

How to Organize an Underground Church - Part 1

by Richard Wurmbrand

The underground church requires deep spiritualization, spiritual exercises, and being bound to God to overcome the dangers of communism and persecution.

Duration: 28:50

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 14:6, Acts 9:15, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9

Topics: "Underground Church"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Richard Woodenbrunt shares his experiences of persecution and suffering as a Christian in Romania under communist rule. He describes the sadistic torture methods used by the communists, including forcing prisoners to eat their own vomit. He emphasizes the need for Christians to prepare themselves for suffering and persecution, as it is difficult to do so once imprisoned. He also discusses the importance of relying on the truth of God's word rather than specific Bible verses in times of hardship.

Transcript

We'd like to extend a very warm word of welcome to one and all. It's a unique occasion and it's the first, I think the first series of meetings that we've had of this nature in South Africa, and so we are indeed grateful to Pastor Wurrenbrandt and Sister Wurrenbrandt for giving their time. They came a few days earlier in order to be with us on this occasion.

We are very happy to welcome you one and all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I understand that there are representatives of various churches. We also have visitors from Pongola, also from the Portuguese community, our Afrikaans speaking brethren, and some from the English speaking churches as well.

You obviously know by virtue of the fact that we sent out our notice indicating that this is going to be somewhat different. We are not preaching to ministers, but we believe that the church which we represent, the underground church behind the iron curtain, could very likely come to our area in the coming days. I don't have to remind you of what is taking place in our surrounding the borders of our beloved country.

We know what's happening in Mozambique, in Angola, some of the African territories, and God alone knows what the future is installed for those in these areas. And so because of this in mind, and because of the burden upon our hearts, we've asked the pastor if he would lecture on the underground church. And he will obviously be speaking and telling you something a little later of what he has upon his heart for each and every one of us.

My privilege now to officially introduce to you, if you have not as yet met our dear brother pastor Richard Wurrenbrandt, the founder and the general director of the Christian Mission to the Communist World. We are now operating in 56 countries of the world. There are few countries that we know of that we are operating in, but we've not as yet been able to disclose it for various reasons.

But it's my real joy and privilege to welcome our dear brother Wurrenbrandt into our midst this morning. Dear brethren and dear sisters, I read from Acts chapter 9, verse 15. The Lord said unto Ananias, go thy way, for soul of Tars 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. Dear brethren and sisters, there exists not one single theological seminary, bible school, university in the whole world, which should have a course on underground church. You learn in seminaries about Sabellianism and Apollinarianism.

You all have learned it. Five minutes after you have finished the seminary, you forget about these things. You never will meet a Sabellian or an Apollinarian.

We learn about the Coptic church and about all kind of small sects which we might never meet in our life. The underground church is the church of one third of the world. Men who had never thought before that they will have to belong to an underground church become members of an underground church, because while America was fiddling with Watergate, Communists have taken over Somalia, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and they are on their way, if God will not prevent them, to take over Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, and if we go further, they've taken half of Cambodia and half of Laos.

Nobody's sure about them, and Christian pastors must know how an underground church looks like, what it does. I spoke with an archbishop in Britain. I told him during one hour about our underground work, and then in the end he said, you will excuse, but it is my hobby.

I am very interested in church architecture. Would you please tell me if the underground church uses the Gothic styles in the building of the churches? If I would tell you who this archbishop is, you could not bear even to imagine that an archbishop can put such a question. The underground church is completely unknown.

We are not trained for it, and we have it right next to our door. Every Christian pastor has the whole world as his parish, and we must know, because we might pass through such tragic circumstances, and if we are privileged not to pass through such tragic circumstances, then we have a duty to help and to instruct those who have passed through them. We in Romania, and in Russia, and in China, and so on, have given many victims.

Many have died in prisons. Many have gone to prisons. We are not proud about this.

The right thing would have been to be so well instructed how to do the underground work as not to be caught, but nobody had instructed us. In a war, I don't admire so much the heroes who die for their

fatherland. If there is a war, I admire rather those who make the enemy die for his fatherland.

Not I should die for my father, he should die for his. And I don't admire so much those who go to prison for Christ. I admire those who know to work so well that they are not caught, and we have to know the underground work.

Surely suffering can't be avoided in this underground church, whatever measures you take. As the first Christians could not avoid martyrdom, it is not possible in such a short time to give a course on underground church. I would urge you to put this question before your synods, before your denominations, and to ask absolutely that a course on underground church should be introduced.

I will give just a few main ideas today and tomorrow, and then you will be able to put questions. What happens in a country when the communists take over? What will happen, let us say, in Angola or Mozambique, if, God beware, the communists take over? You will have a religious liberty as never before. So it begins.

The communists come to power without having real power. They don't have the people on their side. They have not organized yet their police and their staff of the army, and so on.

