

THE WORST CENTURY OF PERSECUTION

Sunday 14 November is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

The Greatest Century of Persecution

You may be surprised to know that more Christians died for Christ in the 20th Century than in all previous 19 centuries combined. The Christian World Encyclopedia calculated that at least 28 million Christians had been martyred in the 20th Century. The total martyrs since A.D. 33 was calculated at 43 million. The encyclopedia calculated that atheists in secular governments had murdered 25 million Christians. Muslims and Islamic governments had murdered at least 6 million Christians. Roman Catholics and RC governments had murdered 4½ million Protestants.

Serving the Persecuted

During the last 30 years of missionary work I have had the privilege of serving the persecuted Church in Mozambique, Angola, Romania, Albania, Rwanda, Sudan, Northern Nigeria, the Congo and Zimbabwe. During this time I have endured aerial bombardments, ambushes, artillery and rocket barrages, and I have been arrested and imprisoned for missionary work.

Speaking up for the Persecuted

Some of what Christians suffer in Marxist and Muslim lands has been documented in [*Faith Under Fire in Sudan*](#); [*Holocaust in Rwanda*](#); [*In the Killing Fields of Mozambique*](#); [*Slavery, Terrorism and Islam*](#); and in documentary films that we have helped to produce such as: [*Sudan: The Hidden Holocaust and Terrorism and Persecution – Understanding Islamic Jihad*](#).

Angola's Agony

On numerous occasions, Cuban soldiers in Angola have placed the heads of cattle, or an AK47, on altars or pulpits demanding that the Christians commit idolatry and bow before them. They have walked into services, and taken the Bible off the pulpit and thrown it by the door and demanded: *"You may all leave – one by one – just spit on the Bible and you can go free. If you don't – we will kill you!"*

Communist troops have burst into church services declaring: *"You Christians – you say that you worship the Lamb – well here is a lamb!"* The Cubans taunted the worshippers as they started pouring the blood of this lamb over the believers saying *"the blood of the lamb is shed amongst you – worship the lamb!"* The head of the lamb was placed mockingly on the pulpit and people were dragged and forced to their knees to bow down before it.

Christians who have escaped from communist concentrations camps and prisons have told how they were often tortured by the Marxists. One prisoner told me of a time in Angola when they were near breaking point and one of them shouted out: *"Why don't you just kill us, and get it over with?"*

The response of the communist concentration camp guards was most enlightening: *“Oh no, we don’t want to kill you! We don’t want to send you to Heaven to be with God! No, we want you to curse Christ and to come to hell with us, for all eternity!”*

The Aim of Persecution

The aim of persecution is not to kill Christians. There is no victory to the kingdom of darkness for Christians to go to Heaven. The aim of persecution is to intimidate Christians into silence. To persuade believers to compromise. To terrify Christians to giving in to cowardice. If the devil cannot stop us being converted, he at least wants to divert us and distract us so that we are not effective in fulfilling the Great Commission and winning other souls to Christ. As long as you refuse to be intimidated into silence, neutrality and compromise, persecution fails.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘if anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? And what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”

Matthew 16:24-26

Sabrina Wurmbrand

The wife of Romanian Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, Sabrina Wurmbrand, testified that before she went to prison she was very poor. But once she went to prison she became very rich. This was because she was poor in the things of the world, but rich in the things of God. When she came to prison she had the only currency that was of any value, she had much of the Word of God memorised and stored up in her heart and mind. Therefore in prison she was able to make many people rich!

After years in the slave labour camps of Romania, Sabrina was finally released. Some time later a man came to her claiming to have been in prison with her husband, and having a message from him to share with their congregation. Knowing how the communist state sought to infiltrate congregations by infiltrating spies and blackmailing members into being informers, Sabrina was cautious. *“Please, before we go any further, would you lead us in prayer?”* She bowed her head.

