

# **I FOUND GOD IN SOVIET RUSSIA**

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**JOHN  
NOBLE**

**I FOUND GOD  
IN  
SOVIET RUSSIA**

# I FOUND GOD IN SOVIET RUSSIA

*by* JOHN NOBLE  
*and* GLENN D. EVERETT

*With an Introduction by*  
BILLY GRAHAM

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# I Found God in Soviet Russia

## English Edition

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*This book is dedicated*  
to all those still in labor camps and  
dungeons suffering persecution for  
their stand and for their trust in God.

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# *Introduction*

BY

REVEREND BILLY GRAHAM

**N**OT LONG ago, John Noble crossed the border of East Berlin into the American sector. Haggard and gaunt due to nearly ten years of Soviet imprisonment, this American citizen reappeared after being swallowed up in the Russian zone of Germany shortly after V-E Day, in 1945.

John Noble has brought back a remarkable story. It is not just a bleak account of the terrible things that happened to him during that decade in the concentration camps of Muehlberg and Buchenwald, in prisons all the way from Dresden to the Arctic, but an amazing account of the survival of Christian faith in the communist prisons and camps he has known.

Here is a still-young American Protestant layman telling the world for the first time of the valiant heroism of Christian laymen and clergy whom he found among his fellow prisoners in the slave labor camps and especially in the dread camp of Vorkuta. It is a story of Lutheran pastors from Latvia and Estonia, Catholic priests from Lithuania and Poland, Russian Orthodox priests from the Ukraine and Russia itself, and Baptist leaders from all over the Soviet Union. It is a story of thousands upon thousands of laymen and women who remain loyal to Christ and by their example gain converts in the very place where Christianity has been most bitterly persecuted.

John Noble tells us, too, of the Russian people whom he met, the so-called "free workers," and the supervisors of the mines. He describes the deep inner hunger he found among them for a faith that offers more than the dead end of Marxist material-

## INTRODUCTION

*ism. He tells us that even members of the elite Soviet police, hardened Communists all, are disillusioned with the system they serve and are searching for a better way of life.*

*The thing that the Russian people are missing is faith.*

*Noble shows us, in keen unforgettable citations of specific fact, how the Russian people feel this lack of contact with the eternal values of Christ in their everyday lives. He has returned not with bitterness but with love and understanding in his heart for those at whose hands he has suffered so much.*

*Throughout the world, in America, in England, in India, in Australia, there is a new spirit moving, a new search in the hearts and minds of men seeking God. We are indebted to John Noble for bringing us word from the Church behind Barbed Wire that the religious revival in our time is, by God's grace, reaching even into the most distant and isolated areas of the world, the concentration camps of the Soviet Union.*

*Here is a story that will inspire every Christian! It is one of the great testimonies of our time, given by a man who himself experienced personal conversion while in solitary confinement in a Communist prison cell and who has seen in his own life the power of God to answer prayer.*

*He brings us word of fellow Christians holding aloft the torch of faith in an area where its gleam has been darkened. He tells us of the unconquerable faith that can win Russia, even as it rose from the lion pits of the Coliseum to sweep Rome.*

*Let us pray for God's blessing upon those from whom John Noble has brought word to the free world; let us pray that their steadfast faith will convince Marxists of the error of worshipping men and material things alone. Let all who read this story be inspired to place their faith in Jesus Christ, as John Noble has placed his, to the end that mankind will triumph over the forces of godless tyranny.*

## I

# *A Mission to Fulfill*

**D**URING THE decade I spent in communist prisons and labor camps I saw many terrible things. I also saw some glorious ones, things more heartening than any other news I bring out of the Soviet Union. My message is this: I found God in Soviet Russia.

I found God for myself through personal conversion and, even more significantly for the world at large, I met many others who had had a similar experience. I discovered that the Christian religion is surviving communist persecution in East Germany and in Soviet Russia itself. I found that secret worship services were held and converts won for Christ even in Vorkuta itself, one of the slave-labor camps in the Soviet Arctic.

Having learned to speak and understand Russian, I found myself in close contact with Russian engineers and workers, and realized that there is deep interest in the Christian religion among both groups. In spite of their forty-year exposure to official atheism, or perhaps because of it, they hunger for the spiritual values they have been denied.

This evidence I am able to bring back to the free world,

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and through it the glorious tidings of a faith that cannot be killed. I have seen Christianity under the most terrible persecution it has suffered since the days of Nero, and I have seen abundant proof that faith in Christ, the Saviour, is still alive in Russia today in the very places where the Communists have tried hardest to stamp it out, the concentration camps. It is triumphant testimony I have to give concerning the Church behind Barbed Wire, and I am convinced it was God's will that I be a member of that persecuted Church for several years in order to testify that God is with it and is sustaining it.

The fact that I survived all I had been exposed to, and was enabled to return to America in good health, before the drastic sentence imposed by a Moscow court had run its full course, is proof to me that God was with me, that there was a purpose in my survival which, as I look back upon the successive phases of my prison experiences, seems nothing less than miraculous. I thank God from the bottom of my heart for His mercy.

I wish that this mission to testify had been given to someone more eloquent than I—or rather that I, to whom it has been given, were more eloquent. But I was there in Russia and am now here in America; the story is mine. As I try to convey it to the free world, I think of the words of Job. Many times during my long imprisonment, when I was tempted to lose faith and to cry out against the injustice and hardships inflicted upon me, I thought of Job. He, too, endured much for reasons that he could not understand but nothing could shake him from his faith. In his famous pledge, he declared, "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips

## A MISSION TO FULFILL

shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit” (Job 27-34).

Job’s pledge is my pledge, also. So long as breath is in me, I will not speak falsehood. So long as the spirit of God is with me, I cannot utter deceit. Out of a sense of solemn obligation to God I will speak the truth to the free world about the wonders I have seen.

## II

### *I Learn to Pray*

**T**HERE COMES a time in every man's life when he learns to pray. For me that moment came a few minutes after nine o'clock on the evening of Tuesday, February 13, 1945, in Dresden, Germany, in the midst of the devastating air raid that laid waste that beautiful city. For the first time in my life, I found myself on my knees praying earnestly to God.

How did I, an American, come to be in Dresden in the closing months of World War II? My parents, born in Germany but naturalized citizens of the United States, had returned to their native land to take up temporary residence in 1938. A year later, we were caught there by the beginnings of the war. I was twenty-one and, at the time of the Dresden raid, my parents, my older brother George, and I had been living under a kind of house arrest for nearly four years. We were confined within the city limits, our movements strictly watched.

It was ironic that I had to be in mortal peril, the concussion of exploding bombs literally blowing me off my feet and onto my knees, before I would turn to God as my refuge and salvation. My father, Charles Noble, was a re-

ligious man. In fact, in his youth he had been, for a brief time, a Christian minister. I had no valid excuse to offer for having become merely one more worldly young man. It was simply backsliding. God had blessed our whole family generously with material bounty, but we were not properly thankful.

My father was born in Homburg, Kassel province, in 1892, where his father had owned a small shoe-manufacturing plant. The family were Lutherans but, when my father was eleven, Grandfather converted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, thanks to the efforts of an American missionary. The new faith meant a real sacrifice for him. Though the six-day week was universal in German factories, my grandfather would no longer operate his plant on Saturday and in winter had to close on Friday afternoon, for the sun set at 3:30 P.M. in midwinter and the Adventist sabbath observance starts an hour before sunset.

The new faith also brought the family into conflict with the Prussian militarism of Kaiser Wilhelm II. In 1913, on the eve of the First World War, my father was drafted into the German Army. As a conscientious objector, he refused to shoulder a gun or perform any military duty on Saturday. He was hauled off to the stockade for insubordination. For five months, fortified by prayer, he endured increasing abuse and punishment. Then, one day, he was rescued from his plight by an extraordinary occurrence.

The inspector general was coming to look over the new conscripts and the captain ordered all the men, including my father, of course, to don their dress uniforms and line up on the parade ground. My father had suffered an injury in his youth which inclines his neck somewhat to one side; he has always carried his head at a peculiar tilt.

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When the men all lined up wearing their high-peaked Prussian helmets, my father's head made an irregularity in the line. The general crisply ordered him to straighten up. When my father replied that he could not because of an old injury, the general ordered him sent to the hospital at once to see if the doctors could do something about it. The surgeons replied that the injury was permanent and the colonel of the regiment took this excuse to give my father a medical discharge.

My father spent World War I, which broke out a few months later, as a Red Cross worker on the Western front, bringing aid and what comfort he could to the wounded and dying. Though often under fire, he escaped without injury. Perhaps this was part of our trouble, he later reflected. God had showered us with so many blessings that we had come to expect them as a matter of course.

After the war, my father went to a Bible school. Adventist youth groups often came there for conferences. At one such gathering, he met an attractive girl, Hildegard Gerling, whose family were also Adventists, and soon the couple married. Eventually, the Adventist Church in Germany split on questions of doctrine and my father became a minister for the small sect known as the Reformed Adventist Church. He went first to Berlin, then to Switzerland, and finally was sent to America to minister to the German immigrants in Detroit. He was conducting an evangelical meeting there in a tent on a street corner lot when I was born on September 4, 1923.

Few of the writings of Ellen Gould White, founder of the Adventist Movement, had been available in German. As my father came to know English, and read more extensively, he began to doubt the wisdom of some of the

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doctrines he was preaching. Being an honest man, he finally had to acknowledge that he could no longer urge others to join the Reformed Adventist Church when he himself entertained grave doubts about many of its tenets. Accordingly, he resigned as minister and afterwards did not join another church. Our family drifted along, rarely attending divine worship, paying less and less attention to religion as the years went by.

My father, still believing in the health value of the vegetarianism which Adventists advocate, started a small health-food business. Then in 1929 came a chance to enter the field of photography when the owner of the Stutz Photo Service in Detroit, for whom my mother worked as photo expert, died in an automobile collision and the business was put up for sale. My mother and father borrowed whatever they could and bought it. The eve of the great stock market crash of 1929 was hardly a propitious time to start a new enterprise, but our good fortune continued in a most extraordinary way.

My father, starting the business with no preconceived ideas, invested heavily in some new automatic photo-finishing equipment. As a result of this automation, we could process amateur photographers' films more cheaply than our competitors, and in those days depression-stricken Detroiters were looking for every way to save pennies, particularly where nonessentials, such as hobbies, were involved. By 1934, we had 220 retail stores handling our printing and developing service and our plant was one of the largest in that area.

Financial success was attained, however, only at the continued sacrifice of life's other values. The Lord prospered us, but we forgot to return thanks. As my brother

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and I grew up, the daily Bible readings which had once been a part of family life gradually disappeared. My father offered prayer only once a day when he said grace at dinner. Sometimes my brother and I took turns at offering thanks at other meals, but it was from force of habit and had no real meaning to us. While I was still only a boy we stopped churchgoing altogether.

In 1935 came the first warning that it was not good to devote all one's time and energies to piling up material goods. At that time, my father was taken seriously ill. His condition was diagnosed as a gall-bladder ailment. In Karlsbad, Czechoslovakia, there was a famous health resort where friends advised my father he would find help. He went there, took the waters, and came back rested and much improved. But soon the pressures of business caused his health to break down again. He made several trips to Karlsbad and on one such trip met a Jewish businessman who had fled Germany to escape Nazi persecution. Despite the Swiss citizenship he had obtained this gentleman was determined to sell a camera factory he owned in Dresden and emigrate to America. My father well knew the value of German cameras and the good market that was developing for them in America. The first thing we in Detroit heard of the transaction was that Father had traded our Detroit photo service for the fine camera factory in Dresden.

He soon found, however, that he could not run it by absentee ownership from Detroit. In 1938, I was withdrawn from the eighth grade and accompanied my parents to Dresden so that my father could put the affairs of the factory in order and visit the health resorts.

In 1939, the storm clouds drew down over our heads as Hitler sent his Panzer troops recklessly into Poland. World

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War II had begun in earnest. We were obliged to register as aliens and it was obvious that my parents, as Germans who had become American citizens, were regarded with suspicion by the Nazis. Still, our life went on peacefully and comfortably enough in our high house on a hill overlooking the city. I was busy studying and working in the factory to learn its operations; I followed the stiff German high-school courses in night-school classes.

In Dresden there was a nondenominational American church which my folks attended on such special occasions such as Christmas and Easter. Prayer, Bible reading, even grace at meals were forgotten.

The winds of adversity blew harder throughout the embattled world, but still we did not heed. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, America entered the war, we were placed under house arrest, and our camera factory was subjected to stern regulation. With the same *sang-froid* he had displayed toward the Kaiser's military administration, my father now told the Nazis that the minute they wanted him to start producing any war material he was through, but that if they wanted cameras to market through neutral countries like Switzerland and Sweden, he would continue to operate his factory. With key workers drafted for military service, my father's presence was almost indispensable at the factory, and the Nazis grudgingly let him continue his work. But as the war began to go against Germany, the antagonism toward us increased and my father decided that we must ask for repatriation to America.

The day of January 25, 1945, was a joyous one for nine hundred Americans who, like us, had been caught in Germany by the outbreak of war. After months of negotiations the Nazi government had agreed to exchange these civil-

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ians for a group of Germans trapped by hostilities in North and South America. With great rejoicing we received a telegram ordering us to report to Ravensburg on the Swiss border, 500 miles from Dresden. There we waited expectantly for our names to be called, looking eagerly across the Boden See which forms the border between Germany and Switzerland. But as officials checked off the list, our names were not on it, and a Nazi official brusquely told my father that the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, had apparently decided that we could not be cleared to leave. My father showed the officials at the border the telegram ordering us to take part in the exchange, but they still refused to sign the necessary document.

There is an end to the bounty which God bestows on those who have forgotten Him, and here we were, a hundred yards from freedom when a single signature on a single document would have returned us to America and spared us all we were subsequently to endure. Yet that signature was withheld and, with sinking hearts, we watched these Americans depart.

Perhaps it was only a bureaucratic blunder for later, in Dresden, we were assured we would be cleared for the next exchange. Perhaps it was fate that, with Eisenhower's army across the Rhine, no more exchanges of civilians were arranged but, as I look back upon it I see another pattern emerging. My family and I had lost touch with God and we were going to have to work our way back to the blessings of freedom and abundance before we could enjoy them again.

Germany had sowed the wind by introducing the ruthless bombardment of open cities in its attack on Rotterdam on May 14, 1940, and subsequent bombings of London

and Coventry. Now she was reaping the whirlwind. Mass British and American air attacks were hitting city after city in the German Reich. Dresden had thus far been spared and was crowded with refugees from other less fortunate cities.

Early on the evening of that fateful February 13, 1945, I was getting ready to go to dinner with a friend at his parents' home downtown when a phone call came from my father at the plant. The Swiss border had been closed, and some valuable cameras that were to have gone to Switzerland that day were still at the plant; in case of a bombing attack on the industrial section of Dresden, he said he was going to send the cameras out to our home where they would be safer in our deep basement, and he asked me to be on hand to accept the consignment. Accordingly, I called up my friend, canceled the dinner engagement, and was there when the men from the plant came, helped them carry the boxes of cameras carefully down the seventy-two steps cut into the side of the bluff against which our house stood, and stack them in the cellar.

After the men had gone, my mother, my father who had returned to the house by now, and I sat down to a late supper, but hardly had taken a mouthful when there came a terse announcement over the local civil-defense station that British planes were less than twenty miles from the city. We went outside, and could hear the roar of the planes coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly, downtown, the eerie wail of the air-raid sirens sprang to life over the blacked-out city. Could it be that our turn had come? I was struck with the helplessness with which a civilian awaits his fate from the unseen hands of the bombardiers above. If the raid was really meant for us, thousands of

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people in the city below must be drawing the last breaths of their lives at this very instant. Perhaps even we ourselves . . .

We had prepared an emergency air-raid shelter in a little room in our basement which had a separate entrance into the garden, and had erected special supports for the ceiling so that, even if the house were to collapse, we would not be buried but we hesitated a moment before going there. We could hear planes both to north and south of the city. Hitherto, when they had flown south they had been on their way to the oil refineries near the Czech border. Perhaps we would be spared again. But suddenly the two bomber wings turned and converged on the city and down came the magnesium flares, the dread "Christmas trees," illuminating the darkened, panic-stricken city.

There could be no doubt now: our hour had come. Desperately we raced down the steps to the shelter, the first flashes of high explosive blinding our eyes and the first blasts of the bombs ringing in our ears. But as the bombs hit the downtown section, we relaxed. All our thoughts were upon the thickness of the brick walls of the house above us, the stoutness of the ceiling supports, the physical protection with which we had surrounded ourselves.

The attack was unusually intense and sustained. Bombs, pouring down now on other sections of the city, were striking closer and closer to us every moment. Paralyzing fear creeps over one as he hears each bomb coming closer, each concussion jarring a little harder, and realizes in panic that the planes are wheeling in ever-expanding circles to a point directly over his head.

For the first time in my life I had the feeling that anything could happen. The physical protection around me

was useless. What human hands had built up, other human hands were now destroying!

A bomb struck a hundred yards from us with a noise like a tremendous thunderclap. Windows shattered upstairs. The concussion of other near-by hits rocked the house, and the door to the basement room kept flying open from the air pressure. This further tortured my mother's nerves which were already on edge, so I stood with my back against it, bracing myself as each blast wave struck. As I stood there—it was strange, since I had not heard the story for years—I thought of the Biblical story of Jericho (Joshua 6: 20, Hebrews 11-30), and the words of the great Negro spiritual: "And the walls came tumbling down." Our walls were tumbling down, indeed. Not just the physical walls of the city, but our spiritual walls as well, those barriers which concern for material things had placed between us and God.

There I was, a foolish, worldly young man of twenty-one. What could I say to God on Judgment Day were I to die right now? I was not worthy of salvation and, as I stood there realizing that any minute might be my last, I knew it. This was the first independent impulse toward religion I had had in my entire life. True, I had worshiped by acquiescence in the worship of others from time to time and had, as I have noted, joined in the mealtime family grace, but never had I prayed directly from my heart before. It had taken a bombing raid to awaken me to consciousness that there was a God upon whom I depended for whatever I should do in life and whatever was to happen to me after death.

Suddenly, in twenty minutes, the ordeal was over. The bombs stopped falling; the planes went away. Outside,

the night was bright as day from fires that had been started by thousands of incendiaries. A strong wind came up, caused by the draft of the tremendously hot fires in the city below and in turn fanning the flames. Then, though the night was clear, huge drops of warm rain began to fall, caused by condensation of moisture from pyres of burning rubble which superheated the air. We had little time to think about the terrible catastrophe that had happened to the city as we raced from room to room in the house, stamping out sparks.

The power was off and we lit candles so we could sweep up the splintered glass and take down the torn draperies and curtains. Our scarcely touched meal was full of glass splinters and my mother went to the kitchen to see what food was left. Then, just as we were clearing the table to prepare for the second meal, we heard the roar of a new wave of bombing planes approaching. No air-raid sirens sounded; they had all been knocked out in the first raid. For a bewildered instant my father and I stood there listening, in utter disbelief. But the throbbing roar was unmistakable. The Allied Air Force was not through with Dresden. We shouted for my mother and headed once more for the shelter. I was in the hallway near the head of the stairs when with bone-chilling terror I heard the soft, hissing whistle of a bomb falling directly on us! I dropped to the floor and, as I did so, a brilliant flash lit the house, followed instantly by a deafening slam that made my ears ring and senses swim. The remaining windows flew right out of their casements and broke against the opposite wall, spraying me with sharp fragments. There came another concussion while plaster dust sifted down and choked my nostrils. A huge land mine had hit the slope of the bluff

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just eighty yards short of the house. It tore the slope off, trees and all, and where the force of the blast hit the house, about a third of the roof was torn away. Had it struck a few yards closer, the full force would have hit us and this would have been the end.

Somehow I got back to my feet and stumbled down the stairs to the shelter. This time I really began to pray in earnest. The British were employing their largest block-busters in this second raid, the highest explosive ever used in war, as we know now, except for the two atomic bombs later employed against Japan. Guided by the light of the fires previously set, the RAF were methodically blowing up Dresden, crushing it in one great blow as a final warning to the hysterical, die-hard Nazis to cease their futile resistance.

I had never talked about religion to my parents and I couldn't explain my feelings to them now. But in those desperate minutes, as the world seemed dissolving into flame and thousands of people were dying, I went down on my knees. I looked back over my life as one who feels death near so often does. I thought of the good days we had had at home in America, of how we had been preserved from all danger until now, of the gradual deterioration of our position, of the day we had been so close to freedom just three weeks before, and the way everything seemed to be building up to some sort of climax.