In Russia, they gave immediate great liberty to the Protestants in order to destroy the Orthodox. Then, when they have destroyed the Orthodox, then the turn came for the Protestants. With us in Romania, they gave very great liberty, and you can expect in... No, and you can expect... Can you hear me? And can you... And in countries like, in Catholic countries like Angola and Mozambique, you can also expect great encouragement and great help for the Protestants just to preach.

But this situation does not last long. They, in the meantime, infiltrate the church. They put their men in the leadership.

They find out the weaknesses of pastors. Some might be an ambitious man. Some might be entrapped with the love of money.

Another one might have a hidden sin wherewith they could blackmail him. They would tell, we publish this, and they put their men in the leadership. And then, at a certain moment, the great persecution begins with us.

Also, such a clampdown has been at once. All the Catholic bishops went to prison, enumerable priests, monks, nuns, many Protestant pastors of all denominations, and so on. Many died in prison.

And now, Jesus, our Lord, tells Ananias, meat soul of Tarsus, he will be my underground pastor, my underground work. That is what St. Paul has been. He has been a pastor of an underground church.

And now, Jesus started a crash course for this underground pastor. And he started it with the words, showing how great things he must suffer. Underground work, preparation for this work, begins by studying sopherology, martyrology.

Solzhenitsyn, in his book, Gulag Archipelago, says that in the courses for police officers in the Soviet Union, they have a course on aristology, the science, how to arrest people so that nobody around should observe. And if they have created a new name, aristology, let us create the name of sopherology. Who wishes? We will speak also, perhaps tomorrow, and then we will have question and answer sessions

about the technical sides of the underground work.

But the first thing is a certain spiritual preparation for this underground work. In a country like this, to be a member of a church, it is enough to believe or to be baptized, or if the church believes in infant baptism, then to be baptized and then to be brought up in faith. In the underground church, this is not enough to be a member in the church.

You can be baptized, and you can believe, and you would not be a member of the church unless you know to suffer, because you might have the mightiest faith in the world. And if you are not a man prepared to suffer, then you will be taken by the police, you will get two slaps, and you will say everything. So the preparation for suffering is one of the essentials of the preparation of an underground worker.

A Christian does not panic if he is put in prison. Prison, we look upon it, and so we teach our underground Christians, since they are very young, to know that prison is for a pastor a new parish, and nothing else than a parish. It is a parish with no great incomes, but with great opportunities of work.

Solitary confinement is a parish. You have been told, I have written a book, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*. First of all, you can speak with God and with angels.

They are there. But you have also a real parish. It belongs to the training of the underground church, of a pastor today, to learn Morse code.

You know what it is, the code by which cables are conveyed. A, B, C, and so on. And through this code, to preach the gospel to those who are to your right and to your left.

And the prisoners always change. They take some out of the cell and they put others in. God has given to many Christians who have been in prison, the privilege to bring to Christ men whom they have never seen through Morse code.

And then after many years, they met these men, have been brought to Christ. And then when you are in common cells, I have had several parishes in my life. The best parish has been prison.

In the parishes here, on Sunday morning, you ring the bell. If he wishes, he comes to church. If he doesn't wish, he doesn't come.

If he doesn't like your sermons this Sunday, next Sunday, he doesn't come. He doesn't come in any case if it rains. But if you have prison as your parish, you have your parishioners with you.

Here they look at the watch. He has preached already 30 minutes, but he never finished. There, when you are arrested, the wrist watch is taken away from you.

And you have the parishioners with you the whole week and can preach to them from morning until night. They have no choice. There exists no possibility.

And there have never been, in the history of Romanian or the Russian church, so many conversions made by pastors as they have been made in this parish which is prison. So don't fear prison. Look upon it as just a new assignment given by God.

I remember when I was arrested, my wife told me as the last word when I embraced her, to go away with the policeman. Richard, remember that it is written, you will be brought before rulers and kings to be a

testimony unto them. Well, this we can accept.

But we have heard about terrible tortures which the communists inflict on you. And they are really terrible. And they will be terrible in Africa.

Worse than in Russia. In Russia, I wonder if you will be able to read Gulag Archipelago by Solzhenitsyn. It is terrible to read 600 pages of tortures.

But these were still European communists. We have the last report about Zanzibar. They obliged prisoners to eat their faces and to drink urine.

This happened in Romania too. But in Zanzibar, they have added something to it. After you have eaten faces and drunk urine, they put some, I don't know what, an iron in your mouth, which makes you to vomit what you have eaten.

And then you must eat again. And it's really not my role today to describe to you all these sadistic tortures to which they recur. And now, how will we do about these tortures? Will we be able to bear them? If I don't bear them, I put in prison other 50 or 60 men whom I know around me, because that is what they wish from me, to betray those around me.

