions, Colonel-Chaplain Cassius Study asked Pastor Wurmbrand why the West should or should not try to coexist with communism. Wurmbrand, always dramatic in his behavior, quickly stepped off the podium, snatched the colonel's wallet from his pocket and replied, "I took your money, your money is in my pocket. Let's co-exist!"

Communism has taken over half the world, and now it wants coexistence. There might be no solution to cancer, he added, but no one has decided to coexist with cancer. Every thief would like to coexist with the police, but this is unacceptable, Wurmbrand said heatedly.

Colonel Sturdy stood up immediately; and, turning to the audience, he said, "Gentlemen, let's send this man to America to snatch the wallets from all the leftists and open their eyes." A collection was taken right then to pay Wurmbrand to go to the U.S.

An initial itinerary of several speaking engagements was prepared for him in the Eastern states. But, upon arriving

alone in New York, most of the meetings were small military chapel gatherings; and, believing them to be unsuccessful, Wurmbrand scheduled an immediate return to Norway.

But, prior to his planned departure, he went to Philadelphia to visit the only friend he knew, a Jewish-Christian minister. His friend discouraged him from trying to stay in the United States, declaring that, after years of imprisonment and torture, Wurmbrand was too feeble to pastor a church. "You will not be able to raise a salary," were his final words.

Before his departure for New York, to board a ship to Norway, Wurmbrand asked his friend to show him a little bit of Philadelphia. As they were walking down the street, they came upon a large anti-Vietnam rally. Out of curiosity, the two entered the large building where it was being held.

A Presbyterian minister was the main speaker, and he was telling the people that communist leaders, although atheists, were our friends and we should not oppose them.

Wurmbrand went straight for the microphone, shouting, "You know nothing of communism. I am a doctor [expert] in communism! You should be on the side of communism's victims, instead of defending their torturers."

"How could you be a doctor in communism," was the sarcastic reply. "Here are my credentials," answered Wurmbrand, as he took off his shirt to show deep torture scars on his trunk.

The police led Wurmbrand off the stage and told him to put his shirt back on. But not before newspaper reporters took dramatic photographs and asked him for interviews.

The next day, on page one of nearly all major newspapers in America and some overseas, were pictures of his torture scars. Requests for interviews and speaking engagements poured in.

Wurmbrand had to postpone his return to Norway for several months while he spoke in various parts of the nation. More speaking engagements followed afterward, and he had to return once again to America. In May 1966, he testified before the U.S. Senate's Internal Security sub-committee. His testimony became the U.S. Government's most sold publication during the next three years.

In November 1966, Wurmbrand immigrated with his family to the United States. Immediately, he started the Christian Missions to the Communist World (presently called The Voice of the Martyrs), a worldwide organization trying to help Christians persecuted by communist regimes. (After the fall of the Soviet Union, it switched its activities to helping persecuted Christians in Arab countries.) His book, *Tortured for Christ*, became one of the first books to alert the West as to what was taking place in Communist prisons.

In the years following, Wurmbrand spoke all over the world and helped many people. On one occasion, he was in the audience when Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the outspoken atheist, was speaking on a television broadcast. He rose and said, "I have traveled throughout the world and have seen many charitable works such as Christian hospitals and Jew-

ish orphanages. Could you give me an example of one atheistic charitable establishment?" O'Hair was struck dumb and could not speak for three minutes. Whereupon, Allan Burke, the moderator, invited Wurmbrand into the debate.

He continued to travel and speak past his 85th birthday; but, during the last five years of his life, he was con-

fined to his bed. On August 11, 2000, his wife, Sabina, died; and on February 17, 2001, Richard Wurmbrand died in Torrance, California.

Now you can better understand why he wrote the following letter to our church leaders. Wurmbrand knew a lot about our friendly relations with the communists.

A Persecuted Christian Writes to the General Conference About Their Attitude Over Persecuted Adventists in Russia, and Their Attitude to the Persecuters!"

Richard Wurmbrand is a Jew who had been converted to Christianity. He had been living in Russia at the time of the following letter (while the iron-curtain was still firmly in place). He had since formed a mission in the United States dedicated to helping persecuted Christians in Communist countries.