There was an awkward silence and then the man, who claimed to have a message from her husband, stuttered and stammered. Sabrina Wurmbrand looked up and, gazing directly into the man’s eyes, said: *“Now then, aren’t you ashamed of yourself? Wouldn’t you like me to explain to you how you can become a real Christian?”*

What can we do to help these persecuted believers?

To Prison with Praise

In 1987, while leading a Frontline mission team across the border, we were arrested. This was my first prison experience. We were stripped and beaten. Thrown into cells covered with human filth. Deprived of water and food,

blindfolded and transported from Livingstone to Lusaka. There we were thrown into an overcrowded prison. The cells, which were 15 feet by 25 feet, were crammed with an average of 60 prisoners per cell. There were no beds, furnishings, plumbing or electricity in these cells. The whole prison seemed to be one big stinking disease factory. With our shoes taken away, walking barefoot, with cut and bleeding feet, amongst this filth, we could only imagine how many infections and diseases God protected us from.

Falsely Accused

In our prison cell there was Isaiah Moyo, a 26 year old black South African, who had been imprisoned on trumped up charges of being a South African spy! Actually, he had lent money to some ANC refugees in Lusaka, who had decided, rather than repay him, to accuse him of being a spy!

Tortured

Isaiah had been severely tortured. He had 26 pussy sores on his body where red hot poker had been pushed into his skin. His knees were calloused from the many hours he spent kneeling on the concrete floor praying to the Lord.

When, by God's grace, international prayer and pressure forced the Zambian government to open the prison doors and let us free, I determined to campaign for the release of Isaiah Moyo.

Publicising the Plight of the Prisoners

American Christians that I met in Cape Town encouraged me to come overseas and testify of the reality of communist persecution in Africa. I received an invitation to speak at the International Society for Human Rights Conference in Frankfurt, Germany and used that as the launching pad for my first overseas ministry trip. This involved radio and TV ministry in the USA, testifying to government officials of the atrocities I had witnessed and documented in communist Mozambique and Angola, and speaking on the BBC World Service.

Later I heard that prison wardens had rushed with their radios to Isaiah Moyo in Lusaka Central Prison shouting: *"Isaiah, that white South African missionary who was locked in here, he is speaking on the radio – and he is talking about you!"*

Isaiah heard the tale end of my interview as I gave people his prison address, and requested people to send care packages, with salt, soap, sugar, vitamins, pens, pencils, paper, etc.

Isaiah told us later that from that time on he was never mistreated again. Mail sacks of letters and parcels were dragged into the cell. He became the most popular person in prison. He had so many trading items which everyone wanted. People couldn't do enough favours for him.

The BBC World Service radio programme had raised him to celebrity status in the prison. The prison guards treated him with great respect, and soon he was set free and allowed to travel back to South Africa to be reunited with his wife and two children.

Publicity Provides Protection for the Persecuted

This was my first experience of seeing what an influence Western Christians can have through prayer and pressure. Publicity provides protection for the persecuted. As our Lord Jesus taught, in Luke 18:1-5, even an unjust judge will do what is right in response to persistent prayer and pressure.

As virtually every Marxist dictatorship in the world is a beneficiary of vast amounts of foreign aid from Western nations, this provides leverage. Most dictators prefer foreign aid to foreign prisoners. If given a choice, they will let the prisoners go free in order to continue to receive the Western dollars, pounds or euros.

Setting Captives Free

Whatever we bind will be bound, whatever we loose will be loosed. By the power of prayer, and through persistent pressure, we can see the powers of darkness limited, prison doors opened and captives set free.

Jesus said: ***“For I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or imprisoned and come to You? And the King will answer and say unto them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these brethren, you did it to Me.’”***
Matthew 25:35-40

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually.” 1 Corinthians 12:26-27

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the Body also.” Hebrews 13:3

The whole article by Dr. Peter Hammond can be accessed by [clicking here](#) or by visiting www.frontline.org.za

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