And here comes the great preparation for suffering, which must start now. It is too difficult to prepare yourself for it when the communists have put you in prison. I remember we had in Romania a case, you know, we are among pastors, such cases happen rarely, but they happen, that a pastor had sinned with a woman.

And now everybody among the pastors debated this question. He was a man already 20 years, a pastor. And my wife said, his sin has not been what he has done on that evening.

The circumstances were so, and the occasion, and the girl was nice, and so on. He did not resist temptation. His great sin was not what he had done on that evening, but his great sin was that 20 years before, when he was not tempted, he had not said to himself, during my pastoral life, different things will happen to me.

Among other things, it surely will happen sometime that I will be tempted to sexual sin. And to take the decision 20 years before, and to prepare yourself beforehand for what might happen, we have to prepare ourselves for suffering. How much every one of us can suffer depends on how much he is bound up with a cause.

How dear this cause is to him, how much it means for him. And here we have had, in communist countries, very big surprises. We have had gifted preachers, writers of Christian books, who had become traitors.

The composer of the best Christian hymnal of Romania became the composer of the best communist hymnal of Romania. Nobody would have expected it from him. Everything depends on this, if we have remained in the sphere of words, or if we are bound up, merged with the divine reality.

God is the truth. The Bible is the truth about the truth. Right theology is the truth about the truth about the truth.

And 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 expositions. None of these are of any help. It is only the truth itself which is of help.

And we have to penetrate through sermons, theological books, through everything which is words, and be bound up with the reality of God himself. When, with us, Christians were tied to crosses four days and four nights, the crosses were put on the floor, and other prisoners were tortured to fulfill their bodily necessities upon the faces and the bodies of the crucified ones, and other tortures like this, I was asked very often in the West, which Bible verse helped you and strengthened you in these circumstances? My answer was, no Bible verse was of any help. It is sheer current and religious hypocrisy to say, this Bible verse strengthens me, or that Bible verse helps me.

Bible verses are not meant to help. We knew Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I will not want when I pass through the valley of shadow of death. Now, dear Susie, give me another piece of apple pie while I read, and I read about passing through the valley of shadow of death.

When you pass through suffering, you realize that it was never meant by God that Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, should strengthen you. It is the Lord who can strengthen you, not Psalm 23, that the Lord strengthens you. And you must not have the soul, you must have the one about whom the psalm speaks.

We also knew the verse, my grace is sufficient for thee, but the verse, my grace is sufficient for thee, is not sufficient. It is only the grace which is sufficient, and not the verse. And specially we pastors, who are handling the word, that is our very calling from God, to speak not only from the pulpit, but the whole week, we speak holy words, and we are in the danger of giving to holy words more value than they really have.

Holy words are only the means to arrive to the reality expressed by it. If you have arrived to the reality, if you are united with the Lord Almighty, communism is not almighty. He can't break the Lord Almighty.

If you are only with the words of the Lord Almighty, you can be very easily broken. The preparation for underground work is deep spiritualization, and as you peel an onion, so to take away one peel from the after the other, what is words, what are our sensations, what are our enjoyments, and to arrive to the reality of our faith, we have, Jesus has told us beforehand, that whosoever will follow me will have to bear a cross, and he showed himself how heavy this cross can be, and they have to be prepared for this. Look how the world does.

Look at a pornographic magazine, or look at an advertising. It inflames your imagination, you know, when you look to this magazine, if you wish or don't wish, it's just something. We have to inflame our imagination by having before our eyes, making spiritual exercises.

I'm very sorry that spiritual exercises are almost unknown in protestantism. We have to revive them in the underground church. Spiritual exercises have been abused by some of the catholics, and then the reformation came, and there exists always a movement of pendulum.

If one has fallen to one extreme, then I will fall into the other extreme. If somebody has made out of Virgin Mary almost a goddess, another would say Virgin Mary is just nothing. You know, you pass from one extreme to the other, and because some abused in false spiritual exercises, others would not make spiritual exercises at all.

But we have to have not only our moments of prayer in which we speak, but we should have moments of meditation and contemplation, and when we read in Acts 11, in Hebrews 11, this long list of those, how they have been sown asunder, and burnt on stakes, and devoured by lions, and I don't know, all kind of things which have happened, I must visualize myself. Now, I am before lions, I am beaten, I am in danger to be burned, and so on. How do I behave in this manner? I remember my last confirmation class before I left Romania.

I took a group of 10 or 15 boys and girls. I did not take them to church. You can't take youth to church.

It's much too dangerous for them. I took them on a Sunday morning to the zoo, before the cage of lions, and I told them, your forefathers in faith have been thrown before such wild beasts for their faith. Know that you also might have to suffer.

You will not be thrown before lions, but you will have it to do with men who will be much worse than lions. Decide here and now if you wish to pledge allegiance to Christ. And they had tears in their eyes when they said yes.

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