I was afraid to call upon the Lord for protection. I had avoided Him all those years when things were going well and now, in my extremity, I found that I was a stranger to Him. I tried to find words with which to plead for His intercession to save my unworthy life, but all I could say, humbly, was, "Please save us, dear Lord! Please save us!"

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For thirty minutes the house rocked as blast after blast hit nearby. Directly overhead the "Christmas tree" flares burned brightly through the clouds of smoke, outlining the boundaries of the city for the waves of bombers still to come.

When at last the roar of the planes grew distant and the explosions were suddenly replaced by an even more deafening silence, we made our way cautiously upstairs. Again, we found urgent work to do. Enormous fire winds were blowing toward the city and the house literally shook with their gusts. Live sparks filled the air and for an hour we fought to save our house; by the narrowest margin, we won the battle. All night we waited for the bombardiers to return. All night we watched Dresden burn, a sea of flame beneath us. We could feel the fire sear our faces as we looked toward the city. Nothing could be done for the poor people down there. The fires would burn until there was nothing left to consume.

About seven in the morning, I left the house to try to find a shop where I could buy a loaf of bread for breakfast. On the boulevard the most dreadful sight met my eyes. Broad as it was, the avenue was crowded from curb to curb with pedestrians fleeing the city on foot. Their faces were blackened with soot. White streaks showed under their eyes where the grime had been washed away by tears and sweat. Men, women and children struggled past in this vast throng, pushing handcarts, bicycles, baby buggies, children's toy wagons, anything on which a little bedding or a few precious family possessions could be carried. Some carried nothing at all, having saved from the holocaust only the sooty, tattered clothes they stood up in. Here and there were the injured hobbling along, wrapped in blankets, their clothes having been burned off or torn

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away by the force of explosions. Some spat blood; others winced in pain as they walked, and leaned heavily upon companions for support. The children were crying pitifully but the adults were silent, many still in a state of shock, too stunned and dazed to be able to feel the magnitude of their loss. Behind them they left not only the ruins of their homes but the bodies of loved ones. Ahead was the uncertain life of the homeless refugee.

Pity swept me at this terrible sight, even though I knew I witnessed that morning in Dresden God's judgment upon a society that had followed its sinful way, with Hitler and his military leaders, down the hard road of the transgressors, Hitler's road.

In the food stores that were open, the owners were giving away their stock. Most of the survivors had no money and had lost their ration cards. I watched for a few minutes and then went home without bread. I did not even ask for any. We still had other food in our cellar.

As the day wore on, some of our friends from the city made their way to our home. We gladly opened the door to them and consoled them as best we could in their losses. There were then only three of us living in the large house, as my brother had gone to the country to do farm labor, and before the second day had passed, we had given shelter to more than twenty persons.

Next day, my father and I got on our bicycles and threaded our way through the still-smoking ruins to the vicinity of our factory. The industrial area had scarcely been touched! But while we were there an air-raid siren sounded. We took shelter at once as a flight of some hundred and fifty American bombers came over to finish the job. They concentrated, however, on the remaining bridges across the Elbe and the section around it that had

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somehow been missed by the hundreds of British night bombers. Our factory area, apparently not considered of strategic importance, was again untouched.

It seemed incredible that in the bombed part of the city anyone at all could have escaped. On the way to the factory, we saw, reduced to rubble, the home of a girl I knew. Even as we stood there she and her mother came up to us from a neighbor's house. They had been bombed out twice, but had each time escaped. Now, as we returned, we saw that the third raid had struck the same place again; we saw its last remaining wall crumble in a sea of flames. Yet once more they had managed to find shelter and were still unhurt. There was no accounting for such literally miraculous escapes.

I felt very much humbled by my own survival. I knew that some invisible hand had been placed above my head. I felt that I must have been spared because the Lord had use for me. I looked at the huge crater made by the two land mines in the side of our bluff. I asked myself what would have happened if that bombardier speeding at over 200 miles an hour, 10,000 feet overhead had pressed the bomb release just one tenth of a second later.

The next week when I went down into the city to try to find some of our factory workers, I looked up the house of the friend with whom I would have dined if the phone call from my father had not interrupted my plans. The house had been blown to pieces. I found no sign of his family. A little later I met one of their neighbors who shook his head in bewilderment as he told me that my friend, his young wife, and his parents had all been killed. One of the first bombs had made a direct hit on the house; there had been no chance to flee.

### III

## *Faith in a Flag*

**A**GAIN, with the immediate bombing danger over, I forgot God. We ought to have been grateful to God for having spared us yet we were not grateful. We still had our eyes on material possessions, earthly safeguards. Even during those terrible first weeks of the occupation, with the Russians in possession of ruined Dresden, we felt completely confident of our personal safety. Now it was the American flag, made with our hands and raised above our big house on the hill, in which we put our trust. We forgot that the flag, made by human hands, could also meet its destruction at human hands.

After the bombing when I had walked through the ruined downtown streets and seen forced labor crews gathering up the burned, decomposing bodies to be taken to one huge funeral pyre in the central square, I had resolved to be thankful to God all the rest of my life that I was not among those nameless uncounted dead. But already I had forgotten. All that I had learned of prayer and dependence on God alone had now to be learned over at great length and with infinite hardship.

But in certain ways I had begun to discover, during

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those first two months of Russian occupation, before my father and I were arrested, what man without God can come to. Although I could not then comprehend why the Russians conducted themselves as they did, the dreadful events of Black Sunday in Dresden, May 6, 1945, gave me my first inkling of the moral erosion that had taken place among the Soviet people.

Under cover of darkness, neighbors continued to slip over to our house for refuge. The tales they had to tell made us sick. Several of the women were hysterical. None of us slept that night.

The next day came word of Germany's surrender and on Tuesday, the war was over. The Russians gave their men three days of liberty to celebrate. Their lust spent in rape, the Red soldiers turned to looting. They were stealing all the cars they could find. After crossing the ignition wires, they would go roaring off down the streets, shouting and sounding the horn. Within a few minutes, with squealing brakes and splintering glass, they would wreck the car at some intersection. Such of them as could still navigate would extricate themselves from the wreckage and presently go off to steal another car.

No, the truth about Russian conduct in liberated areas is not pleasant. The terrible truth is that when you remove God from a society, you remove the basis for a moral code; and when men live without a moral code, they live in violence and sin. Sin is never without its penalties. From the standpoint of long-range Soviet policy in Germany, no greater blunder could have been made than to permit the Russian army to behave as it did. Our German neighbors in Dresden did not expect easy treatment at the hands of the Red Army, for the dreadful rumors that had reached

them from the East left no doubt that things would go hard with them. But no one could have expected, or imagined, what actually took place in the form of rape, murder, and drunken barbarity of all kinds. From the West, people had heard that the Americans were treating conquered German cities in their zone of occupation very differently, and everyone hoped that in the postwar settlement Dresden would be turned over to American or joint Allied occupation. Charity and sympathy toward defeated opponents, shown often by Americans of every rank, were a natural part of Christian morality, but I think even the Kremlin would now agree that such Christian conduct would also have been a show of tactical wisdom. There had been high anti-American feeling after the great bombing but overnight, after the Russians arrived, that feeling disappeared. The Russians who might have been welcomed as liberators by many who were strongly anti-Nazi, instead made themselves hated and despised.

In the midst of all this horror my family and I were left unmolested and the fact that the Red Army not only seemed to respect our flag but also gave us an order for cameras made us feel even more secure. Despite the friendly attitude of the Russians toward us, my father felt it was not well for us to remain in the Russian zone. American officers told us, however, that no arrangements could be made for repatriation of civilians before January, 1946, at the earliest, because of the shipping requirements. But they said we should not worry, as Dresden would soon be transferred to British occupation. They should have known better than to be so naive as to think the Russian army would voluntarily leave any place that it held, but we were filled with confidence by this report. It was the

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Fourth of July and the holiday spirit of the American troops observing Independence Day in this land far from home communicated itself to us.

Close to midnight the next night my father and I returned from a trip to Jena. We had gone there to order lenses with which to fulfill our Russian contract. A dim light showed that someone was still up, waiting for us at our home in Dresden. It was probably Mother or even George who had by now returned from his farming assignment. But why should they be up so late? As we mounted the steps, George stepped out to meet us; he was not alone. A Russian in civilian clothes was at his side.

"We were placed under house arrest an hour after you left," George told us, nervously.

We went inside and there a Russian officer, flanked by five armed guards and an interpreter, rose to meet us.

"You are under investigation," the interpreter told us. We were quickly searched and all our documents of identification taken, including our American passports. Argument was useless. The American flag that had been flying over our house had been torn down that day. Dad and I were taken off to prison.

## IV

# *Trial by Hunger*

I HAD NOT yet learned to put my trust in God nor to turn to Him for help. I had not yet found peace of spirit by relying on the prayer that His will be done. Prayer was still foreign to me, and when I finally did pray, it was in anger, in fright, in despair.

“Lord, where are You? Don’t You see me here in prison, locked in this cell? I need Your help! I am innocent, Lord! Let me out!”

I literally shouted my supplication to Heaven, forgetting that I was not permitted to speak out loud. A hard knock on the door startled me, flinging me back to reality. A Russian guard banged his key against the metal-plated door to my cell and through the peephole I could see his eye regarding me balefully.

Minutes passed before I could calm down. I sat on the metal “tray” that, suspended from the wall, served as my bunk and, holding my head in my hands, I bent over the table that was my cell’s only furnishing. A beam of the setting sun shone for a moment through the little window set high in the wall and illumined the marks on the wall which were my calendar. Eight lines scratched there, eight

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days in this cell in solitary confinement. It was July 28. For twenty-three maddening days I had been held prisoner by the Russians, unable to communicate with the outside world, with no charges brought against me, no trial, and no indication of what my jailers intended to do with me.

There had been three days at Police Headquarters, where I was kept in a small single room with an armed guard present every minute. I had slept on a kind of sofa and had eaten the food brought me at irregular intervals. Loudly I had protested that I was an American citizen and that my arrest was illegal, only to be told by the impatient Russian officer in charge that no doubt his superiors knew what they were doing.

Then followed twelve more days of detention in another Police Headquarters building, again without charges, interrogation or explanation. And finally, transfer to the grim stone fortress that had long served the city of Dresden as its prison. I had ridden in the same police van as my father but we were forbidden to speak. I was thrust into Cell 5, my father across the corridor into Cell 29.

In solitary confinement, a man has nothing to do but think. There is no one with whom he can speak, nothing to read. My cell was a small, tight-closed room, twelve feet long and six wide. There was just enough space for me to take six short paces back and forth for exercise. The window was so high that I could tell only whether it was day or night. There was the metal door, a single sheath except for the peephole. For eight interminably tedious days I had stared at the four walls of this barren little cell.

It was only in my extremity that I was now able to break through those walls of silence—this time, on July 28, 1945—and my extremity was not bombs but hunger. This was

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the first day that we had had only warm water instead of the usual soup, or coffee, and bread. When the guards came around again at the time of the evening meal, I could hear tin bowls rattling against the doors of the cell block. Curses and cries of protest echoed through the corridor. "God will punish you for this, you Red swine," I heard an anguished voice cry out. With mounting apprehension, I awaited my turn. My fears were soon confirmed: again we received only warm water.

Weakly, I went back and sat down on my bunk, looking at the spoon in my hand for which I had no use. "Lord," I cried out bitterly, "are You expecting anyone to live on this?"

Then, suddenly, I went on my knees with humility and prayed, "Lord, Lord, I am starving! Help me, or I will die!"

Quickly, I rose from my knees. It was not safe to be caught kneeling in prayer. Already, as the sun went down, the unfrosted electric-light bulb which lighted my cell all night had been turned on so that the guards could watch me. To be found praying would be excuse enough for a trip to the dungeon and what is called in communist double-talk "re-education."

I stretched out on my bunk. Closing my eyes, as if in sleep, I tried to find words with which to pray: "Our Father in Heaven, I was unthankful for all You permitted me to enjoy in the past. I trusted in the material things made by men's hands alone. Now I turn to You for help. You know that I am hungry and in prison. I beg You to give me bread in the morning and, during the coming day, to open the doors of this prison so that I may again be free."

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Having offered this prayer, peace was restored me and I went to sleep confident that in the morning I would have bread—with freedom for dessert. In the morning when I awoke, I tried to busy myself so that the half-hour wait for breakfast would not seem so long. With my sleeve I dusted off the corner of the table so that I could lay my bread down while drinking my coffee.

The lock fell open on my door, and I held out my pan with my left hand for the imitation coffee and my right hand for the bread. In the second the door was open I gazed at my father's door, down the corridor on the other side, and smiled so that he could see I was alive and healthy. Those split seconds when our doors were opened for food did sometimes give us a glimpse of each other. The door closed and my right hand was still empty; there was no bread! Quickly I pushed open the peephole in the door and watched as Dad opened his door. Surely he had been praying for food, too. He did not even hold out his right hand for the bread; he had seen that there was none. Yet he had a grateful smile for the guard and a cheerful glance across the corridor for me. How could he be cheerful? I was puzzled and confused. And when at noon there was only water, I was completely disillusioned. Surely God has abandoned me, I thought; I have prayed earnestly to him in my hour of need and He has denied me. I was done with God, and He, it seemed clear, was done with me!

Of course, I realize now how foolish I was to think that the first time I prayed, I should get an immediate answer. God doesn't work things out that way. I had prayed that *my* will be done, not *His*. I prayed a selfish prayer, thinking only of myself, and had been demanding, rather than

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penitent. When my prayers were not granted, I was angry.

That night, however, with my stomach growing numb after two days of enforced fasting and with the rebellion in my spirit fading as my body became weaker, I felt differently about it. Remembering the mercy promised us by our Lord, Jesus Christ, I turned to Him in prayer and asked Him to intercede with God that we might have food. I repeated my prayer over and over so that the Lord would surely know my need and would not overlook it.

Suddenly, on the morning of the fourth day, my prayers were answered at last and there was bread again. Closing my eyes, I gave thanks to the Lord. Breaking the bread and slowly eating it, I felt the weakness of my body replaced by a new surge of hope. At noon and again in the evening we had a fairly thick soup along with the bread and that evening I slept soundly. I felt that my prayers had been answered and I kept on praying that the food rations be increased. I also continued to pray for release.

I should have observed that the Lord gave me food when I needed it and not when I wanted it, and should have realized then that He would lead my captors to give me freedom only in due course when He saw fit. But I continued to pray selfishly, and certainly with impatience.

On the morning of Thursday, August 2, came a crushing disappointment. Again we were given only coffee for breakfast, and at noon and night only warm water. And this went on day after day until by the ninth day almost half the prisoners had died. And still the starving process went on. But what happened to my father and me during this period in Dresden Prison convinced me forever that there is a God who reigns over this universe and who can answer the prayers of those who believe in Him.

## *The Miracle of Bread*

THE POWER of prayer is demonstrated most strikingly in the hour of greatest need. And no extremity in human life is greater than that of starvation, one of the slowest, most painful deaths that can be inflicted upon man. On the morning of August 2, when the second period of withdrawal of food began in Dresden Prison, my body was already run down from lack of proper nourishment during the previous month. The hunger pains I suffered were excruciating. My body cried out against its destruction. I would have eaten anything that was brought to me, but at each mealtime my bowl was filled only with water.

No sooner had our noon "meal" of warm water been brought that day than a terrible clatter, an uproar broke out through the prison. Maddened by the renewed starvation, the desperate prisoners were knocking on their doors, calling out for food. Many of them bitterly cursed the Russian guards, calling them every vile name possible. The riot was spontaneous, prolonged, and more determined than any previous protests by the prisoners.

The Russian guards ran up and down the corridors, armed with machine guns, threatening to shoot the rioters.

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The Russian captain in charge always had a dog whip hanging on his belt when he took the daily roll call. If a prisoner complained, or made a disrespectful remark, he knew how to use his whip. This day he employed it ruthlessly. Other guards armed themselves with whips and clubs. Soon the screams of prisoners being beaten almost to death added to the bedlam. Hatred begets hatred. The more the prisoners screamed in rage, the more gusto the guards took in adding to their torture.

Among the rebellious prisoners was a German communist leader who had already incurred the displeasure of his Russian masters, perhaps for showing too much independence. All his life this man had worked for the communist revolutions. Now he was already harvesting the fruits of Marxism. He cursed loudest of all against his tormentors and with most vehemence. He was suffering too for his lost faith in that ideal which he had previously worshiped. He had denied God for years: he had hated religion. Now, in his hour of mortal agony, he could turn only to the frustration of uncontrolled rage. It was ironic to see the punishment he suffered at the hands of the Communists. But the greatest punishment of an atheist is to be cut off from God and this punishment was one of his own making. He who had rejected God now faced death: but betrayed by the godless system he had served, he could not seek strength or solace through faith. Embittered, in complete disillusionment, he suffered an even worse punishment than the blows which eventually silenced his harrowed voice.

I tried to remain quiet while the tumult of the demonstration raged around me. I knew it was of no avail to curse the guards or to plead with them. When they were ordered

to serve us food again, they would do so. If they brought us no food, death must be our fate. I decided to conserve my strength and to pray as hard as I could to the only One who could save me.

I knew I had neglected God for worldly gain. My present situation was a direct punishment for what I had done. I resolved to bear it as meekly and penitently as possible. After the starvation had been going on for two or three days, the noises in the prison began to diminish. Only a few knocked on their doors any more. Only occasionally would one cry out, now usually in a delirious voice. The whips and gun butts of the guards had ended the cursing and reviling. The weakness of famine was now doing the rest.

Throughout the prison would be heard only one sound, the eerie wails and chants of some Moslem soldiers singing their prayers. These prisoners were men from General Vlasoff's army. He was a Russian general who hated the Communists and went over to the German side during the war. He had no trouble finding recruits for his cause among the Russian units from Turkestan and Uzbekistan, for the Moslem religion had been cruelly persecuted by the Communists in those colonial areas of the Soviet Union, and many of the Asiatic soldiers of the Red Army were more eager to turn their guns against the forces of Moscow than against any foreign foe.

Vlasoff's rebel army had been trapped in Bohemia and Saxony by the collapse of Germany. These Moslem soldiers had now fallen prisoner to the Russians. The fate which awaited them when brought before Russian military courts can well be imagined. They would either receive the quick death of execution by a firing squad, or the slow death of

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life at hard labor in the Siberian mines. But despite the grim prospect confronting them, these men had not lost their faith.

The Moslems, sharing the common heritage of the Old Testament, worship the same God as the Hebrews and Christians, though they call Him Allah and believe that Mohammed, rather than Christ, was His greatest prophet. These devout men were preparing themselves to meet God.

All day long the eerie, plaintive chant of their prayers could be heard. From time to time, there was an interruption and the sound of blows and cries of pain would echo through the prison. The chanting got on the guards' nerves. No matter how many brutal whippings were administered, however, the singing always resumed. The Moslems place their devotion to God above all else and nothing but death would silence them.

At first their chanting seemed weird and unearthly to me but after a while I found it had a soothing effect on my spirit. I knew that I was not alone in offering prayer in that prison and that there were many others who had a religious faith that nothing could shake. I found comfort in this fact.

Each day my strength diminished. After an entire week without a morsel of food to eat, I found myself too weak to walk. I had to slide myself from my bunk to the door to receive my coffee or bowl of warm water. I knew my father would be looking through his peephole and I tried to pull myself up and to stand as straight as I could to show him that I was still on my legs. He, too, was still on his feet. He was growing a long beard as was I, and we were both progressively becoming emaciated. Our appearance was so changed that we could hardly recognize one another.

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By this time, my weakness was so great that I could no longer sleep at night. I did not feel any pain but felt dizzy and giddy, as if I were intoxicated. It was difficult to keep my thoughts collected. At times, I became delirious. My spirits gradually sank to the depths of despair. As each day passed without food or comfort of any kind, it seemed to me that the Lord had slammed the door in my face. I reproached myself bitterly for having neglected Him all those years, for now it appeared to me that it was too late to repent and that both my life and my eternal soul would be lost.

On the ninth day of the fast, both my bodily strength and my mental processes had sunk to such a level that, in one of the few lucid moments I had in my delirium, I realized death could not be far away. When the guard came with the water that evening, I found that, for the first time, I hardly had the strength to go to the door and get it. With thirst as well as hunger now assailing me, I knew that probably I had only a few hours left.

Every hour or so I could hear a dreadful scraping noise along the corridor and stairs as the body of another prisoner was dragged out for burial. The bumping of the head as the guards dragged each corpse down the stairs was hardly endurable. I could only tremble in fear, and wonder how long it would be before the guards would drag out my own stiff and whitened body, or my father's.