Since he had been a persecuted Christian, he writes to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists describing the persecution he saw Adventists were receiving and his astonishment at the attitude of the General Conference to the Communist authorities in Russia notwithstanding this persecution. In this letter, Mr. Wurmbrand comments about an article he saw in an official Seventh-day Adventist magazine:

"Dear Brethren:

Your article about depression was highly appreciated. I am a Jewish Christian pastor who have been persecuted since childhood for being a Jew. Almost our entire family perished in the Holocaust. After I became a Christian and a pastor, I was in Nazi prisons, and then in Communist jails for 14 years. Now in America, I lead a mission which helps the Christians persecuted in Communist countries.

Every day I read reports about Christians who are imprisoned, tortured, and killed there. This does not depress me. What weighs upon me is the unloving attitude of American Christians toward their persecuted brethren.

Your magazine is an example of this. In your article about Russia, you find 'similarity between Marx and God's promises.' How can one be a Christian teacher if he does not distinguish between what one says and what one does?

I send you my book 'Was Karl Marx a Satanist?', with plenty of quotations from Marx. He says verbatimly that he wishes to ruin the world. To succeed in this and to catch naives, they speak about beautiful plans for the world.

Are you not aware that the language of criminal seduction and that of love are the same? If I wish a girl for one night, to throw her away afterwards like a dirty rag, I will tell her, 'I love you.' I will say the same if I wish a girl for honest marriage. Before finding 'similarity

between Marxism and God's promises,' you should have studied Marx and Lenin.

The latter wrote in a letter to Gorki:

'Thousands of natural catastrophes and epidemics are preferable to the slightest notion of God.' Thus, cancer is preferable to faith.'

This is the major difference between us and Marxists: love toward God and hatred toward Him.

I sent to brother Hegstad of your Department of Religious Liberty a bunch of material about Adventists in prison for their faith in Russia. Where was the liberty for the Adventist preacher Shelkov who died in jail after 24 years of detention? The same for many others of the underground and of the official Adventist Church.

It is simply a lie that the Adventist church lost its organization prior to World War II because of internal problems, as you assert. Did you not read 'the Gulag Archipelago'? [a work written by Solzhenitsyn]

It is not permissible to write about Adventism without having read Ellen White. It is not permissible to write about Russia without having read Solzhenitsyn. Don't you know that Stalin killed millions of Orthodox, Protestants, Adventists, Jews and that he destroyed church buildings? Where are the buildings the Adventist churches owned before? The Adventist church in Moscow must gather now with the Baptists in a building which belonged formerly to the Reformed church. Its pastor and all the congregation simply disappeared under Stalin's terror.

You praise the Russian Adventist leader Kulakov for urging cooperation with the government authorities. These are Marxists. Marx wrote in 'The Communist Manifesto' that his aim is to abolish all religion and morals. At what can Christians cooperate with them?

It was not the endeavors of Kulakov which sparked the reunification of your church. It was the fact that the KGB put in jail every Adventist who dared to say, "we do not collaborate with God-hating Communists." On which side would Ellen White, the author of 'The Great Controversy,' have been?

It is a shame that your General Conference supports the Russian Adventist preachers who had become stooges of Communists. The founder of Adventism, Ellen White, sided with Christians who worked underground against the Papacy.

The story of betrayal of Adventists by its leadership is old.

I remember the German Adventist leadership shouting, 'Heil Hitler!'

The General Conference collaborated with them, while true Adventists filled jails under Hitler and some of them were beheaded. I attended an Adventist congress in Roumania in which the dictator King Charles II was praised. Many Adventists were in jail at that time. The Adventist leadership of Roumania today also praises the Communist government.

I was at the same time in jail with many Adventists, official and underground, beaten to the blood because they refused to work on Saturdays. In jail they ate almost nothing, fearing there might be some pork in the food. In times when we got one slice of bread a day, they gave tithe. They renounced to this bit of bread in favor of somebody who was older, sick, or weaker. Wherever you are, you are meant to seek Jesus. Jesus has given His address in Russia: 'I was in jail and you visited me not.'

Ellen White prophesied there will be a great persecution of Sabbath keepers in the USA. Suppose this will happen, will you be on the side of the Adventist, loyal to their faith, who will worship underground, or will you collaborate with the persecutors as your kin does in Russia?" - Letter to the General Conference from Richard Wurmbrand.

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