With my last strength, I struggled onto my knees and earnestly asked the Lord simply to close my eyes this night and release me from my mortal suffering. I said, in effect, "Dear Lord, I give up; I can't go on any longer. I have no way out but through Thee. Lord, close my eyes and take

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me to Thee, or if it be Thy will that I must go on, give me the strength to do so, and lend me Thy hand to guide me. My will is broken, Thy will be done. Amen."

I committed my soul entirely to the hands of the Lord. Unworthy of His grace though I was, I felt prepared to die. This time, I had not prayed that my will be done but that the Lord's will be done. I was completely submissive to that will.

With this prayer the roots of my tree of life had at last reached the rock of faith in our Blessed Lord, Jesus Christ. Clinging and fastening around that Rock, I sensed an immediate change in my life. Literally, I felt as though I was born again. I began to understand for the first time the words of Jesus to Nicodemus (John 3-3), "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." By committing my life to Christ without reservation, I had the amazing experience of being born again of the Spirit.

I sensed an immediate change in my situation. I knew my prayer had been heard, and that, at last, I had an answer. The veil of weakness and dizziness which had dulled the perception of my senses was being lifted. From a source outside my own body, strength was coming to me. It was the most wonderful, miraculous sensation I have ever experienced.

I had committed my life to God by accepting Jesus as my personal Saviour. I had confessed my failure and had asked the Lord to take over and do with me what He pleased. I was now in the hands of God, and it appeared that God did not want to close my eyes in death, as I had begged, but meant me to go on living, since my life was

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now to be lived in His service. It took me a long time to give my life to God. When I finally yielded it, I received more than I gave.

The next morning when the guard came with "coffee," I got up from my bunk and stood at the door waiting for it to open. The experience of a new life and peace with God was so great within me that I had no more pressing concern than to share it with my father. I knew he had been fighting the same battle. That morning, he was first to receive his coffee-water and I was prepared to call out the news, despite the whipping that would surely follow. Father's door was opening slowly and for some moments I could not understand the sight: he had placed his tin pan at his feet and stood there, his hands folded as if in prayer and extended toward me. I understood that Our Lord takes care of these things much better than embattled mortals like myself. I did not have to call out; I did not have to be whipped; Dad knew exactly what had happened to me that night. I stood in adoration before God when my door opened in its turn and Dad could see the peace that reigned within me as, with a smile, I received my portion. Although I derived no nourishment from the flavored water, I felt much stronger. After going downhill steadily for nine days, until the icy fingers of death seemed to be grasping my body, I was now gaining strength. On the tenth day of starvation, I was stronger than on the ninth, and on the eleventh day stronger than on the tenth!

To feel that I grew stronger, even though I was still denied food of any kind, gave me renewed confidence in the Lord. If it was the Lord's will that I should live, and grow stronger without even any human food for my body,

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it meant that I no longer had to worry about bread or about anything else. It was manifest that the Lord did not intend that I should die at this time. I had asked for death. He had given me life. Nothing could happen to me now, I knew, unless the Lord permitted it. I remembered the words of our Lord, "No harm shall come to him who putteth his trust in Me."

I prayed that my father might be given similar strength for I knew that he, too, must be on the verge of death, being older and having been plagued for years by ill health. We could not communicate but, as he was to confirm months later, he knew when he saw my changed appearance that the Lord had saved me, as he had been praying that He would. Without a word being exchanged, he said, he could see in my face that his prayers had been answered.

The starvation regime continued four or five days longer. During this time, more and more prisoners died, until over half our number had gone. The rest were at death's very door, yet each new day I felt stronger than before.

There are those who would say that this was not a miracle, that my body simply found renewed strength because of faith and relaxation of tension. I say that the faith itself was a miracle and the strength that faith gave me was truly miraculous. Whatever happened in Dresden Prison that night, I can only testify that I had been an irreligious young man, without faith, who felt that the Lord had slammed the door in his face and that death would be his only release. Suddenly, both my faith and my bodily strength were revived. I can testify that a miracle happened to me then and that I was saved from death.

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The date of this miracle was August 10, 1945. The place was a communist prison cell. It was not the only miracle to which I can testify from my decade of imprisonment. The one which happened to my father was, in a sense, even greater. What happened was, as he told me much later, that he, too, felt that our trouble was a direct punishment for having drifted away from God. Looking back over his life there in prison, he could see that if he had not been so attached to material things and the goal of business success, we would not have been in Germany or in the fix we were. He had left the ministry, and, even worse, he had stopped worshiping God. Doctrinal differences over the meaning of a few verses in the Bible had not caused him to lose all his faith in the Word of God, but it had caused him to become neglectful of his duties to the Creator. He was keenly conscious of his error, and throughout his early period of imprisonment prayed earnestly for God's forgiveness.

When the two periods of starvation came, Dad saw clearly that he was in the hands of people who could do with him whatever they wanted. His American citizenship did not even entitle him, in their eyes, to the consideration of a trial. If they wanted to kill him, they would and could thereafter blandly deny he had ever been a prisoner. He felt that his old life had come to an end, and that if there was any life ahead for him, it would have to be on the basis of an entirely new spiritual existence that was beginning for him.

"I felt that we were in the hands of Satan," he subsequently told me. "At the same time, I earnestly believed that if I placed my life in the hands of the Lord, nothing would happen to me that was not His will."

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My father prayed almost continuously during the time we were undergoing starvation and like me, he received strength as a result of prayer that pulled him through that ordeal. Otherwise, a man of his age and physical condition could scarcely have survived.

The period of systematic starvation did finally come to an end after twelve hideous days. On Tuesday morning, August 14, without explanation, the "liquid diet" order was suddenly lifted, and we received bread with our coffee. It was not a full slice but some stale crumbs on a piece of paper, amounting in all to perhaps two ounces. However, it was our first nourishment of any kind and when I received these crumbs in my hand, I must have sat transfixed for at least a quarter of an hour, trying to comprehend that it was real and that the Lord had seen fit to save my life. Tears ran from my eyes and I offered a prayer of gratitude to God. Then I ate each crumb slowly, as though I were partaking of the Communion wafer.

It was fortunate for me that I approached this bounty with gratitude and reverence. I may have saved my life thereby. Many of the prisoners grabbed their bread and, without pausing a moment, gulped it down ravenously. Their stomachs had shrunk during the period of the fast and could not accommodate any solid food so suddenly. Two or three men died within the hour of acute indigestion. Others were made sick and vomited, thus losing the value of the food and further weakening their emaciated bodies. For two or three days after the starvation ended, I could still hear almost hourly the scraping noise of bodies being dragged past my door. Many of the men were too far gone to be saved by a meager portion of bread. But I managed to keep my food down and digest it, and

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I think the fact that I had first stopped to pray was responsible for this.

I saved half my bread that morning and hid it away. This did not imply lack of faith in God, for He had showed His hand to me and I was confident that, despite my suffering, He was protecting me. I simply thought it prudent to take good care of all that was given me, so that I could sustain myself should starvation begin again.

From this day on, however, we continued to receive two ounces of bread and a weak soup which seemed to have fishbones as its principal ingredient. This food was barely sufficient to maintain our feeble strength, and everywhere in the prison men continued to die. I found that it was not just the amount of bread I received that counted, but the blessing that came with it. I asked God before each meal to bless this food for my use, and asked that the strength I derived from it be used in His service—and my prayers were answered. Just as I had grown stronger each day without any food at all during the latter part of the starvation period, so now I gained strength from spiritual force, even though my body continued to decline in weight and my face grew more haggard because of the prolonged malnutrition.

My father subsequently was to have another encounter with starvation by the Communists and find further convincing evidence that God does answer our prayers, and is able to perform miracles for those who believe in Him. This was when Dad was in the communist concentration camp of Waldheim, in solitary confinement. His strength was greatly depleted by the years of imprisonment he had endured before going there. The food at Waldheim was very poor and he was suffering intensely from hunger.

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One evening he lay down on his bunk about seven o'clock, feeling that he could not go on any longer, that he had endured all that a man his age (nearly sixty) possibly could. The evening meal, such as it was, had been brought to him two hours before, at five o'clock. It would be many hours before morning. Dad could not sleep, and as he lay there, thinking surely his life would end soon if he did not have some relief, he prayed to God to send him just one more slice of bread, or, if this was not possible, at least to let his tortured body have sleep that night so that he would have strength to face the morning.

After that prayer, peace came upon him. About eight o'clock, while he was still lying awake in his bunk staring at the ceiling, the door to his cell slowly and soundlessly opened. With amazement, he saw it swing outward two or three inches, and a hand reach in and lay down three slices of bread, then quickly withdraw, and the door gradually close.

My father was awe-struck. It was several minutes before he could bring himself to rise from his bunk and go to examine the bread. There it was, the equivalent of a whole day's ration. Giving thanks to the Lord with trembling lips, he took and ate it.

The bread gave him greatly increased strength and, he is convinced, saved his life. The hand that opened that door, my father believes, was a human hand. It was, in fact, almost certainly that of one of the Communist jailers, one of the tough, trusted party followers who had custody of the most important political prisoners. The guard had evidently seen that my father was near the end, both physically and mentally, and had been moved to compassion for him. He does not claim that this was an angel

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visitant, though, being unable to see his benefactor, he might be excused if he thought for a few moments that it was.

What was the force that would move a Communist to take pity on my father? What led the jailer to take bread from the kitchen and give it to my father secretly, an act which would have cost him his job had it been discovered by the prison commandant, which might even have resulted in his own imprisonment? It was a terrible risk that he took. He was careful that even my father should not see him and know the identity of his benefactor.

Something spoke to the conscience of the Communist jailer that night. Something inside his own soul led him to take bread and risk his own life to give help to my father, who was after all only one of the hundreds of prisoners facing death from mistreatment. What spoke to him? What but the voice of God?

Yes; I can testify that God can work miracles for those who have faith in him. God saved me from death at the hands of my captors when, in the most desperate hour of my life, I turned to Him and committed my life to Him, and thereafter, I gained in strength without any food at all. At the same time, my father survived his ordeal by means of prayer, and later saw even more convincing evidence of how God answers prayer, when his life was a second time saved.

And I shall relate the many other examples of the power of prayer I witnessed both in the East German prisons and in Soviet Russia itself.

## *Helping Others*

**I**N SEPTEMBER the bread ration at Dresden Prison was suddenly doubled to four ounces. In October it was increased to five, and in December it reached 250 grams, a little more than half a pound a day. Although we still lacked vitamins, life could be sustained at this level. As the food situation improved, I felt stronger and my thoughts were turned in gratitude to God for having brought me among many others safely through the crisis of starvation.

After this experience, my sense that God had a purpose for my life continued to grow and I no longer prayed for release. I did not know what this higher purpose might be but I was content to keep the pledge I had made in my extremity, that my life from that moment was God's to use as He saw fit. I was confident that when I had accomplished whatever the Lord had in mind for me when He had answered my prayers, then and then only would I be released.

Meanwhile, one thing I could do in the service of the Lord, despite my imprisonment, was to testify to my fellow prisoners about conversion and the source of strength

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I had found through prayer. I was eager to share the good news and thereby try to lead others to Christ.

I was kept in solitary confinement until the end of December, 1945. Only in September, October and November, 1945, when the prison was becoming crowded from mass arrests by the Soviet secret police, was I given cellmates. This gave me opportunities to testify to my experience of conversion and to the power of prayer. Sometimes, too, there was the chance to pray with another person, one of the blessings of a shared belief, and to see the results of prayer in other lives.

This was the case with a forestry student who had been picked up in a purge of anti-communist students at the University. He was very much interested in religion and was deeply moved by my experiences. We prayed together every night, and one of us would say grace at each meal; it was a wonderful comfort to us both. There was no reason, except that he was not a Communist, for his imprisonment and we prayed not for his release but that he might see justice done. One day, without explanation, he was suddenly released. Again months and months of solitary confinement passed when in January, 1946, I had been given the job of working with the prison records, I found out that out of 21,000 prisoners who had passed through the Dresden jail, only fifteen had been released outright without charges. Thank God—my friend was among them!

Knowing of my anxiety to let my mother, still held under Soviet house arrest, know where we were, my released cellmate went directly to our house as soon as he was free. It was mid-November, four months after our arrest. After my own release nearly ten years later, I learned he got

the message through. He was greeted at the gate by a Russian guard who asked him what he wanted. Thinking quickly, he said he had come to tell the Nobles that their coal could not be delivered that day! When the guard summoned my brother George to ask if coal had been ordered, my friend was able to give him the facts about us in rapid-fire German, and then to beat a hasty retreat when George said this must be the wrong address.

One of the first men to be thrown in with me was a doctor of about fifty, a Russian who had emigrated to Germany and become a psychiatrist in a mental hospital. During the war the Nazis had ordered "mercy killings" of many patients in such institutions and now some of the doctors were being rounded up and charged with complicity in the crime. A peasant boy of about my own age, twenty-two, came in at the same time. It was right after the noon meal and they both complained that they had had no breakfast as well as no lunch, so I brought out a piece of bread I had been hoarding against any future ration decrease and offered it to them. The boy refused, saying that he had also saved a piece of bread and had eaten it that morning. But the doctor took it and gulped it down ravenously.

The next day, however, he suddenly told me that he had actually had breakfast the morning before, in MVD (secret police) headquarters, but that he had been so hungry he had lied to me. My first reaction was anger. I had been saving that piece of bread carefully and had let myself be tricked out of it; when one has practically nothing, a piece of bread looms large. But as I did not betray my anger, perhaps the bread served another purpose, as well as appeasing the man's hunger. Perhaps it meant

something to this man who did not believe in God, that somebody had shared what he had with him. Certainly it must have been conscience which prompted him to confess, and I soon became thankful instead of angry.

Though I was never permitted to leave the cell, other cellmates came and went and a generally cheerful spiritual atmosphere reigned there which helped us all. We even managed to observe Christmas, softening our bread and shaping it into stars which we dried on the radiator so that we could have "Christmas cakes."

The Russians, of course, took a harsh view of any religious observance of the day, so harsh in fact that the day after Christmas the warden of another communist prison joined us as a fellow prisoner because he had permitted the spirit of the day to soften his heart so far as to allow a famous Dresden baritone, an opera singer charged with "deviation" from the communist cultural line, to lead the prisoners in Christmas carols. He had even allowed the cell doors to be open, though the prisoners stayed inside. This unfortunate man subsequently received a sentence at hard labor.

Two days later, on December 28, I had a little talk with my father at last. We were let out of our cells that day for the first time since we had been there, nearly six months, and permitted a bath, haircut, and shave; in the bathroom I found my father, who had some previous experience with the work, acting as barber. A six-month growth of hair takes more than a minute to cut and so I was enabled to tell him the essential facts, that I had accepted Christ as my Saviour and had found in Him a refuge. He said he had felt sure that this had happened; he was over-

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joyed to see me and have me confirm my conversion. It gave him the conviction he told me later that all would be well with me, no matter what befell us.

Soon after this, I was assigned to a work detail with the job of distributing food, and this meant that I was transferred to a cell next to my father's in the cell block where working prisoners were housed. Through this change, I learned why we had been arrested, for the man in charge of handing out the jobs, now a prisoner himself, had been an aide to the MVD General in charge of the Dresden area and had been present with an elite detail of MVD men when we were arrested. The reason he was a prisoner now was that, during our arrest, he had gone back alone and searched the house, stealing for black market purposes some of the cameras we had stored there. The vengeance the authorities visited upon him for an offense smaller than most of the looting then common in Dresden seemed to indicate that it was our cameras, rather than my father and me, that the Russians themselves were after. They wanted the cameras but they did not want to pay us for them under the contract their government representatives had signed. The longer I was in prison the more convinced I became that our arrest was a pretext for the confiscation of our factory and repudiation of our contract. Our crime was that we owned something they wanted for nothing! Yet while they were stealing the cameras themselves, they denounced as a saboteur of the state one clumsy individual who stole the same thing for himself. This was but one of the many examples I was to see at the peculiar perversion of law which occurs when any government recognizes its own ends as the sole moral

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standard. And it was this double standard, as I later saw plainly in Russia, that was turning the people against their communist leaders.

I was glad to have the food-distributing job because it gave me a chance to help some of the poor fellows who were receiving "special punishment." They were the new prisoners who were still being interrogated and, as part of the procedure of breaking them down so they would sign "confessions," they were denied food or given short rations. I was handed a secret list: some were to get food every other day, some only every three days, some were to have soup but no bread, and others half a portion of everything. I tried to give them all full rations. Not only was I sorry for my fellow prisoners but I thought most of them were innocent. If they had been guilty of some such misdeed as theft or black marketing, they would have confessed under the ruthless questioning. Since they had not, it meant they were being asked to confess to things of which they knew nothing, and adding to their pressures by not feeding them seemed to me like playing into the hands of their captors.

Something I had not realized until then was that in trying to do the Lord's work, you are bound to encounter the servants of the Devil. I couldn't imagine at first what kind of men would deliberately fabricate charges against people who they knew were innocent and then beat and starve them into signing "confessions" that would ruin them or even result in their death. I was not long, however, in getting acquainted with the type who would do the Devil's work for him. I had one as a cellmate in my newly assigned workers' cell.

He was a Bulgarian, an unsavory character whose only

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aim in life was to attach himself to the winning team and reap what benefits he could. Since he spoke Russian, he had been serving the Russians as an interpreter, as previously he had served the Nazis when they were occupying the Balkans. His Russian masters, however, distrusted him, and for some specific reason which I never knew had thrown him into prison. It was not long, however, before he had insinuated himself into a position of authority again. He was put in charge of all office work and, as I was his cellmate, he managed to transfer his work to me so that he could use his time to better purpose, as he put it: namely, to visit the women's cells.

So it was that I was transferred to office work. I should have known better than to truckle before him but I was anxious to remind the Communists that I was an American and that I had been held for over six months without any semblance of trial or any formal charges having been brought against me. My work was to maintain the list of all the prisoners, taking note of those who came in and went out each day, those who were sick or died, together with such data as the charge on which they were held, which department of the MVD was handling their cases, and what sentence was imposed after "trial." In this way I thought I could find out more about my own case and my father's. Also I could move about the prison and learn whatever went on; above all, I could see my father every day, though not for long.

Seeing the tremendous injustice reflected in the prisoners' records, I began to believe that the Lord had sent this job my way so that I could tell the world just how some aspects of the Soviet occupation of East Germany were run. By being very observant for those several

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months, I committed a grave offense in communist minds: I learned too much. When the time came, long after this, that whatever charges had been fabricated against me were to be considered by Moscow, I believe I would have been released except that the Russians knew I knew too much and decided to keep me a prisoner, regardless of any protests the United States might make. I am certain that it was for this I was sent to Siberia.

Yet I can see that here too the hand of God was moving for, as it developed, it was not only in East German prisons but also in Soviet Russia that I saw and heard more than the ordinary prisoner. It was a long road I had to go but, because I placed full trust in my pact with the Lord, I was able to maintain my hope in eventual freedom. Prayer never failed me. And I was to have great need of prayer in the terrible days that lay ahead.

## VII

### *Rescued from My Tormentors*

**M**Y STAY at Dresden Prison was now limited, because of my too great knowledge of its workings. But for a little while longer I was allowed the freedom of the place, thus continuing to see for myself the two sides of the coin: the injustice practiced by the communist authorities, and the religious faith with which many prisoners armed themselves against the inhuman persecution they suffered.

My work started at 7 AM. when the officers went around and unlocked the cell doors, leaving them closed but secured only by a hook at the top. I would follow them along the corridors, unhook the doors, peer in, and check off the names against the commandant's official list. If any were sick, I would help them get such meager medical aid as was available, though about all the doctors could give them was aspirin and advice. I would take the water jugs out, put them outside the doors, and come back later to fill them. Often when I opened cell doors I would find prisoners on their knees praying. Only in this way was I enabled to know how many of these people had the same means of comfort and strength I had found.

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They had great need of faith, as shown by the records which kept me busy most of the day. It was a grim story these records told of human beings enmeshed in the web of an evil and heartless bureaucracy. Often the prisoners were held many months, as I had been, before ever being interrogated. Verdicts rendered by the Russian military courts before which they eventually appeared were almost invariably "guilty," no matter what the offense charged or whether there were any evidence to support it. Only fifteen people, as I have said, were liberated out of a total of 21,000. The rest died, were executed or were sent to concentration camps. Most were given long sentences at hard labor and deported to the Soviet Union to serve their terms.

But bad as was the plight of the male prisoners, that of the women inmates was incomparably worse. We had quite a number of women inmates, most of whom had been arrested on political grounds. There were five women's cells in our cell block alone.

The indignities they suffered during interrogation by the MVD officers are unprintable. By this time, early in 1946, the Soviet officers in Germany had been placed under strict nonfraternization rules with respect to German civilians, for their previous licentious behavior with German women had created such public indignation that it was making the puppet role of East German Communists almost impossible to fulfill. Rigid regulations now kept the Soviets segregated. They had very few Russian women with them, and their wives and families were kept at home in the Soviet Union for security reasons (to prevent defections to the West) as well as to ease the housing shortage in the "liberated" areas. When women prisoners

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were brought in, Soviet officers regarded it as an opportunity for sexual pleasure. Unless a woman confessed promptly to whatever she was charged with, there was no indignity to which the sadistic MVD interrogators would not submit her. Many of the women were brought back to their cells in a state of shock or hysteria.

Often male and female prisoners who proved resistant to the torture the American press so appropriately calls "brainwashing," were thrown into the dark dungeons in the cellar of the prison. There they were stripped of everything except their underwear. The dungeons had nothing but bare floors, no bunks, chairs or furnishings of any kind. The food was bread and water. The suffering of the men and women in the dungeons was terrible. Here was seen sadistic abuse of one's fellow man at its worst.

Since my Bulgarian cellmate had a position of considerable trust with the Soviet officials, he regarded the women's cells as his own preserve and spent most of his time and energy there.<sup>1</sup> While I was working on the prison's confidential records, he was below making the women inmates any kind of promise that came to his mind: additional food, freedom from further interrogation, special privileges, anything that was necessary to break down a woman's resistance to his demands.

Of course, he could not fulfill any of the promises, being only a privileged prisoner himself, but this never bothered his conscience. The women had cruel disillusionment added to their other woes if they were so foolish

<sup>1</sup> Space does not permit in this volume a description of all the political intrigue and communist persecution which John Noble observed. For a more complete description of this aspect of his story see his other autobiographical volume, *I WAS A SLAVE IN RUSSIA*, Devin-Adair (New York) 1957.

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as to try to buy favors with their bodies. The fact that other women were around when he engaged in his seductions made no difference to him, or to the other men who frequented the women's cells.

All this deeply offended my sense of decency. I had tried to cultivate a tolerant attitude toward sex relations, realizing that I had never before been exposed to the seamy side of life. During my high school years, I had been busy in the factory all day and attended night-school classes every evening. Restricted as I was by being an enemy alien in wartime Germany, I had relatively little social life. I was probably rather naïve for my age, but far more experienced men than I would have found this savagely opportunistic attitude toward women repellent. Living in constant association with such practices, however, and being denied normal social relationships, I found it required great fortitude to resist the temptation to take advantage of these women. Without Christian faith, I too might have been pulled down into the whirlpool.

When the women would not yield, many of them were forcibly attacked by the guards. If it was reported that a woman had been raped, the prison guards were supposed to be punished for it but actually the women were afraid to report the abuse they suffered for fear of incurring further ill treatment or a longer sentence from the Russian court. I know of only one instance in which a Russian guard was actually punished for attacking a woman. Unknown to him, a Russian officer had also taken a great interest in the same pretty young blonde prisoner. When she told her admirer of the guard's assault, the offender was immediately arrested and sentenced to seven years in Siberia.

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Despite all this brutal depravity, love did blossom in the prison. Even in such unnatural circumstances, human beings seek a natural, happy relationship. In one cell in our block five young men were confined and in the cell next to it, five women. They could not see each other or speak but they became acquainted by tapping on the wall in code. Each man would take a turn at the wall, tapping. Gradually, by learning about each other's backgrounds, they sorted themselves out and each man took a partner. They began to send one another love messages through the wall. Soon a "wall marriage" was arranged.

During the "wall marriage" the men became exceedingly intimate in the messages they exchanged with their women. They actually regarded themselves as married to their unseen partners and pledged that, if they survived, they would try to meet and fulfill their vows.

Everyone in the prison talked about the "wall marriages." I understand such liaisons became common in communist prisons, and I know of at least one case where a man and woman who had shared adjoining cells met years later and did fall in love. They are now happily married and live in West Germany.

As for my cellmate, the Bulgarian, it was not illicit sex but stealing that brought about his downfall. This occurred right after I was called for my first interrogation, on August 22, 1946. I had been held fourteen months with nothing more asked of me than my name, age, and place of birth and with no charges of any kind placed against me. Suddenly, I was called in for further questioning. With dread I approached the interrogation room, but once more the Lord was with me and I suffered no ill treatment. The questioning lasted only fifteen minutes. I was asked

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for a brief biographical sketch of my life, why I had come to Europe, where I had studied and what subjects, why American soldiers had come to our house, and what orders I had received from the Americans. I answered all the questions and categorically denied that I was an espionage agent for the American Army. The MVD officer seemed satisfied and I was dismissed without a word of accusation.

When I returned to the prison, I discovered the Bulgarian and a group of other privileged prisoners going systematically along a corridor of the cell block with a conniving Russian guard and ordering the inmates to throw out all the surplus clothing they had, socks, underwear, shirts, even handkerchiefs. These they were gleefully dividing among themselves.

The stealing of personal possessions was forbidden by the prison authorities for it would give some prisoners a chance to sell their "take" on the black market, thus obtaining money with which to bribe their way to freedom. The Bulgarian had been in trouble for robbery several times before, on complaints of fellow prisoners. His was a vicious practice, for the prisoners had so little that losing any possession represented a major personal crisis. I had existed my first six months without a single change of clothing so I well knew what it meant.

I went to the Bulgarian and told him that if he did not give the things back, he was going to be in serious trouble. He told me, in effect, to mind my own business or the trouble would be mine, and his confederates went on with their looting. Just then, the assistant chief of the prison came through and I asked him if the confiscation of clothing then going on was official. He said he did not know but

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would find out. The moment he left, the thieves began hurriedly to kick things back into the cells.

Naturally, the Bulgarian and his cohorts were furious and began looking for a chance to pay me back. Soon a guard came and ordered me to a cell, telling me that I was not to work on my job any more. Shortly, the Bulgarian joined me. He had been kicked off his job too, and on August 27 they took him away. I heard that eventually he obtained his freedom. Although the Russians were tired of his sordid antics, their totalitarian system had need of a man of his character; his talents were too valuable to them to waste in prison.

His departure left me alone in the cell and I was not long in feeling the vengeance of the guard and the favored prisoners whose game of theft I had broken up. In passing out the food one day, they gave me half a portion. The next day I received only a third of a portion. The third day, my quota had dropped to one-eighth.

As my hunger pains mounted and the specter of starvation once more faced me, I prayed fervently to the Lord. Was there need to test my faith again, I asked? Was this not unjust when I myself had tried, at risk of my neck, to give every prisoner a fair share in distributing the food? Would the Lord now permit my jailers to torture me this way? I begged Him to relieve me from this situation. Immediately after the prayer, I fell sound asleep although pangs of hunger had been gnawing at me.

Early next morning, a guard awakened me and told me to pack my clothing and come with him. I was leaving Dresden Prison! I wrapped my few things in a blanket and soon found myself in the hall with thirty or more other prisoners among whom, joy of joys, was my father! I put

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my bundle down next to his and sat on it. Not a word were the prisoners permitted to say, but there was no need for words: we were thankful to the Lord that we could go on together, wherever it was that the Russians were taking us.

We were led out to a bus and, as we rolled through the city of Dresden, then turned north, through miles of ruins still untouched by repairs, I realized that we were being taken to Muehlberg, a large concentration camp forty miles to the north. It was not freedom but even Muehlberg would be a welcome relief after the solitary confinement and crowded quarters of Dresden Prison. I was rescued from my tormentors, at least for the moment, and I said a prayer of gratitude to the Lord for His mercy in what had been another hour of despair, thanking Him above all for the great blessing of having my father with me.

As we swung through the concentration camp gates, I realized that we were still prisoners and that anything could happen. The Lord had been my Protector, but would He protect me forever from the Russians?

## VIII

### *More than Coincidence*

**M**UEHLBERG concentration camp, built by the Nazis in 1940 to house prisoners of war, was one of those which the Russians took over intact with scarcely any interruption to make the change of management. As time went on (and I was there for eighteen months), this place came to have a double meaning for me: I was to witness evermore cruelty and injustice—which was God's plan for me—and I was to undergo a further test of my faith through being exposed to an ever deepening depravity.

At first the transfer seemed to my father and me almost like receiving our freedom when we compared our new conditions with the exceedingly close confinement we had known for fourteen months within a single wing of Dresden Prison, most of that time caged like beasts behind bars. Here we were soon freed to walk around the barracks and talk with people. Although the Muehlberg buildings were of temporary wartime construction, and we slept with head to wall on crowded wooden shelves which ran around the earthen-floored room, this new freedom of movement seemed for awhile to be all we needed.

At the time we arrived, in September, 1946, there were about 16,000 prisoners in the camp. All but one hundred were German civilians who had been arrested in the East Zone, about 1,000 of them women. Conditions were bad for the women, but not nearly so bad as at Dresden Prison. Some of the women had been so broken morally that they would voluntarily enter into liaisons with the Russian guards in the hope of gaining special favors. The Russians would go to the women's barracks in the daytime and did not mind the lack of privacy. There were enough women prisoners at Muehlberg so that women who wanted to maintain their decency had some chance to do so, despite the debauchery they were often forced to witness. Attacks on women were rare at Muehlberg, as there were enough poor creatures who willingly submitted to their Russian guards. Moral virtue was something women prisoners had to pay a high price to retain, but many had the strength of character to do so. I had great admiration for those women who had faith and ideals strong enough to resist degradation, regardless of the constant pressure put upon them.

I need not elaborate on the extent to which the mental and moral condition of the women who gave up the fight deteriorated. The same was true, although to a less obvious extent, with the men. Unless some standards of decent behavior are observed in a concentration camp, men and women tend to revert to a bestial level. Resisting this degradation of character, I discovered, is one of the most difficult problems any individual faces in prison life.

I had firmly resolved that my life was dedicated to the Christian way and that I would not again forget my obligation to God. The task was far from easy in the harsh en-

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vironment of the camp, but I found that it was of great help to have a Christian goal, to try to serve Christ wherever I was, during the aimless, interminable days of imprisonment. That objective, I soon found, made life just as meaningful in prison as it would have been in the free world outside.

My father and I had an opportunity now to pray together again. He was eager to hear about my conversion and my experiences in having my prayer answered. Now he could tell me about his own experiences in faith at the Dresden prison. One of the most amazing of these had occurred just after the starvation period, while he was still in solitary confinement. The door to his cell suddenly opened and a badly frightened man with a package under his arm was thrust in. The man looked at my father in astonishment; then he sat down and began to unwrap the package which contained all his personal belongings. My father told him not to bother unwrapping it because he feared there must be some mistake (Dad had been told several times that he was to be kept in solitary confinement pending trial). A little later, when the Russian guards came along to make a check, they too were surprised to see two men in the cell and went away to investigate the matter. That evening at roll call they returned and said that the other man was to be removed from the cell at once. But, somehow, no one came for him.

My father and his unexpected cellmate then knelt together to pray. The man nervously told my father that this was the first time he had been inside a prison in his life. He was terrified and, being a devout Roman Catholic, had prayed that he might be placed in a cell with a Christian man, and not with some atheist, Communist or com-

mon criminal. He prayed now that he might be permitted to stay with my father. The communist guards said again next day that he would be removed but, through some incredible mixup in the prison records, the Catholic did stay on in my father's cell not just for a few days but for many weeks.

During this time he suffered greatly from the poor food. Finally, stricken with dysentery, he became so weak that he could not raise himself on his cot. It became a most difficult, disagreeable job to care for him but one my father gladly performed, drawing on experience he had gained in World War I Red Cross work. The man's weight dropped to about eighty pounds and finally he could no longer take food. He realized he was dying and his mind dwelt constantly on his wife and fifteen-year-old daughter whom he had not seen since the end of hostilities. My father and he prayed earnestly together that he might receive some word about them.

The very next day, as the watery soup was being ladled out at noon, he heard a familiar name called out. It was the name of a prisoner who had just been assigned to the next cell. Father's cellmate listened carefully and, when the new prisoner replied, there could be no doubt that this was a neighbor from his own small village who, having just been arrested by the Communists, had been brought into Dresden Prison and, out of hundreds of possible cells, had been placed in the one next door! Through one of the prison workers, my father soon sent a message asking if the man had seen his friend's wife or daughter. The reply was, yes! They had returned to the village only the day previous to his own arrest; he had seen them and talked to them, and they were both in good health.

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Upon receiving this wonderful news, my father's friend got out of bed, sick as he was, and knelt down to give thanks to the Lord. He said he was now ready to die if it should be God's will but, with hope restored, he began to get better until eventually he was quite well again. Meanwhile, the neighbor who had been able to pass along this joyous news was taken to another prison the very next day. A few weeks later, my father's cellmate was sent to serve a two-year sentence in another prison from which he was eventually released to rejoin his beloved wife and daughter. There again was a chain of circumstantial happenings that seems more than can be attributed to mere coincidence.

My father's experience during the terrible ordeal of starvation in Dresden Prison was much the same as my own, he told me. Near the end of that two-week period, he had become so weak that he was certain death was near. But after praying for forgiveness for his sins and committing his soul to the Lord, he suddenly found one morning that he got strength from a drink of water. This surprised him; he saw it as an answer to prayer and as God's way of giving him the strength and courage needed to survive starvation. From then on he grew stronger. Even though he had been in ill health for a number of years before his arrest and was in particularly poor condition to endure such treatment, he surmounted an ordeal that cost nearly all other prisoners his age their lives.

In April, 1946, my father had undergone another terrible physical ordeal, one which I had been spared. He was taken to MVD headquarters for questioning and there subjected to the sadistic Communist version of the "third degree." Although the agents made no accusation against

him, they questioned him closely about the activities of members of the 76th U.S. Army Division who had come to our house to assist with the repatriation of United States prisoners of war. They wanted him to confess that these American officers and men had used our home as an espionage center to gather information against the Red Army. When my father refused to bear false witness against the men, the agents confined him to a special torture cell which was three feet wide and six feet long, a veritable living coffin of damp stone, set in the recesses of what had once been the potato cellar of a large German mansion. Water dripped from the ceiling and the cell was bitter cold. Here my father contracted such severe and painful rheumatism that he could not move his legs and feet or endure having anyone touch his red and swollen hands.

The MVD agents apparently became worried that he would die on their hands. Breaking off their interrogation, they had Father carried to the prison doctor. When the doctor examined him, he shook his head and told the guards to take him back to prison, explaining, "There is nothing I can do for him. He will last no more than three or four days."

My father quailed when he heard this forecast of imminent death for he feared it was only too true. But when they took him back to Dresden Prison to his old cell to die, I was able to leave him extra food, with raw vegetables from the kitchen. These added vitamins had an amazing effect and soon Father found his health nearly restored. A few days later, I was put on the record-keeping detail.

If there had ever been any doubt in my mind as to

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whether God answers prayer, it would have been forever resolved when He saved my life for a second time. Even if, during the period of starvation I had suffered, I had not been convinced that my life was being spared for some purpose, my second experience would have proved it to me. It happened while I was in the bare, poorly-furnished camp hospital, being treated for a foot injury. Suddenly, I was seized with an unbearable, cramping pain in my side. I writhed in agony.

The chief doctor, himself a prisoner, called in the several other doctors in the camp, German physicians who had been arrested by the Communists for one reason or another. They examined me and said I had had an attack of acute appendicitis. They agreed that an immediate operation was necessary before the appendix burst. But how to operate was a desperate problem, for there was no anesthetic. They took the problem to the camp commandant and it developed that a small supply of spinal anesthetic, the first that had become available, had just arrived in camp. It was intended for the use of the Russians' own doctor but there was a small amount left over after operations had been performed on Soviet officers or members of their families and, since the commandant expected to get some more, he let them have enough to operate on me.

The camp doctors operated at once, stretching me out on a wooden table, and using a knife ingeniously formed from a piece of scrap iron. They used surgical clips fashioned from tin cans. To their and my delight, the operation was a complete success.

Had I been stricken at Muehlberg at any time before this, it probably would have been fatal, for it is difficult

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to conceive of doctors conducting a successful operation without anesthetic of any kind. Had it occurred while I was in Dresden Prison, probably I would have had no medical aid at all. Had it occurred a couple of weeks later, I would have been denied help since the anticipated shipment of drugs had not actually arrived. As it was, I had the attack at the one time when the supply of drugs made it possible for the doctors to save my life.

After it was over, the camp doctors frankly told me to thank God alone that they had been able to save me. And thank God I did from the bottom of my heart, for this was yet another evidence that my life was being saved for some purpose. In the years that lay ahead, my confidence never again wavered. God had shown His hand to me, not once but twice. And anyone to whom such an experience has occurred is thereafter a truly humble man.

## IX

# *Witnessing for Christ*

**M**UEHLBERG opened a wide field for Christian witnessing, for my father and I found a great interest in religion on the part of our fellow prisoners. Many a missionary would have traveled thousands of miles into far and unknown lands to find so hungry a flock of lost sheep.

But no missionary could have come to this area, the center of a communist concentration camp. There we were by the grace of God and we endeavored to make our witness for Christ as effective as was possible under the circumstances. During the latter part of 1946 and the early part of 1947 we had only one thing in abundance—time. My father, by virtue of his theological training, knew many verses of the Bible by heart. As we sat on the bench along the barracks wall, a small group would gather around him and discuss their past and present experiences in the fields of prayer and faith. They would ask him to explain various parts of the Bible and then they would discuss the significance of Christ's teachings with reference to their present situation.

We always testified to our personal experiences with

prayer in Dresden Prison and found that there were many who were impressed and who were led for the first time to open their hearts to the Lord in prayer. My father probably made more Christian converts there in the concentration camp barracks than he did in his early years as a full-time minister of the Gospel.

Naturally, there were unbelievers in the camp who had fallen away from God. It was hard to show them that the Lord was with us every hour of the day, because they felt that if He was, He should relieve us of our suffering. Not all of them could be led to see that some good might come of our persecution, that ultimately such injustice as this might be the only way to show the world the evils of godless Marxism. They took the position that they should not believe in God unless God performed some miracle for them. These poor souls without faith in God had no higher ideal than the Communists whom they opposed, for they too denied God and scorned His teachings. They were bitter and defenseless, without the armor of faith. There were many, however, who wanted to put their trust in the Lord that He might guide them through their travail. They shared their own experiences in prayer and faith with us and we found this a wonderful inspiration.

My father's eyes took on new sparkle and even though, as the winter wore on, the food situation became so bad at Muehlberg that the cumulative effects of malnutrition again threatened our lives, he seemed to be nurtured on spiritual strength and literally to grow stronger. He felt that his mind was restored to balance, that all unworthy thoughts had been cast out to make way for the rededication of his life to Christian principles.

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We had a Bible study group which prospered, although it had to be conducted secretly, and brought us all great benefit. Informers were always to be feared, men who, in the hope of some benefit from the camp rulers, would betray any fellow inmate. Our prayers for protection from informers were heard, however, and not once were we accused of violating the camp regulations.

We soon needed all our faith for by Christmas, 1946, starvation stalked the camp. A cook from one of the kitchens had promised my father an extra ration of bread for Christmas Eve. When he did not come with it, I went in search of him. It was against the rules to go from one section of the camp to another, but I was worried about Father's health; he was in desperate need of food and I had to get him something. I searched the kitchen area but could not find the cook, and all I was able to glean were some potato peelings and husks from oats that had been given the horses in the stables. But even this, I knew, would be better than nothing. As I turned back toward our barracks, a tragic sight greeted my eyes.

Just one concession had been made to the holiday by the camp authorities: they had permitted a lone evergreen to be decorated with a string of electric-light bulbs as a Christmas tree. As I came around a corner of the kitchen building in the dark I saw the tree, and silhouetted against it was a funeral procession. A group of prisoners were carrying out the bodies of those who had died that day of starvation and illness. The burial detail formed a continuous chain, each man carrying the rear end of the stretcher ahead of him and the front handles of the stretcher behind. I counted as they trudged slowly past

the tree. There were seventy-two bodies being carried, without benefit of clergy or funeral rites, to a mass grave in the frozen earth of the nearby hillside.

Here I saw for the first time in true perspective the vast human toll being taken by Communism, not only there in Germany where Nazism had already taken its brutal toll, but in every country where it had ever come to power. Thousands of human beings had been killed, as had those whose bodies were going on Christmas Eve to a nameless mass grave. This was the final indignity: the dignity of human death, as well as human life, had been destroyed.

The light of the Christmas tree was a symbol of hope that the world through faith might defeat the evil, fanatical system which on that Christmas Eve had brought inglorious death to these helpless victims. As their bodies were carried past the tree, its glowing lights stood out against the cold, bleak sky, not alone as a sign of their personal hope for resurrection but as the hope of the world. I prayed for their souls as they went to their grave and for the salvation of a whole world that had turned its back on Christ.

That night throughout the free world chimes were ringing their joyful message from church steeples, and the hearts of Christian men and women were open to the Christmas spirit. Here behind the Iron Curtain the forces of darkness were having their own feast. Did the free world know what was going on inside the communist world? Did it care? Often, as we heard reports over the communist radio of voices raised in the outside world calling for peace and "friendly understanding" with the U.S.S.R., we wondered bitterly if those who were suffering and dying in their resistance to Communism were do-

ing so in vain. We could only pray that the Lord would let the world know the truth. At Christmas we felt close to the community of Christians in the outside world yet isolated from them and the festive board at which they celebrated Our Lord's birthday.

Death at Muehlberg was soon to strike my own family. My father's brother, the only member of his family who had not emigrated from Germany, was brought into our camp one day as a prisoner. He had become a member of the Nazi Party in its early days but, in 1937, revolted by its policies, he broke with it; during the war, he was arrested by the Gestapo (Hitler's secret police) and imprisoned. In spite of this record, he was arrested soon after the war by the Russians, and charged with having been a former Nazi Party member. He was very ill when he was brought to Muehlberg and his condition grew steadily worse. My father was with him on March 10, 1947, when he died. His body was taken out to a long trench where he was interred with the other dead of the day. Next morning the burial detail would come along and throw a little dirt over the bodies and then new layers of bodies would be laid in the trench until it was filled. In this way the Russians kept the burial ground very small. In case it should ever be discovered, no one would be able to tell exactly how many dead had been buried there.

Subsequently, when the concentration camp system was abandoned in favor of sending prisoners to forced labor in the mines, the entire hill on which Muehlberg was situated was leveled off with bulldozers in order to bury the mass graves under tons of dirt. Muehlberg, which means "mill hill" in German, was where a big windmill for grinding grain had once stood. The more than 9,000

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prisoners who died of starvation and diseases there in less than three years of the camp's operation by the Russians were such a high proportion of all prisoners held that the authorities feared for the public standing of their East German puppet regime if the truth were to become known; hence they tried to hide their crimes. Recognizing no moral law, the Communists are nonetheless ashamed of their murders.

In February, 1947, all men at Muehlberg were ordered to take a physical examination. Only 1,200 were adjudged healthy and capable of performing hard labor. I was among this group, representing less than one out of ten in the camp, and was immediately placed in quarantine. About this time, my father was asked by a Russian political officer if I were healthy and what occupational skills I had. My father replied that I was in good health and that he feared I would soon be sent away to Russia for forced labor. A few days later the officer confided to him that, because I was an American, I was not to be deported to Russia. He was right. Two days before the group left for Siberia, I was released from quarantine and again united with my father—for which we gave thanks to the Lord with grateful hearts.

Now all the healthy workers at Muehlberg were gone, and the remaining prisoners who had work assignments were often too weak to perform them. I went to the chief of the food stockroom, told him that I was one of the healthy ones still in camp and asked him for a job. These work assignments, although involving heavy labor in the kitchens and storerooms, were eagerly sought, for kitchen workers could always get a little extra food. Again, I

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had prayed that I might have such a work assignment, and on February 16, 1947, my prayers were answered.

No sooner had I started to work on my new job than I faced a severe moral test. While cleaning up the floor of the stockroom where the Russian soldiers received their commissary supplies, I found a small pouch of tobacco under the counter. Prisoners could rarely get tobacco. Some who were heavy smokers would even trade extra food, which they badly needed, for a cigarette or two. I had never acquired the habit of smoking and in prison was glad that I had not.

When I found the tobacco, I put it in my pocket and took it back to the barracks where I placed it on the table so that all who cared to smoke could share it. The next day the chief of the food stockroom called us all together and said that someone had stolen some tobacco. He demanded to know who it was. I was appalled. I had not stolen the tobacco, but found it under the counter. However, the Russian soldier who had left it there must have made a complaint when he came back and could not find it.

Several of my companions in the stockroom knew well enough who had taken it, as they had shared it. I asked them whether I should confess, but they said I would be mad to do such a thing as I might lose my job and be placed in a punishment cell as well. However, my conscience bothered me for fear one of the others on the crew would be blamed for what I had done, for it seemed certain that the stockroom authorities would have to accuse someone. Accordingly, I resolved to go to the chief privately and tell him what had happened.

When I told him, to my surprise he laughed and said he had been certain all along that I was the one who had taken it, since I had been assigned to clean the floor. He said he had wanted me to come and tell him myself. Had I sold the tobacco on the black market in the camp, I would have been liable to punishment. However, after ascertaining that I had actually offered my find for the others to share, he let me off with a mild reprimand.

From that moment on, I enjoyed the implicit confidence of the stockroom chief. He regarded me as the one worker he could trust and before long gave me the most coveted job in the stockroom. The Russian soldiers were entitled to a ration of butter and cheese, products absolutely denied prisoners and which we in the stockroom were not even permitted to handle. The butter and cheese were carved up on a big wooden block for distribution to the Russians: the coveted job was that of cleaning it off each day! The chief would also give me the big spoon with which jam was dipped out of a crock for the Russians' rations and would tell me to take it to the kitchen to get it cleaned. He knew, of course, that long before I got to the kitchen that spoon would be absolutely clean of jam.

Every night in my pocket there would be a little paper with some of the scrapings from the butter and cheese block carefully preserved for my father. In this way, we each received an ounce or two of additional high-calorie food each day. The amount was small, true enough, but its effect when added to our meager diet was astonishing. My father, who had been relatively weak, gained rapidly in strength. So did I. Later, we even secured a little metal drum in which we could boil any grains of wheat or oats we found to make a little "bread."

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Thus I found that honesty paid even in a Russian concentration camp where it might seem that only a fool would try to hold to a conventional moral standard. I had resolved to try to show, by example, what the faith of a Christian could do. Many times thereafter I discovered that no matter where I was, honesty got me further. People always appreciate honesty especially when it comes into a situation where they do not expect it.

We had received no trial and no formal charges of any kind had been placed against us, although we had now been imprisoned for more than three years when, in September, 1948, a general amnesty was declared for East German political prisoners. It was on the eve of a big Russian Zone election and the Russians wanted to help their communist puppets. We did not know it then, but they were also getting ready for the blockade of Western forces in Berlin which almost brought on war with the NATO nations.

As the Communists were preparing for their big push to take over Berlin—a strategy which, thanks largely to the Berlin air lift, backfired and failed—all but about 3,000 prisoners at Muehlberg were released.

We were not among those given freedom in this amnesty. Instead, we found ourselves headed toward another concentration camp whose very name strikes terror to the heart of civilized men, Buchenwald, the notorious Nazi extermination camp which had now been taken over by the Russians. Another stage in our journey was beginning.

## *A Stunning Blow*

ON SEPTEMBER 22, 1948, my father and I found ourselves behind the barbed-wire fences of Buchenwald, near the city of Weimar. Quite a number of prisoners who had been there under the Nazis were back again under the Communists. They told us that their Nazi captors had been more cruel and vindictive but had not, as had the Russians, deliberately let people starve, so the proportionate death rate under Stalin was greater than under Hitler. At one time in Nazi days, Buchenwald had housed 40,000 prisoners, of whom some 7,000 are said to have been killed; the largest number the Russians held while I was there was about 14,000, more than 8,000 of whom died.

In Buchenwald we had a few concrete barracks that were better than the temporary wooden prisoner-of-war barracks in which we had been living at Muehlberg. However, every building was fenced in so that we had hardly any opportunity to communicate with neighboring barracks. The only job assignment I could get at Buchenwald was transporting building materials whenever there was construction work to be done around the camp. This

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job I shared with my father; it got us around the camp a little and gave us some exercise.

The diet was on a bare subsistence level, as it was in all Russian concentration camps. Prisoners already weakened by starvation had, for the most part, died off. My father and I, like all survivors, had now become toughened by hardship. Even so, the months at Buchenwald were ones of bitter privation and we learned again as we had in the past that only with the help of God was it possible to keep going. Only faith could supplement that diet. One great benefit actually resulted: my father found a remarkable improvement in the gall-bladder condition from which he had suffered and which had required prolonged medical treatment. The complete absence of fatty foods had apparently accomplished a cure. The illness, which had been the first warning of the consequences of the soft life we were living, was gone for good.

On Easter Sunday, 1949, came a glorious experience—the first service of “religious worship” we had been permitted to attend in the nearly four years we had been prisoners. Services were conducted by clergymen who were themselves prisoners. First, there was a Catholic Mass, then two Lutheran services, the camp auditorium each time being crowded to capacity with prisoners standing in every available place.

This was our first experience of the brand of “religious freedom” the Communists occasionally like to exhibit before the world for propaganda purposes. I suppose that, at this particular time, they wanted to tell communist sympathizers and gullible persons that they were so tolerant of religion they even permitted religious observances by prisoners in concentration camps.

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For a while they also permitted German religious organizations to send printed matter into the camp: a few Bibles, religious calendars, Gospel tracts, even hymn books. Some of the prisoners ridiculed these things having lost all faith in God because of the hardships they had endured. To many others, however, this spiritual food was literally a godsend. The Soviet guards resented this religious material but they could not punish anyone for reading or discussing it, as it had been officially permitted to come into camp.

My father was able to borrow a Bible once in a great while from one of the Lutheran pastors in our barracks, and this was like a refreshing drink of water to someone who had been wandering a long time in the desert. Whenever he had the Bible, he would call me over and we would sit on a bench and go through several chapters of Scripture, discussing them. Others would come, too, until a virtual Bible study group had gathered spontaneously about us.

Thus many months passed at Buchenwald, as they had at Muehlberg. And despite the fact that I still had not had a trial or had any formal charges brought against me, I was not impatient. The hours were passing, the days and months, and with them the years of my youth. I was twenty-six now but, instead of sinking into hopelessness as did some of the prisoners, I grew more and more confident that when God wanted me to be released, I would be. Meanwhile, I knew I was observing things that must be reported to the free world when I was given freedom. Thus I was able to bear patiently the interminable waiting which otherwise would have driven me mad.

It was inevitable that the Russians should at last bring

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me to trial, even if that trial was only a farce. Their judicial system does not seem to find it embarrassing if the prisoner must wait four and a half years for the "investigation" to be completed and for the MVD to come up with something to justify giving him a sentence: they have no habeas corpus proceedings to trouble police or judges. Nor do the Communists worry about the deprivation of individual rights inherent in such a process, despite the loud outcries they make about human rights everywhere outside the Iron Curtain.

Between February 1 and 7, 1950, orders came to Buchenwald for the transfer of approximately 300 prisoners. I was among them and thus came the day I dreaded when I must be separated from my father. The Lord had permitted us to be together for nearly five years but now I was going to have to make my way alone toward whatever new perils lay ahead. It was heartbreaking to be separated from him, not only as my loving father but also my teacher of the Gospel. Yet I had to face it. Now I was seeking only the hand of the Lord as I was taken with the others to the headquarters of the NKVD (Russian political police) in the city of Erfurt.

There we were locked in basement cells, eight or nine men to a cell. Vermin were everywhere and conditions became unspeakable. At night, the rats walked over our faces as we slept on the floor. I was kept there thirty-eight days (from February 3 until March 13) before being called up for interrogation.

I ascertained that my father was definitely not with the group that came in from Buchenwald and concluded that he had been released. I was wrong, although I did not know it until my own release years later. Actually, he left

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there ten days after I did and was turned over to the East German political police, since the Russians evidently felt they had nothing which would justify holding him any longer. They were then hoping to create a good impression on the world at large by turning all political prisoners over to their East German puppets. Thus the Soviet could claim that it was no longer holding any internees in Germany.

The German Communists took my father to Waldheim Prison, one of the worst in the East Zone. Originally a Christian monastery, it was now jammed with 7,000 prisoners. During interrogation there, he learned that the German Reds were going to try to accuse him of smuggling cameras into the West Zone. He denied this categorically and even got the interrogating officer to agree that this was not the real reason for his arrest. In any event, he did not get the opportunity to stand trial before a court but was sent to solitary confinement, placed on starvation rations and, in his already weakened condition, was soon close to death. Here again we know that without the Lord's mercy the situation would have been hopeless. It was at this time that an unseen benefactor brought him the bread which saved his life.

Day after day the same routine: get up, drink your coffee-water, walk in circles, eat your soup, pace back and forth, wonder why you're here, listen to the screams of the tortured, listen to every sound in the hall, watch new victims of dictatorship come while others go to their execution or die a "natural death." In short, go out of your mind day after day or seek comfort in Our Lord above.

No one to talk to and nothing to read month after month were devouring the last reserves of resistance. Something

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had to break, either the prison restrictions or Dad. All day Dad paced his ten steps to and fro with his hands folded in prayer. If anyone were listening to his requests, he would laugh and say Dad was out of his mind asking for a book to read. Dad was asking for a miracle for it was not Lenin, Marx, or any of the other Communist "gods," he was wanting to read a Bible . . . the Holy Scriptures, and he was about to ask a guard for it.

With the rays of the sun one morning, new strength and courage came to my father. At the early roll call he hesitated a moment, then turned to his chief guard and asked in a low voice looking him firmly in the eyes: "Guard, please report that I would like to have a book." Blood must have rushed to Dad's head in that second for he had wanted to say "Bible" but the word *book* came out instead.

"What, something to read? You? Why, you know that's against our rules."

The guard would not look straight at Dad . . . he must have felt guilty. However, as he stepped back to turn away, some other voice in him must have given him the command to say, "I'll pass the word along."

Only an hour or so passed when a harsh tread was heard in the hall. The steps were coming closer. Dad's thoughts froze as they usually did when the door opened at an unusual time. Wide shoulders, sharp cold eyes. The prison director himself stood before him! He asked abruptly, "You say you want something to read?"

"Yes sir, you see . . ." Dad started to reply when the director lowered his voice and half-whispered:

"I know what you want, you want a Bible." Then he laughed out loud and said he had no Bible but he wanted

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Dad to report to him on Monday. My father nodded and the director turned on his heel and left.

Dad was stunned. Before he even tried to figure out what had happened he raised his folded hands in praise to God. The unspoken word, *Bible* had been transferred to this man through the Holy Spirit. The days passed slowly but Monday finally came. Filled with fear and courage Dad went to the director's office, praying every step of the way. The closer he came to the door marked *Hauptverwaltung* (main administration) the faster his heart pumped. Could this be a trap? A final quick prayer . . . and he stepped in. Two or three men stood around. They must have been acting against their will, for they seemed defenseless. The director, the one in the middle, who was considered the beast of the prison, spoke up: "So you want a Bible, huh?"

"Yes, I do," Dad said. Everyone was quiet. The boss looked at the guard who had escorted Dad in, then he turned to the officers to his right and left. Not wishing to utter a word, they shrugged their shoulders.

"O God, O God," Dad was pleading silently. Hardly turning his eyes from Dad's the boss reached behind him and handed my father a Bible. Tears stood in Dad's eyes as he thanked both God and the director for this gift.

"I want you to know we had to send to West Germany to get this for you," the director said hastily.

In his cell once more, Dad opened the sacred book carefully. It was brand-new and, to his great surprise, inside the cover were the words, *Printed in New York*.

The Bible was a great joy and blessing to my father; he was no longer alone in his cell. He read it through from cover to cover four or five times during the ensuing months

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of his solitary confinement and studied it carefully. He also passed the time singing hymns. The guards, hearing him, thought that he had lost his mind. They were not used to hearing prisoners sing in the solitary confinement cells. They could see no reason why a prisoner should praise God from the depths of a communist prison. But when they opened the door, he would smile calmly at them and suggest that they join him in praising God. Since his release, he has declared repeatedly that he has had no happier hours in his life than those alone in that cell bringing himself back to the Word of God and to joyful communication with Our Lord. Those hours in prison he regarded as a time given him for purification and rededication that he might lead a truly Christian life thereafter.

My father spent two years altogether in solitary confinement at Waldheim. Then, for a while, he was permitted a limited association with other prisoners, particularly when walking in the prison yard for exercise. Whenever a fellow prisoner asked him how he felt, he answered with a smile that he felt fine for the Lord was with him. After my father's release, a man who had been a prisoner at Waldheim saw him on the street in Berlin and came up to tell him how much his calm and cheerful attitude had meant to him. The man said his morale had been very low and, when he spoke to my father, his was the first smile, the first voice of confidence he had encountered in many months. It moved him deeply and brought him to turn his own thoughts to God. If faith in God could give a man such confidence and courage as Charles Noble displayed, he thought that he, too, might seek strength in the Lord through prayer. He did so and was richly rewarded. He found the courage to endure the ordeal and survived to

win his freedom, eventually finding sanctuary in West Berlin.

At last, in June, 1952, after seven years of imprisonment, the Communists summoned my father to stand trial. Judges came from Leipzig and, in a brief hearing, he was charged with being a monopolistic capitalist and a member of the ring of industrialists who had supported Adolf Hitler. No evidence was offered to support these charges. None could have been produced, for my father had a life-long record of opposition to German militarism and it was obvious that our small factory had exercised no monopoly in the great German camera industry. Under communist justice, however, no evidence is needed. The court duly convicted my father and sentenced him to seven years—the time he had already served. A few days later the communist authorities told him that he could go free. He insisted on being given a written statement, however, so that he would not be accused of crossing the border into the West Zone illegally and risk a new trumped-up arrest. The police officer finally gave him a paper that said he had been in jail “a few days” and had been released! My father immediately crossed the line into West Berlin; the day was July 4, 1952, America’s Independence Day.

During the last few months in East German hands, my father had been permitted to write a few lines each month to his sister-in-law in Berlin and to receive a reply from her. Thus he learned that my mother and brother George had escaped to West Germany in January, 1946. They had been kept under house arrest for six more months in Dresden after my father and I were taken away; then one day the Russian officer who had been guarding our house announced that the house arrest order had been rescinded

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and that he was leaving. First, however, he had my mother sign an inventory of every object in the house, and asked her to agree that she would remove nothing of value. When, the next day, a different officer came and began helping himself to a number of articles, including a large lamp and a fairly conspicuous vase, she and George decided that the Russians were planting a trap for them. Within an hour after the officer left, they also left, taking with them only the clothes they were wearing and a few precious possessions stuffed in their pockets. They went to the railroad station, bought tickets for Berlin and, when they had reached East Berlin, took a subway train with pounding hearts, and a prayer on their lips, for West Berlin. They were not stopped and searched and made good their escape.

Back in Dresden, the Russians came within a few hours to seize the house and its contents. They have used it ever since as a guest home for Communist dignitaries visiting in Dresden, and of course have never sought to give any compensation for it.

News of another sort was also waiting for my father on his release. My aunt had written, "John is working for an Eastern company," from which he took it that I had been deported to slave labor in Russia. It was not until his release, however, that he knew this for certain and realized that nothing further had been heard from me.

Meanwhile, after my separation from my father, I was at last called for interrogation by the Russians on March 13, 1950. It was my second interrogation in five years of imprisonment, the first having come in August, 1946, some fourteen months after my arrest. The new interrogation turned out to be a surprisingly polite interview at which

exactly the same questions were asked me as had been asked before. My answers were still the same. There was only one additional question and that was, where had we sold our cameras. I told the interrogator that we sold them all over the world, and he then inquired who was our contact in the Soviet Union. I replied that we had never sold any cameras in Russia. He then asked sarcastically how I could say that we had sold cameras all over the world when we had sold none in the Soviet Union, the greatest country in the world. I replied that we did not consider trying to export them to Russia because her trade barriers had made business relations between the U.S.S.R. and other countries of the world virtually impossible. This he did not like. He ended the interview abruptly and I was sent back to my cell in the basement for thirty-eight more days, until April 20.

On April 20, I was suddenly transported to another prison at Weimar, twenty-five miles away. There I was placed in a cell with ten men, all Germans. Again I waited, as did the other prisoners there, while the days stretched into weeks and then months. To ease the atmosphere of apprehension, we engaged in intellectual pastimes. Each man would tell of books he had read or of experiences he had undergone. One man was a locomotive engineer who had been on the burial detail at Buchenwald. He had witnessed terrible suffering and the deaths of thousands but had retained a deep, abiding religious faith. Each night he would recall from memory the words of a hymn and recite them for us. He must have known hundreds of hymns, for he selected a different one each evening. We then held common prayer together, all of us but one. That one was a German businessman who had emigrated to

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Brazil and been deported to Germany in 1944 just in time to meet the Russian army of occupation. The Reds immediately arrested him as a capitalist. He was an anti-religious cynic who would argue so bitterly against the acceptance of the Bible and the practice of religious faith that we finally had to avoid all religious discussions just to keep peace in the cell.

After three and a half months at Weimar during which not a word was said to me by the Russians, I was suddenly summoned one night and taken down the hallway to an old courtroom. There I found a Russian in civilian attire sitting on the end of a bench at a table with a red cloth; there was also a Russian girl sitting at the side of the table to act as interpreter. She asked my name and then told me to sit down. When I did so, she immediately pushed a piece of paper across the desk, handed me a pen, and told me to sign. I asked what the paper contained and she replied in an offhand manner that a trial had taken place in Moscow and I had been sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment at hard labor!

I was stunned. Until that moment I had never expected that the Russians would dare to convict me and deport me to the Soviet Union. I had been held for five years in East Germany and had not been accused of doing anything against the law. In a daze, I asked what charges had been brought against me in the Moscow court and of what crime I had been convicted. She told me impatiently that any questions I had would have to be answered in the labor camp to which I was being sent. She said the paper was merely an acknowledgment that I had been informed of my sentence and asked again that I sign it.

The sentence was not retroactive but was to take effect

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as of the moment I signed the acknowledgment, with no time credited for the five years and one month spent while being "investigated." I had not been permitted to appear at my own "trial" or even been advised of the charges.

Angered by the rank injustice, I cried out, "My Lord!" The interpreter smiled, cynically.

Then my prayer on the night of my conversion rang in my ears. "Lend me Thine hand to guide me . . . Let Thy will, not mine, be done." Now I knew the full meaning of these words, the sacrifice required of me. The Lord had saved me from starvation and had preserved me through many dangers. Nothing could happen to me that was not His will. This was no time, in the face of my enemies, to lose my faith. So, with trembling hand, I signed the required acknowledgment that sealed my fifteen-year sentence.

After I had done so, I was taken to another cell in which were about forty men. Some of them smiled wryly when I entered because I looked so puzzled. They asked me how many years I had been given and I said slowly, unbelievably, "Fifteen!" One of them laughed aloud and said, "We've all got twenty-five!"

I sank to an empty place at the side of the cell and said, "O Lord, why did this happen to me?"

Another prisoner put a sympathetic arm around my shoulder and said that he had asked that same question in the shock of receiving his sentence upstairs, and that the Russian on the bench had laughed and asked him, through the interpreter, if he believed in a God. The German said he certainly did, and the Russian then pointed to a picture of Stalin hanging on the wall and said, "That is our God, and the only God we have." Three years later

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their god was dead—dishonored in death as soon as his body was cold.

Desperately I prayed that night in Weimar Prison. My life was in God's hands, but this was a stunning blow. It was 1950. My sentence would run to 1965. I was almost twenty-seven years old. Must I remain a prisoner until I was forty-two? Even then, would I ever be released? Was it my fate to be only a nameless, unknown prisoner of the Soviet state until death should release me in some Siberian slave camp?

I found it hard to pray that night, harder than ever before in my life, but I did pray, and peace came upon me, that strange unique confidence that I was doing the Lord's will and that I would be preserved from all harm. I had been given a difficult mission, and I would be enabled to carry it through.

Two days later I left Weimar in a prison van headed for the long and dreadful journey eastward to the Soviet Union.

## *Into the Land of the Godless*

“MY GOD, MY GOD, why hast Thou forsaken me?” During that terrible journey into the Soviet Arctic in the sealed and crowded *Stolopinskis* (railway cars hideously designed for prisoner transportation), those words came often to my mind. There was comfort in them, knowing that Our Lord, too, had undergone complete despair. They are perhaps the most compassionate words He ever said, embracing as they do all men’s agony.

Later, even while that journey lasted, I could say those other words which follow: “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.” For me this did not promise death; I was supposed to go on living until this unspeakable ordeal was completed and I could give my witness. Before the trip was over, I was reconciled.

It was August when the trip began, October when we finally reached Vorkuta, the slave-labor camp which was our destination, a name more to be feared than any other but which came to have another meaning than horror to me, for it was there I found that the Russians, too, want Christianity. This I could not know, however, as at last a few miles east of the city of Brest-Litovsk in Poland we

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came to the border of the Soviet Socialist Republics, third and last door through which we were to pass into the vast empire of the Kremlin. The first door, which had long since closed behind me, was the border between the Russian zone of Germany and the area occupied by Western troops. The second was the carefully guarded border between East Germany and the so-called People's Republic of Poland. Now we were at the entrance to the inner sanctum, the border of the Soviet Union itself, the last of the barricades designed to keep the people of Russia from contact with the rest of the world.

This last barrier of the Iron Curtain is a series of barbed-wire fences interspersed with mined fields and machine-gun posts; it runs through bare plowed fields in what had been, until the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, the heart of the prosperous farming region of central Poland. To a depth of three miles, all Russian civilians are barred from their side of this "frontier zone." Through its few carefully guarded gateways pass only such Soviet citizens as the government trusts to have contacts with foreigners, and into the U.S.S.R. come only such visitors from abroad as the Communists think it to their advantage to admit. No newspapers, magazines, books, or personal letters can come into Russia over this border without first passing the rigid communist censorship. And the Pasternak case is formidable proof that the trip from the communist heartland to the outer world can be as hard. Even in the invisible air waves above the Iron Curtain, the Communists try desperately with radio jamming to block off all communications from the free world, especially the broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe.

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The purpose of this incredible barrier placed between the Russian people and the rest of the world is to permit the master-minds of the Kremlin to impose the ideology of Communism upon their subjects, and to lead them through all the twists and turns of the "party line." The Soviet leaders try to keep the carefully conditioned minds of the Russian people free from contact with any other political ideas; especially, they want to keep from their people a true knowledge of conditions in the outside world so that they will believe that under Communism life is better than anywhere else in the world.

This barrier is designed not only for political purposes but to protect the cult of atheism in Russia by shutting out the concept of God from one-sixth of the world's surface! The Russian government, committed officially for more than forty years to the proposition that God is a myth and religion an opiate for oppressed working classes, fears the Christian religion above all others. As our prison car passed through the barricades, we were going into the Land of the Godless. Here, then, was the nation which had tried to outlaw God.

But can God be outlawed?

After the October Revolution of 1917, the Communists had ruthlessly persecuted the Christian, Jewish, and Moslem religions until two-thirds of the clergy had been liquidated and four-fifths of all church buildings had been closed or turned into museums for instruction in "scientific atheism." Here was a country in which for thirty years not a single Bible had been allowed to be printed, where children were taught in the schools that God is a mythical deity invented by capitalists and exploiters,

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and where suspicion dogged every Russian who dared attend public worship.

Can God be kept out of a nation? Can the Christian faith be completely exterminated in a land where once it was held dear? Can a barrier of barbed wire, censorship, and radio jamming keep a knowledge of God from the residents of a vast area of this planet?

I was happily to learn the answer to these questions in my years of captivity, but at the moment when I passed through that last inner door of the Iron Curtain, it was with a feeling of foreboding and despair. I tried to comfort myself with the words of Our Lord, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." For this seemed, indeed, to be the end of the world. And God was with us still. In the crowded prison vans, there had been no opportunity for anything but quiet inner prayer but as soon as we were released from our cars in the city of Orsha, near Moscow, to spend several days there in a prison which served as a marshaling point for arriving slave laborers, I noticed that many of the men got down on their knees in their cells the very first thing to thank God for having preserved them during the terrible trip.

No; God had not stayed behind at the Iron Curtain. The channels of communication were still open and God is as close to the believer in Russia as anywhere else in the world.

Of course, there were those cynics and skeptics among my fellow prisoners who asked how anyone could give thanks to a God who was permitting us to suffer as we did. If there really were a God, they argued, He would deal with these Russian Communists who for years had openly sneered at His very name. Many people who were not sta-

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ble in their faith would have their beliefs shaken after hearing such remarks.

I always answered to such criticism that while I did not know what purpose was being served by the suffering we were enduring, I was sure that there was a reason. I felt that God would deal in due time with the atheists of Russia and that meanwhile the world must see by the suffering of the victims of communist tyranny what an evil system it is. I would explain the experiences I had already undergone in the Russian prisons and tell of my experience with the power of God to answer prayer. In this way, I was able to strengthen the faith of some who were wavering.

The Russians themselves see the evil of their system. I noticed, as we were marched through the streets of Orsha, that the people averted their eyes when they saw us being led by, with the MVD men and their ever-present Tommy guns marching beside and behind us. No one looked at us, not even the children. The terror of the slave-labor camps was too close to all of them, for there was probably not a single family that did not have at least one relative who had disappeared into the hands of the secret police.

At Orsha, too, I encountered the first of those experiences that were to show me profoundly shocking evidence of the impact of atheism on the morals of Soviet society. It is important for Westerners to understand the depth to which atheism has plunged the Russian people if the deep inner hunger I found among them for a better way of life is to be fully understood.

As we entered Orsha prison where we were to be lodged temporarily, we marched past a cell block which harbored a number of women prisoners. These were Russian women, judging from their appearance and the Russian phrases

they shouted at us. When they saw 200 new men prisoners being marched in, they stood at their cell windows and greeted us with loud calls, smiles and laughter. Some raised their skirts and made the most obscene gestures I have ever seen. Although we could not understand what they shouted in Russian, there was no mistaking their meaning. Like the unbridled behavior of the Russian men during the rape of Dresden, I found the lewdness of these Russian women utterly incomprehensible. While a few of our men at first made some ribald reply to the women thus exhibiting themselves, the actions of these wretched creatures soon became so revolting that scarcely a man among us could avoid an expression of disgust.

At first, I supposed that these Russian women must have been prostitutes, swept up from the dregs of the city in a clean-up drive against vice, or perhaps they were the victims of mental illness who did not know what they were doing. Before long, however, I learned that there is no such thing as a professional prostitute in Russia, the situation in Soviet society being such that thousands of ordinary working girls regularly barter their sexual favors without moral scruples or social disapproval. Where there is general atheism there can be no moral standard, and where there is no moral standard promiscuity is not regarded as a sin. These poor women whom we saw, degraded still further by their prison experiences, were neither insane nor, by Russian standards, particularly immoral. They were typical of millions of Soviet women.

As we left Orsha, we found we had new company—very unwelcome company—in the persons of a number of Russian criminals who had been jammed in with us. There are two classes of prisoners in the Soviet penal system, the

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"criminals" and the "politicals." The criminals are those who would be sent to jail in any society, murderers, thieves, black marketeers, and incorrigible scoff-laws. The politicals are those whose offense is jeopardizing "the security of the state" by holding views deemed at variance with the current party line. Criminals are put in with the politicals whom they terrorize with their arrogance, fighting, and thieving. The guards encourage the criminals in this because it makes the terror-stricken political prisoners easier to handle.

At Vologda, north of Moscow, we spent a week in another prison while the mysterious processes of the Soviet bureaucracy determined our destination and fate. Some men hoped for labor in the milder climate of the Crimea or the Ukraine, but most believed we were headed for the harsh steppes of Siberia. When at last we were taken back to the railroad, we were placed in boxcars and, as the train moved northward, ever northward, the Russians among us well knew where we were going. It was toward the worst possible destination, they told us, with rueful jokes. We were heading toward the most notorious slave-labor camp of all, they said, the dreaded coal mines of Vorkuta!

A Roumanian prisoner was aboard who spoke good Russian and German. Through him, we learned from the Russians something about the terrible labor camp toward which we were heading.

Up in the Arctic tundra fifty to one hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle, veins of coal had been discovered in 1944. The area is about fifty miles south of the Arctic Ocean and the same distance west of the Siberian border. The Ural Mountains fork as they reach the sea and the Vorkuta mines are in the valley between the two ranges,

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technically part of European Russia but geographically part of the Siberian Arctic, one of the coldest, harshest regions in the world. Since few Russian workers could be induced to go to such a climate to sink mine shafts into the perpetually frozen tundra, the Soviet government dragooned thousands of slave laborers for the work. The toll in human suffering and loss of life was appalling, but the coal was being dug. This was the remote spot to which I, an American, was on my way!

It was on this last lap of the journey that a new menace appeared like a specter before us when we learned from the Russian prisoners that the Korean War had broken out several months before, in June, 1950. There was considerable talk among the Russians that a full-scale war between the United States and the Soviet Union would soon be inevitable. In that case, we would be in imminent danger of starvation in Vorkuta, they said. Everything had to be brought in over the single-track railroad line on which we were traveling and, in the event of any trouble back in Moscow or any enemy action that would disrupt rail service, we would be cut off in the Arctic from our thin life-line to civilization. This added to our gloom as we reached the end of the line and were herded through the grim barbed-wire fences toward the bleak barracks half sunk in the tundra soil. It was October and already the sun was low; the cold Autumn wind was whipping down from the polar sea.

In spite of the depressing future that lay before me, in this forsaken spot near the frozen roof of the world, my own personal feeling was again one of quiet confidence. I did not share the panic and despair that gripped the other prisoners. Nothing could happen to me here, I reasoned, that would be any worse than what I had already experi-

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enced. Ever since that day in the midst of the starvation period at Dresden when I had given my soul to Christ, I had noticed a gradual improvement in my condition. The Lord had not saved me merely that I might die here. Of that I felt certain.

My faith was in the Lord with all my heart, but I must confess, that, as we left the train and marched down a mud road toward the great concentration camp stretching for miles across low snow-covered hummocks as far as the eye could see, I did not understand how any human being could possibly survive. To work in these mines and to live through a winter that would bring temperatures as low as 70° to 80° below zero, I told myself, was going to require another miracle. Could I hope for such a miracle here?

## *The Miracle of the Nuns*

“*V kovo ti verisch?*”

Several Ukrainians who shared the bunks at my end of the barracks clustered around and asked me this question. I had no idea what they were saying, for I knew neither Ukrainian nor Russian. One of them then took a scrap of paper and drew two symbols on it, a cross and a Buddha. I pointed to the cross and they murmured and nodded, obviously pleased, and one of the men made the sign of the Cross. This was my first communication with my fellow prisoners, and their very first question had brought us the common bond that transcends race or nationality, the Cross of Christ.

Alone as I was there in Vorkuta, utterly forlorn, I had been kneeling beside my space on the bunk shelf each night to offer up a prayer to God. The other men, observing this, had wanted to know to Whom I prayed. Now they knew that it was to the same One in Whom they believed.

The words of Our Lord (Matt. 19-20), “Where two or three are gathered together in my name,” came to have a new meaning to me here in Vorkuta as I realized deeply the need for a church, for some visible unit of belief and

fellowship no matter how small. Though I had prayed fervently to God every night, I could feel my mind as well as my body slipping downward and I realized that unless I could share my prayers and thoughts with someone else, I would surely go mad.

Although there were many Germans at Vorkuta and, as I later learned, some other Americans, it was the practice of the MVD to break up ethnic and national groups among the incoming prisoners; that was why I had been billeted with a number of Ukrainians and Lithuanians. From the first, I was impressed by their spirit of friendliness and helpfulness toward a newcomer. They did their best to explain things to me by sign language. The first man with whom I was really able to talk was an outstanding rabbi, one of the many clergymen. Rabbi Simon Dickmann's name I want to record for all because it is high time the Soviet authorities be forced to admit that they have been holding him prisoner since his "disappearance" in Moscow more than a decade ago. After enduring terrible persecution at the hands of the Nazis during World War II, the rabbi managed to make his escape to Palestine. There, because of his knowledge of Polish and Russian, a Jewish relief agency sent him to Moscow to help the Jewish refugees who had fled eastward from Nazism, and to guide them on their way to their new homeland, Israel. A few months after Rabbi Dickmann's arrival in Moscow, the Soviet government embarked on a ruthless persecution of its Jewish minority and began to systematically liquidate all who advocated Zionism. This persecution was apparently based on the conviction that anyone who wanted to leave the workers' paradise and emigrate to some other country must be a capitalist sympathizer or a subversive

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agent. Rabbi Dickmann, as well as many of those who had worked with him to bring relief to the homeless refugees, suddenly "disappeared" one day and found himself on the way to the mines with a long sentence at hard labor. The fact that the rabbi was not a citizen of Russia made no difference, any more than did the fact that I was a citizen of the United States.

Rabbi Dickmann heard that there was an American among the group of prisoners that had just arrived, and as soon as I had had a chance to wash up (in cold water as usual and out of a rusty pan with a cake of so-called "mud soap"), he came over to greet me. He spoke a few words of English but we soon found that we could converse more fluently in German. He asked me my religious faith and was soon asking me all that I knew about religious life in America. I told him of my personal experience with prayer during the years of my imprisonment in the Soviet Zone of Germany and he nodded his understanding. Each of us was delighted to meet another believer in God.

Because of his administrative ability, Rabbi Dickmann had been given the task of parceling out work in Camp Department 3, to which I was sent. Observing that I was in poor physical condition from my long ordeal in the *Stolopinski*, he placed me on Team 139 at Mine 16. This was a surface team, which meant that I would escape, at least for the time being, having to go down into the damp, dark mine shafts.

It was our job, when coal and shale came up from the mine, to push the cars off the elevator and take them out and dump them. These little cars were loaded with about two tons of rock, and two of us had to push a car by hand for half a mile down a narrow track over which a crude

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wooden frame had been built as protection from the weather. At the end of the run, we pushed the car up a ramp and, with a back-wrenching shove, dumped its load into another car waiting below. This second car was then lowered down an incline by cable into a deep depression in the tundra where the shale, which had very low fuel value, was gradually burned, casting a dismal pall of smoke over the frozen moors. Snow drifted in through the roof over our track and the wheels often froze, derailing the cars. It was slow, tortuous work in the bitter cold of the Arctic winter—and ridiculously inefficient as well, since it could have been done much faster with a single engine. But the Russian mine superintendents were not disturbed by questions of efficiency. The MVD was always ready to supply a fresh requisition of political prisoners for slave labor in the mines.

The evenings were extremely lonely for me because I could not talk with my fellow prisoners. They talked in Russian, a language which the Ukrainians particularly hated, but which was the only tongue common to so many different nationalities as there were at Vorkuta. Except for an occasional conversation with Rabbi Dickmann, at first I could only sit silent and brood. This was dangerous to anyone's mental health for at Vorkuta there was much to brood upon. Death was our constant companion. Many of the prisoners were middle-aged men, some of whom, former college professors, doctors, lawyers, clergymen, had never done hard manual labor before in their lives. Heart attacks and exhaustion took a dreadful toll among them. Those who died suddenly, dropping in their tracks while at work, were considered fortunate. Others had to endure the torture of *angina pectoris* until every movement

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brought excruciating pain to their weakened hearts. Still others contracted tuberculosis and we would listen at night to their wracking spells of coughing until at last the Lord mercifully granted them eternal rest.

One night I was awakened by a loud cry. "*Rusскиye cherti!*" a prisoner shouted (which means "Russian devils!"). He was a strapping Kalmuk, a member of a proud people of Soviet Asia. He was going to take the hard way out. There was only one way to escape the slavery of the mines and that was to become so crippled or ill that the camp authorities could get no more work out of you. The man was standing in the center of the barracks room and in the dim night light every eye was on him. Slowly, deliberately he placed his right hand on a stool, palm down. Then, with his left hand, he swung a hatchet down with all his force striking the hand just above the knuckles and severing all four fingers. As the blood spurted out, he wrapped two filthy rags over the purpling stumps and, laughing with sick pride at what he had had the courage to do, he crawled back into his place on the bunk shelf. Throughout the bunkroom, not a whisper could be heard. In a little while, the guards came by and took the delirious Kalmuk to the camp infirmary where the stumps were trimmed and sewed up, without benefit of anesthetic and threw him in the dungeon for sixty days for "sabotage." Meanwhile, as I fell into fitful sleep, the words of Our Lord echoed through my mind (Matt. 5:30), "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell . . ." Was my hand, too, offending me by doing the Communists' work? I continued to brood and I knew that unless I could

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break through this language barrier which was isolating me, unless I could share some bond of fellowship, I would surely lose control and do something rash.

One day, I found a prisoner who could teach me Russian. A former student at the University of Moscow, this young man had been arrested and condemned to Vorkuta for alleged failure to follow the party line. He had a book knowledge of German and could speak a little English, and soon we could converse easily. Under his tutelage, I rapidly acquired a working knowledge of Russian with its difficult vocabulary and idioms.

Once the language barrier was overcome, I started to make friends around the camp. My fellow prisoners were eager to question me about America. Although the radio, kept permanently tuned to the Moscow station, nightly blared forth its propaganda over the loudspeaker in our barracks, the prisoners did not believe all the lies Moscow broadcast. I too began asking questions and discovered that Vorkuta was virtually a little United Nations. There were prisoners among us from Brazil, Mexico, Britain, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Canada, Iran, Mongolia, China, and many other countries. I also heard about other American prisoners in Soviet concentration camps, although it was not until later that I met other Americans at Vorkuta.

When the conversations turned to religion, as they soon did, I heard of an extraordinary happening, a miracle, which had just occurred in Vorkuta. God indeed was there with us! And the eagerness with which the men told me this story left no doubt as to the fact that the Iron Curtain could not keep God out of a country or out of the minds and hearts of its people.

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It was in November of that year, 1950, just after our own arrival, that three nuns reached the camp under sentences of hard labor. The many thousand women prisoners at Vorkuta did not work in the mines but performed other rugged work, and the nuns were assigned to a plant which made bricks for construction work throughout the whole Arctic area of Russia.

Whether these nuns were members of a Roman Catholic or a Russian Orthodox religious community, I cannot say for certain. The Russian Orthodox church did have convents in pre-revolutionary Russia, but these had long since been liquidated by the persecutions of the early 1920's, so that I believe these Sisters probably came from one of the last convents in the Roman Catholic area of the Ukraine or from Ruthenia.

At Vorkuta these women were referred to as *veroiuschie* or believers, the term applied to the Christians in Russia who still carry on personal devotions in secret, not unlike the Christians who met underground in the catacombs and defied the persecutions of Nero.

When the nuns were first taken to the brick factory, they told the foreman that they regarded doing any work for the communist regime as working for the Devil and, since they were the servants of God and not of Satan, they did not propose to bow to the orders of their foreman despite any threats he might make.

Stripped of their religious garb, the nuns' faith was their armor. They were ready to face anything and everything to keep their vow and they did face their punishment, a living testimony of great courage. They were put on punishment rations, consisting of black bread and rancid soup, day after day. But each morning when they were

ordered to go out to the brick factory, into the clay pits, or to any other back-breaking assignment, they refused. This refusal meant, of course, that they were destined to go through worse ordeals. Angered by their obstinacy and fearing the effect upon the other slave laborers, the commandant ordered that they be placed in strait jackets. Their hands were tied in back of them and then the rope with which their wrists were bound was passed down around their ankles and drawn up tight. In this manner, their feet were pulled up behind them and their shoulders wrenched backward and downward into a position of excruciating pain.

The nuns writhed in agony but not a sound of protest escaped them. And when the commandant ordered water poured over them so that the cotton material in the strait jackets would shrink, he expected them to scream from this pressure on their tortured bodies but all that happened was that they moaned softly and lapsed into unconsciousness. Their bonds were then loosed and they were revived; in due course, they were trussed up again, and once more the blessed relief of unconsciousness swept over. They were kept in this state for more than two hours, but the guards did not dare let the torture go on any longer, for their circulation was being cut off and the women were near death. The Communist regime wanted slaves, not skeletons. They did not transport people all the way to Vorkuta in order to kill them. The Soviet government wanted coal mined. Slave laborers were expendable, of course, but only after years of labor had been dragged out of them. Thus the commandant's aim was to torture these nuns until they would agree to work.

Finally, however, the commandant decided that he was

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through trying. The nuns were either going to work or he was going to have to kill them in the attempt. He directed that they again be assigned to the outdoor work detail and, if they still refused, that they be taken up to a hummock in the bitter wind of the early Arctic winter, and left to stand there immobile all day long to watch the other women work. They were treated to this torture, too. When the pale light of the short Arctic day at last dawned, they were seen kneeling there and the guards went over expecting to find them freezing, but they seemed relaxed and warm.

At this, the commandant ordered that their gloves and caps be removed so that they would be exposed to the full fury of the wind. All through the eight-hour working day they knelt on that windy hilltop in prayer. Below them, the women who were chipping mud for the brick ovens were suffering intensely from the cold. Many complained that their feet were freezing despite the supposedly warm boots they wore. When in the evening other guards went to the hill to get the nuns and take them back to the barracks, they expected to find them with frostbitten ears, hands and limbs. But they did not appear to have suffered any injury at all. Again the next day they knelt for eight hours in the wind, wearing neither hats nor gloves in temperatures far below zero. That night they still had not suffered any serious frostbite and were still resolute in their refusal to work. Yet a third day they were taken out and this time their scarves too were taken away from them.

By this time, news of what was happening had spread throughout all the camps in the Vorkuta region. When at the end of the third day, a day far colder than any we had yet experienced that winter season, the bareheaded nuns

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were brought in still without the slightest trace of frostbite, everyone murmured that indeed God had brought a miracle to pass. There was no other topic of conversation in the whole of Vorkuta. Even hardened MVD men from other compounds found excuses to come by the brick factory and take a furtive look at the three figures on the hill. The women working in the pits down below crossed themselves and nervously mumbled prayers. Even the commandant was sorely disturbed. If not a religious man, he was at the least a somewhat superstitious one and he knew well enough when he was witnessing the hand of a Power that was not of this earth!

By the fourth day, the guards themselves were afraid of the unearthly power which these women seemed to possess, and they flatly refused to touch them or have anything more to do with them. The commandant himself was afraid to go and order them out into the hill. And so they were not disturbed in their prayers, and were taken off punishment rations. When I left Vorkuta four years later, those nuns were still at the brick factory compound and none of them had done a day's work productive for the communist regime. They were regarded with awe and respect. The guards were under instructions not to touch them or disturb them. They were preparing their own food and even making their own clothes. Their devotions were carried on in their own way and they seemed at peace and contented. Though prisoners, they were spiritually free. No one in the Soviet Union had such freedom of worship as they.

What their example did to instill religious faith in thousands of prisoners and guards there at Vorkuta, I cannot begin to describe. Later on, when I had the opportunity

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as a locker-room attendant for the MVD men to talk with some of the more hardened Russian Communists about religion, not one failed to mention the Miracle of the Nuns. With a puzzled expression, each would ask my opinion of it. How could such a thing happen, they would say. How could God have saved these women from freezing on that hill!

I could not answer, except in terms of my own experience with prayer and with faith in Our Lord, Jesus Christ. I told them how I was saved from starvation and said that evidently the nuns had found the same strength through prayer. They were visibly moved by this additional demonstration of the fact that God's power exists.

The rationalist looks in vain for an explanation of such an event. God showed His hand in a miracle on that hill in the Arctic wastes of Russia and by that miracle brought faith to Vorkuta. Thousands of prisoners were buoyed up in their resistance to Communism. Many Communists themselves were touched and an unadmitted hunger in their hearts for religious faith was thereby brought to light.

## *An Heroic Priest*

THE NUNS were not the only ones who bore Christian witness in Vorkuta. To my surprise, I learned that a number of my fellow prisoners in our compound were ministers or priests. There were, as I have briefly indicated earlier, Roman Catholic priests from Lithuania, Greek Orthodox priests from the Ukraine, Lutheran pastors from Latvia and Estonia, a Jewish rabbi, a Mennonite bishop from the Volga Basin, Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even a Mormon missionary. These men had been guilty of one and the same sin: they had placed God before the Communist state.

Father S., a Catholic priest from Lithuania who was in my work brigade and who became my close friend, was typical of these heroic men of God. His clerical garb had been taken away. He wore the same rough clothes, performed the same back-breaking labor, pushed the same cars of slate as the rest of us, but he was somehow a man apart.

Among the things that were strictly prohibited by the rules of Vorkuta were religious conversations among the prisoners, the holding of religious services, and the read-

ing of religious literature. If a clergyman or layman was caught violating any of these rules, the punishment was usually two months' work in solitary confinement. This was not a light penalty. For the first five days, the victim would be placed in a cold cell, sometimes stripped to his underclothing. He would have to pace back and forth continuously to keep from freezing. Then for fifty-five more days he would be on bread and water rations in a tiny, virtually unheated cell.

As this torture had not proved a sufficient deterrent, the Soviet authorities, in March, 1954, made the initial five-day period of torture even worse. They would take the offender to a cell that was a favorite torture chamber with the political police. Here he would be allowed to wear warm clothing but would be chained to the wall in such a position that every muscle and nerve cried out for relief from its enforced contortion. Meanwhile he would be given only 30 per cent of the normal bread ration and a very thin soup, so that hunger pains would soon add to his misery. It would seem that a man undergoing such treatment must die of pneumonia or collapse from physical exhaustion, but none of the clergymen did, to my knowledge. Nor did I ever hear of any one of them breaking down mentally or emotionally under this treatment, although some of them suffered it not once or twice but many times during the course of their years at Vorkuta.

Father S., a man in his early thirties, was one of the most fearless of these. He had been arrested in his village church in Lithuania one Sunday after Mass because he had refused to preach a sermon praising Communism on one of the Soviet government's anniversary days. Charged with "sabotage of the state," he was given a ten-year sentence

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at hard labor, and sent down into the coal mines. Even in the pits, his eyes burned with fervor like white lamps in his dust-blackened face. He never forgot that he was a priest and that his first duty was to minister to the souls of the faithful whom God had entrusted to his care in this place, and he was one of the priests who offered Mass in secret for many of the slave laborers deep down in the mine.

With a ledge of rock for an altar, a battered tin cup for his chalice, melted snow water for his wine, and a small piece of black bread for his wafer, he would offer the Sacrifice of the Mass and administer Communion to his men. His church was the black, dusty end of a coal tunnel, lit by the flickering head lamps of the miners. Many priests kept a tiny vial of sacramental wine hidden on their persons so that they could have just one drop to use in the cup with which they offered Mass. They would risk any hardship to preserve this vial.

On a trip down to the end of the mine one day, I accidentally came upon the Father leading such a service and I shall never forget the scene. I had heard the murmur of voices in the tunnel and thought that perhaps there was a group of men back there waiting for some cars to load but, when I drew close enough to see them in the dim light, I realized that they were reciting a prayer and crossing themselves. I could see the priest in work clothes, elevating the Host before a cross made of two timbers nailed together. The tunnel was barely high enough for him to stand erect and the men were kneeling on two-by-fours placed on the damp, muddy floor; they were repeating their prayers together in voices so soft they seemed but an echo of the priest's words.

Here, I thought to myself, I was seeing in the twentieth

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century Christians meeting together to worship God under circumstances that must closely resemble the candle-lit chambers of the Roman Catacombs in the first and second centuries. This time Stalin and Malenkov, rather than Nero, were attempting to stamp out Christianity and silence Christian teachings within their empire. And Stalin and his followers were succeeding no more than had the imperial fiddler.

But I was not the only one, alas, who came upon such a Catholic service down in the mine. One day a militant atheist among the prisoners came across the Lithuanian group which had gathered together secretly. They used various pretexts for getting away from their work in the mine when the hour for a religious service arrived—word of mouth was passed along in whispers. Any excuse could be used: one man would break his shovel and have to go get another. A second man would take the batteries out of his head lamp and deliberately drain out the liquid (the Russians issued the old-fashioned wet cell batteries). The head lamp would go dim, of course, and the man would have to go off to the storeroom to get another. Others would simply slip away and disappear. In the depths of the mine shafts, it was impossible for the supervisors to keep track of all their men at any given moment. In one way or another, twenty to thirty Lithuanians could gather at the end of an abandoned tunnel.

One day, Father S. was leading the devotions when the atheistic prisoner happened upon them. In an outburst of anger he cursed the priest, accusing him of using the prayers as an excuse to keep "his" men off work for half an hour and thus put an extra burden on the rest of the shift to make up the day's quota of coal. The priest ignored the

abuse and refused to stop the service. The man then seized a shovel and attacked the Father with it, hitting him and driving him back from his improvised altar.

The atheist was immediately set upon by the Lithuanians and suffered a thorough pummeling as they chased him back up the tunnel. However, when they returned to assist Father S., they found that his left arm was broken, and they had to take him up the shaft to the camp hospital. They said he had hurt himself in the mine but the MVD men were not long in finding out the story and no sooner was a splint fixed on the Father's arm than MVD men came and took him out of hospital. He was stripped of his clothes and put into the cold cell to begin his punishment.

His suffering during the ensuing days with the broken arm and the other tortures inflicted on him can only be imagined, but God preserved His servant through sixty days and nights of pain and anguish. Two months later he returned to our barracks, emaciated, the lines of suffering standing clear in his face, but his spirit was as unbroken as ever. His arm was crippled as a result of lack of proper treatment and he could not be sent back to the mine; that was the point when he was assigned a member of our work brigade, pushing the cars with his good arm and shoulder.

He was soon leading devotions among the men in the barracks, hearing confession, and doing personal counseling. We made his job as easy as possible for him so that he had more time and energy for his priestly duties than he had had before. Often he would team up with me in pushing the cars of slate down the rails. As we trudged along and pushed our fardel through the long hours of the day or night—for we had to work on night shift every three months—we would talk about religion, speaking in

Russian which we had both learned since coming to Vorkuta.

Theological words are very difficult to translate when a language is learned under such circumstances and without formal training. For instance, when the Russians or Lithuanians would say the word *molit*, they could demonstrate to me that it meant "pray." But when they pointed up in the sky and said, "*Bog!*" I didn't know whether they meant God or Heaven. The word *god*, heard frequently in the Russian language (spelled *gad*), means "serpent" or "reptile." (No wonder the Ukrainians had at first been confused as to my religion!) It was difficult to get used to *Bog* for God while to express such abstract words as "faith" and "confidence" was for a long time impossible for me, as the complexities of the Russian language made it very hard to find the right phrase. Nonetheless, Father S. and I were able to talk a good deal about spiritual matters as we worked. He was impressed with my story of the power of prayer during the starvation period I and my fellow prisoners endured at Dresden; he compared it with his own experience of finding enough strength to endure the tortures of the cold cell. In general, he agreed that in our prayers we should not ask for release but simply that God's will be done. He thought that perhaps our imprisonment was necessary to show the world how evil Communism is and that our suffering might, in God's plan, be part of the means of redeeming the world.

One of Father S's best friends was a Lutheran pastor who worked near us. They used to have long discussions. Differences in denomination or creed were much less important in Vorkuta than in the outside world. We were all standing together against the common foe and the close

friendship of this Catholic priest with the Lutheran pastor remains in my mind a vivid symbol of the unity of Christianity, and indeed of all faiths, under communist persecution.

I know Father S's name, of course, and wish that I could make it public here but it would be no service to him to do so since he is still in Vorkuta, with many more years to serve before his sentence is completed. The Vatican knows of this heroic priest and when the annals of this age of persecution of all churches are written, his name will have an honored place. Some day Father S. may even appear upon the roster of the Beatified, as a priest whose extraordinary heroism has earned him special spiritual merit. Yet his valiant work is typical of the heroism of many Roman Catholic priests who have been imprisoned in Russia and who have, like St. Paul, continued to preach the Gospel in prison and to exhort the faithful.

## *Loyal Lutherans*

ON A BLEAK winter night, the furtive shivering figure of a prisoner could be seen outside the barracks building next to ours. While the eerie light of the search-lamps illuminating the barbed-wire barriers of the compound was reflected on the snow, and the wind blew in frigid gusts, this fellow would walk back and forth, back and forth, trying to keep warm despite the sub-zero wind.

At any sign of a Russian guard coming toward the area, he would quickly return inside and, by the time the guard arrived and entered the building, he would find nothing but a group of laborers sitting on their bunks or on the benches in the center of the room, chipping mud off their boots, sewing on buttons, or engaging in idle conversation. In the drying room at the rear, a number of men would be hanging up work clothes which they had just washed.

As soon as the guard had left, the self-appointed sentry could be seen again taking up his post near the door, as if out for a smoke or a breath of fresh air. And if the guard had slipped in now he would have found that the men so busy hanging up their wash a few minutes ago were kneeling with bowed heads, while one of their number led them

in prayer. For meeting here this night in Vorkuta was the Church behind Barbed Wire. This is the real church in Russia, the branch of the Christian Church which no delegation of visiting foreign clergymen is going to be permitted to see.

Wrenched from their homes and condemned to a life of slavery in the barren wastes of the Arctic, the dedicated clergymen and laymen who make up this Church have sown new seeds of faith that have taken root and grown. Its denominations are as diverse as the religious backgrounds of the slave workers in the mines, Russian and Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, Baptist, Mennonite, Mormon, Adventist—denominational lines do not mean much. Sometimes, literally only "two or three" men would gather in His name, as was the case with the Mormons. At other times, there would be fifty or more taking part in a service. In this great body of faith that continues to exist and conduct services underground in Soviet slave-labor camps are many of the outstanding religious leaders of Russia and of the Soviet satellite states as well as many of the most dedicated laymen and women of the churches that once flourished in areas now under Communist rule.

The first service of this Church behind Barbed Wire which I attended was one conducted by a Lutheran pastor who had been deported from his native Latvia. The Lutheran services were among those customarily held in the drying room where the men could disperse quickly if guards came. Most of the Lutherans came from Latvia or Estonia, the little Baltic republics which had been invaded and annexed by Russia in 1940 despite treaties of friendship guaranteeing their independence. In addition,

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many of the prisoners from East Germany were Lutheran, as were a few Volga Russians who had been members of the old Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, a religious body completely and ruthlessly suppressed by the Communists in 1938.

We had several Latvian pastors among the Baltic prisoners in our compound area. One of these pastors would conduct the service, speaking in Russian, the one tongue by now common to us all. We would meet on any evening except Sunday, as the guards would then be especially on the lookout. Services were held at a different time and place in each instance to avoid falling into an easily detectable pattern. Whenever one of the Latvians would come by and casually say, "Why don't you drop over in about half an hour?" I would know that a service was to be held that evening and, picking up some things, I would go over to do a little "laundry."

The service would open with a prayer, then a Bible lesson. Since at this time we had no Bible in camp, the pastor would have to quote the text from memory. How well some of those ministers knew their Bible! They could quote whole chapters of the New Testament without hesitation even though in the Russian language which was not too clear to all of us. Following the Scripture lesson, we would pray, imploring God to give strength to His people until the time should come when we would be released. Then would come a sermon, usually an exhortation directed toward those among us who might be wavering in faith, asking themselves how God could let us all suffer so, or having difficulty in justifying their personal beliefs wearied as they were by the incessant drumming atheist propaganda. Such sermons reminded us that our sufferings were

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not in vain but would help redeem the world from Communism and atheism. After the sermon, we would have a hymn. We dare not sing hymns aloud, but would all hum the tune together quietly while the pastor recited the words.

During those precious minutes when we met together in prayer, a great burden was lifted from my shoulders. While we were there with our Heavenly Father, we were with the Church Eternal and the walls of our prison camp faded away until they were as nothing. We were with Christ, and though our bodies were in bondage our souls were free. We all risked severe punishment by attending these services yet men who had never been regular in church attendance before would give up anything they were doing and come to join us, regardless of the danger.

What a wonderful life it gave our souls as we frequently hummed Martin Luther's great hymn and heard the words so appropriate to our own position:

A mighty fortress is our God,  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amidst the floods  
Of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
Doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great.  
And armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.  
Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing,  
Were not the Right Man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing.

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Dost ask Who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is He!  
Lord Sabaoth His Name;  
From age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.

Lutherans are a tough people in their spiritual beliefs, as they long ago proved in their years of persecution. Communists are finding them no less dedicated today than were their forebears. Unyielding to threats of punishment or blandishments of atheist propaganda, the loyal Lutherans of Vorkuta showed a devotion to the Christian faith that was an inspiration and a challenge to us all.

There had been no organized worship services or religious activity at Vorkuta until prisoners from the Baltic countries began to arrive in considerable numbers: it was their example which emboldened the Ukrainians, Poles, and Russians so that soon there was a great revival of religion among all prisoners.

These Lutheran pastors were stalwart men. I would like to pay particular tribute to one who was a fellow prisoner in my compound nearly all the time I was there and who frequently led us in worship. He was the Reverend Paul Rosenbergs, dean of the church district of Riga of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, a brilliant young theologian and preacher who now, unfortunately, has joined the ranks of Christian martyrs who died at the hands of the Communists.

In the life and work of Paul Rosenbergs are mirrored the lives of hundreds of Protestant clergymen who have fallen prisoner to the Communists. Born in 1906, the son of the Reverend Peter Rosenbergs, pastor of famous old St.

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Martin's church in Riga, he early showed great promise as a student and followed his father into the ministry. He was ordained in 1931 and thereafter wrote several books on theology, one of which, *Handbook for Christian Intellectuals*, caused a particular stir in university circles; at the early age of thirty-five, he was made Dean of Riga District and member of the Supreme Board of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia.

Paul Rosenbergs was a brilliant, respected clergyman, happily married and the father of four fine children when, in 1944, tragedy struck. He had proved himself a fearless defender of Christianity and justice during the short Russian occupation of Latvia in 1940-41 and the German occupation which followed, 1941-44. First he was arrested by the Nazis because of his public protest against the persecution of the Jews. But the German authorities feared to send him to concentration camp because of his high standing in the Lutheran church, and eventually released him to return to his pulpit.

When the war turned against Germany and the advancing Russian armies again neared Latvia, Peter Rosenbergs was urged to join the thousands of other Latvians who were fleeing the country having had a taste of Russian persecution in the previous occupation of 1940. The young pastor knew how bitterly the rulers of the Soviet Union detested organized Christianity. His own father had been imprisoned by the Red Army during its brief occupation of Riga after World War I and sent to prison, where he died of typhoid fever in 1919. However, Paul had just been called to serve St. Martin's, the church of which his father had been pastor, and although his brother-in-law, the Reverend Richard Zarins (now pastor of the Latvian Evangeli-

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cal Lutheran Church of New York City), and other members of his family were fleeing, he decided to remain with those of his parishioners who had to stay.

He had served as pastor of St. Martin's for only eight weeks when, in September-October, 1944, the Russian secret police suddenly arrested him, charging him with anti-state activity; a year later he received a sentence of ten years at hard labor. Meanwhile, his wife and four children were brutally evicted from the parsonage and exiled, along with thousands of other patriotic Latvians, to the "new lands" of the Soviet Union, i.e. Siberia.

Some time prior to my arrival in 1950, Pastor Rosenbergs had been sent to Vorkuta to serve out his sentence at hard labor as a coal miner. Though he was thin and bone-weary from the heavy toil, he always seemed to have time for personal counseling and prayer with the men. The National Lutheran Council of America in a recent tribute to him has quoted some of the East German prisoners who were with us at Vorkuta as calling him "the ideal clergyman who never lost his faith," and "the saviour of many from despair." To these words, I can only offer a loud "Amen."

His faith was, indeed, an inspiration to every one of us who knew him. These men who have recently been released have reported that Pastor Rosenbergs was murdered on the eve of his own departure from Vorkuta. He was apparently a victim of the *blatnoi*, or criminal prisoners, whose constant harassment of the political prisoners was one of the worst evils of the camp.

The Pastor was killed about Christmas time in 1955, nearly a year after I was released. He had served all of his ten-year sentence. The camp administrators had given

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him a few hundred rubles, representing the balance of the "wages" due him and he was planning to go to Siberia to join his wife and children from whom he had received a letter. He went the rounds of all the barracks that night, saying good-bye to the members of his congregation, pausing here and there for a word of encouragement and a moment of prayer. He even stopped to say good-bye to some of the young criminals and thereby, perhaps, sealed his death warrant, for they would know that on the eve of departure he might have some money in his pocket. He left his own barracks, saying that he was going to say farewell to a friend, a former German schoolteacher, billeted about half a mile away.

Paul Rosenbergs never reached his friend. His body was found next morning where he had been murdered, a few hundred feet inside the camp gate. And robbery did seem to have been the motive: the rubles for his train fare to Siberia were gone. Sorrowfully, the men whom he had loved and served watched as his body was picked up by a Russian truck and taken off for burial among the other nameless dead who lie out in the frozen tundra. His family, who had waited all those years, were never to see him again.

In respect and gratitude, we may well recognize that the most brilliant part of Paul Rosenbergs' ministry must be reckoned not as the years of writing, preaching and teaching in pre-war Latvia but as those when he was a preacher and living example of Christian ethics as he led his Church behind Barbed Wire.

## *Brave Baptists*

**T**HROUGHOUT the civilized world there has been a great spirit of religious revival during the last several years. Even in Vorkuta I could see this was true: we had Russian newspapers there, given us for propaganda purposes, and could keep up with world affairs by seeing what the Russian editors were attacking. From time to time, I would see reference to an American evangelist named Billy Graham and to a revival of religious "superstition" in the capitalist countries.

The Reverend Billy Graham was depicted as a tool of the reactionary interests of Wall Street, but it was significant that Russians felt they had to mention him at all. Various church conferences which were meeting in the western countries were also ridiculed and denounced. Whole columns, of course, were devoted to Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary, Cardinal Wyszynski of Poland, and other churchmen whom the Reds in the satellite countries had jailed after phoney trials. From time to time there would be an editorial in *Pravda* or *Izvestia* warning young people against attending church or other religious

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ceremonies, by which token we could see that the religious revival must have reached Russia.

Even in Vorkuta, signs of this revival were manifest. Men were being led to accept Christ as their Saviour who had never attended church services before in their lives. Everywhere among the prisoners was a hunger for faith and hope. We felt very nervous as we read of "victories" being won by the hard-pressed "Volunteers' Corps" of Red China in the Korean War for we knew that the Communists were being defeated in their attempt to overrun South Korea and, when we heard accusations over the Moscow radio that the Americans were employing germ warfare and hysterical outbursts against American militarism, we were afraid an all-out world war might break out at any moment. If such a thing were to happen, it would probably mean the end for all of us. But some prisoners hated the Russians so much that, in spite of this, they actually hoped war would come.

When men are in our situation, realizing that everything they have in life can be taken away from them, they desperately need a firm rock upon which they can stand, something to which they can remain anchored no matter how fiercely the storm blows. So it was that in Vorkuta conditions were ripe for a revival of faith and we soon had just such a revival there, paralleling the one going on elsewhere in the war-troubled world.

The fact that such a revival did occur was due in no small part to the Baptists. The Russian Baptists are, in a sense, the true Protestants of that country. The Russian Orthodox Church is ritualistic and, with its stress on veneration of the saints and of the Virgin Mary, resembles the Roman Catholic Church in many ways. The theology and

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dogma of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Ukraine is very close to the Roman and also to the Anglican Churches. Russian Baptists, however, are an evangelical group without ritual or ceremony, and are comparable to the Protestant churches of the United States. They are quite fundamentalist in their theology, believing in a strict interpretation of the Bible. Needless to say, they have suffered great persecution under Communism, but in spite of this or perhaps because of it they are the one church group in Russia that has seemed to grow stronger under the Red regime. There are probably more Baptists there today—if we count the thousands in concentration camps—than there were at the time of the 1917 Revolution.

The Baptists in Vorkuta were largely from the German-speaking section of the Volga Basin. Quite a few were Ukrainians, however, and some were from "Mother Russia." Also, due to their evangelical fervor, the Baptists were making converts among groups of all nationalities. There were no facilities available for baptizing these converts, but they became members of the Baptist group with the formal rites of baptism left for another day. They generally met for worship right after supper, sometimes behind the curtains of the stage in the camp auditorium which was part of the dining hall. This stage had been built so that Communist propaganda movies could be shown and indoctrination lectures given. There were compulsory programs there on such Communist holidays as May Day and the anniversary of the October Revolution. But the propaganda talks had proved so ineffective that the stage was now seldom used and provided ideal privacy for secret Christian services.

In these services great stress was laid on Scripture and

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I found them much like the services and prayer meetings I had heard of in Detroit in my family's early Adventist days. There were no Baptist ministers in our compound although there were a number in other parts of the camp. However, our group had some very well-trained laymen who were able to take the lead. In addition to the weekly services, which were held on different nights to avoid detection, there were also informal Bible study sessions which took place out in the open in the mess hall. While we were eating, a group would gather at one of the corner tables in the back of the dining area and among them one or two men would engage in a seemingly casual conversation. Only when you drew near and sat down with your tin plate of salt fish and black bread, would you realize that what they were talking about was a passage from the Bible. Everyone else would sit quietly eating while these leaders discussed some Bible story or commented on the teachings of Christ in their necessarily casual way. We had no Bibles but, since these men knew their Scriptures by heart, we could get along without them. Those who were listening would never look at the one conducting the lesson so that the whole effect was deceptive to the guards.

If a prisoner newly transferred to our barracks evinced an interest, the Baptists would invite him to a table where religious discussion was going on and in this way many men had their first contact with Christ's words. In many cases these prisoners came from sections of Russia or the Ukraine where there were no churches at all and they had never had an opportunity to know the Scriptures except, perhaps, at second hand. They were reluctant at first to risk attending forbidden services, but when they had once

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discovered what nourishment the Lord had waiting for them there, they thirsted for more than casual table talk and before long were regular attendants.

The great zeal for evangelism I saw among the Baptists at Vorkuta is what has made it difficult for Communists to suppress this Church in Russia. The Baptists do not need a church building for worship nor an ordained priest to conduct service. Wherever there is one Baptist you are soon apt to find two, and wherever there are two sooner or later there will be four. The Bolsheviki could and did gain control of the Russian Orthodox Church by arresting and liquidating the Moscow hierarchy and by infiltrating many passive, subservient men into the Moscow Patriarchate in their places. The Communists rigidly screened all young men who entered the Orthodox theological seminaries to prepare for the priesthood, but they have never been able to control and suppress the Baptists in quite the same way. Baptists are, in a sense, revolutionaries just as were the Communists in the militant phase, except that their revolution is based on Christ, not Marx. The Communists are disturbed by their presence. They have imprisoned hundreds and thousands of Baptists, but they have not exterminated the Baptist Church in Russia, and when Baptists have been sentenced or exiled to the slave labor camps, the only result has been to establish Baptist churches in those camps and wherever the victims are sent.

## *Russia's Religious Freedom*

EVERY TIME I hear Soviet propaganda about freedom of religion in Russia, I think of the thousands of political prisoners in the slave-labor camps whose chief and frequently only "political" offense is that they believe in God and worship Him by trying to live Christian lives in keeping with the teachings of the Bible.

The Soviet state has democratically made no distinction among religious groups: it has had as its objective the extermination of them all. And while the Lutherans, Baptists, and Roman Catholics were the most active in organizing underground church activity at Vorkuta, the smaller groups were by no means more ready in yielding to persecution.

I think, for instance, of the elderly Mennonite bishop there and of the sufferings his people endured in the Soviet Union. This bishop was in charge of issuing work clothes, selected for the job because of his age and his reputation for unwavering honesty. He was a little too honest for the *blatnoi*, the young criminals, who found that they could not get anywhere by trying to bribe him into giving them an extra issue of clothing. But though they threatened

and muttered, the Lord protected him and the hoodlums never raised a hand against him. Apparently even they had some respect for his scrupulous fairness. One regulation of life in Vorkuta that this old Mennonite disliked more than any other was having to shave, for the religious principles of his group require the wearing of a beard. He had been forcibly shaved when arrested and his official identification picture showed him clean-shaven. The rules of the MVD were that, if a prisoner wore a beard in his identity photo, he had to keep the beard trimmed just the way it was when he was arrested. And if he was photographed clean-shaven, he could not raise a beard while in prison. This was obviously a precautionary measure against intended escape and is common practice with most police forces. The bishop constantly complained about this, however, feeling that because the camp authorities would never let him raise a beard they particularly had it in for him because we did have a full-bearded Ukrainian Orthodox priest in camp.

The Mennonite bishop, by virtue of his position in the clothing department, knew almost every one of the 4,500 prisoners in our compound and took a personal interest in us all. He seemed to be everywhere at once and was always offering comfort and advice. Often he would talk with me about religious life in the United States. Thousands of his fellow Mennonites from Germany and Russia had emigrated to America many years ago where they became the dominant group among the "Pennsylvania Dutch" farmers, and he was eager for word of these communities. I was only able to tell him what little I had read of their prosperity and the respect in which the sect was held by the rest of the communities in which they lived.

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The bishop had been a camel merchant in the Volga River basin, for in southern Russia the Asiatic camel is still almost indispensable, the roads being in about the same condition as in Marco Polo's time. His co-religionists in Russia had suffered terribly under the Soviet regime. Most of the Russian Mennonites were farmers. They were noted for their agricultural skill, which was why they had been invited to settle in the Volga region in the time of Catherine the Great. But badly as the Soviet Union needed the food that they produced, the Politbureau authorities could not sanction the tranquil survival of a Christian society in the midst of state-sponsored atheism, and orders were given that the farms be collectivized despite their high productivity and the Mennonite communities broken up. Many of the men were deported to forced labor in Siberia and Arctic Russia, and the women were pressed into work in the factories. The rest were deported to the "new lands" of Soviet Turkestan.

Despite the terrible fate which had befallen his people, the Mennonite bishop had not become embittered. Though forced to work for the Communists, he made his principal task that of helping others. The regulations demanded that a prisoner could have a new shirt or jacket only when the previous one was completely worn through. In general, we got a shirt every six months. The bishop, however, knowing the extremely bitter cold to which we on the surface crews were exposed, was lenient in his judgment as to when our clothing was worn too thin. He reminded the others who worked down in the mine that warm air was blown down into the shaft and that even though it was bitterly cold down there, it was warmer than on the surface. Many of us were saved from serious

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frostbite by the bishop's generous interpretation of the clothing regulations.

Several other Mennonite men were in this compound. They were not able to arrange formal worship services but each worker got one day off out of ten (after the 1953 strike at Vorkuta, this was changed to one day off a week), and that day he would spend resting and visiting. Since the bishop was always around the clothing-supply room, it was easy for them to meet with him for prayer. In this way, they kept up an active spiritual life. Their homes were gone, their communities dispersed, their families in want, ahead of them lay perhaps endless years of slavery but they still kept their faith and confidence in God.

Assisting the bishop in the stockroom was another elderly man, a Mormon. The Mormons in Soviet Russia and its satellite countries are a very small group. They are also relentlessly persecuted, due to the fact that belief in the Book of Mormon originated in the United States among followers of Joseph Smith, and that the international headquarters of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. Therefore, in addition to persecution for their religious beliefs, they are further suspected of being actively pro-American.

Conversion to the Mormon faith was tantamount to a life sentence at the hands of the Communists, yet I noticed that this small group preferred to surrender worldly freedom than to give up their belief in Christ and in what they considered Christ's latter-day revelations. There were only a handful of Mormons in our compound but on their days off they would always meet for meditation and prayer.

Another small group in our camp was the Jehovah's Witness sect. This aggressive sect, too, traces its origin to the United States. In addition to severe persecution for religious beliefs and suspected pro-Americanism, they further incur the wrath of the Soviet bosses by professing absolute pacifism. They do not recognize the "kingdoms of this earth," but only the kingdom of God. In America, members of their sect will not salute the flag. One can well imagine what happens in the Soviet Union to those who will not raise an arm to salute the hammer and sickle!

As in the case of the Mennonites and Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia are to be found, as a group, almost entirely in the Church behind Barbed Wire. One of the Witnesses, a very elderly man (the Russians spare neither age nor sex in deporting dissenting groups to slavery) served as caretaker in our compound. One by one, he managed to find openings for the other Witnesses as helpers in the locker rooms or barracks, so that they could keep their religious community intact. They tried to meet for prayer and devotion every night, but the meeting must appear as casual as any group of tired men sitting on the wooden bench and talking.

Still a third group tracing its origin to American missionaries was that of the Seventh-day Adventists. Soon after it was known that I was a Christian, I was asked to what denomination I belonged. This was natural enough since I would be seen here at a Lutheran service and there at a Baptist, trying to attend any meeting conducted in Our Lord's name. I had to explain that I had earlier fallen away from religion and could not count myself member of any denomination, although my father had once been a Seventh-day Adventist missionary.

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Soon there came an invitation to attend a meeting of the Adventist group of Mine 3. They met in Barrack 14, a little distance from the center of the compound and in the area where most of them lived. As soon as I got there, the members wanted to know whether I had heard of Mrs. Ellen Gould White, the founder of the movement, and they were delighted to know that I had more than once visited Battle Creek, Michigan, the birthplace of their Church.

The leader of the Adventist group was a silversmith who worked in the mechanical department of the mine. He was known for his skillful engraving of spoons and other pieces, and constantly had trouble with the guards who wanted him to decorate their cigarette boxes or fancy cigarette holders. He was conscientiously opposed to the use of tobacco or liquor and was so conditioned by his faith; neither bribery, cajolery, nor force would prevail upon him to make any object connected with those indulgences, which he considered vices. Naturally, the Russian guards were unable to comprehend such a thing as a conscientious principle, especially one that meant self-denial, and they kept on badgering him.

The silversmith was successful in getting Saturday, which was his Sabbath, for his day off, and he was never investigated by the camp authorities as were those who fought to get Sunday off. Only known atheists were granted Sunday as a day of rest.

A Ukrainian Orthodox group was another body which met regularly for services, both in the barracks and in the mine below. Not all of the Ukrainians were religious; in fact, a majority of them had been raised in areas where religion had been all but stamped out by savage Soviet persecution which characterized the early post-revolution-

ary days. One of them told me that there were a number of Orthodox churches in his home town, two of which were now used as garages, another as a machine shop, and a fourth as a storehouse for ammunition during the war. The Reds particularly favored churches as storage places for munitions in the Ukraine, he told me, because they knew that the Ukrainian underground was reluctant to blow up its own church buildings. His father had been killed during the war and he recalled that when the body was being lowered into the grave, a man who wore the robes of a priest under a civilian overcoat appeared and said a few words about God, the Father. But, raised as my friend had been in atheist schools, he was not sure at the time that the priest had not been referring to Stalin! This had been his only contact with religion before his arrest.

Subsequently, he met the same "underground" Greek Orthodox priest at Vorkuta. He had been apprehended while conducting rites in secret and was condemned to hard labor in the mines. My friend had by this time heard about Jesus from me and now he heard about this same Saviour from the priest from his home town who had risked death to say a prayer at his father's funeral. Thus the young Ukrainian, raised under atheism, learned that Jesus was worshiped in many lands. Before long the priest was able to receive him as a member of the Church Underground.

The Greek and Russian Orthodox believers at our camp had been terrorized so long in their homeland and had been so miserably treated in prison that they did not have quite the same spirit of resistance as did the Latvians, Poles, and Ukrainians. They did not worship together as

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often, although one group did have a little Church sanctuary set up in an abandoned coal gallery deep in the mine, complete with two-by-fours on which they knelt, and an altar with a rude crucifix cut of tin sheathing.

The Ukrainians conducted their services in the Ukrainian language but when the meeting broke up and they returned to their bunks, they began speaking Russian again, using all the curses common to the Russian vernacular. I did not see how they could worship God one moment and revile His name the next, even though they explained that these phrases in Russian are never taken literally.

In addition to the many Lutherans from Latvia and East Germany, we had some from Estonia who generally worshiped by themselves. Although according to the camp regulations all nationality groups were to be broken up as far as possible to make it difficult for prisoners to form any organized resistance, the Estonians had succeeded in getting a work-team together made up entirely of their own countrymen. Due to a relaxation of regulations in their homeland, they were permitted to receive more food parcels from home than any other group. This supplement to their diet was small but important, and they were the one group strong enough to fulfill their quota down in the mine. The quota, incidentally, was seventeen tons a day per man, rather than the sixteen tons of the American folk song.

The Estonians argued that, since they were all strong and spoke the same language, they could get along better if they were permitted to team up in the same work brigade and, since the administrators were anxious to fulfill their own quota, they agreed. Actually, the Esto-

nians were strong enough to dig their quota in seven hours instead of eight. This meant that they could crawl out of their shaft and take an hour off with no one the wiser; in this way, they found time to have religious services together down in the mine, services conducted in their own language by one of the several clergymen among them.

With so many religious services going on, we were obviously not able to keep all of them secret. Despite precautions, we were bound to be caught by surprise once in awhile. I was at a Lutheran service one night when it was broken up. A whole squad of guards was conducting a systematic search of the prisoners' barracks in our compound as they did from time to time, confiscating all letters, papers, books, writing materials, and anything else that might make it possible for the slaves to get in touch with the outside world, or to bribe the free Russian workers to smuggle in contraband. Almost everything in the way of personal possessions except the clothing on the prisoners' backs was taken away. This was, incidentally, the reason we were prevented from keeping any diaries other than those indelibly recorded in our minds.

We knew, that night, that such a search was going to take place but, since the guards were still in the other barracks some distance away, we hoped to finish our service before they had reached us. However, they skipped the other buildings and came striding in well before we expected them. We broke off in the middle of the final prayer and tried to look as though we had merely been chatting together.

However, they began searching us and in the pocket of one of the Latvians they found a Bible which had been smuggled to him in a food package from home. In the

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pockets of others they found religious tracts. Seeing that there were a number of us there from other barracks, they surmised that some religious observance had been going on and demanded to know who was conducting it. We refused to give away the identity of the Lutheran pastor and the commandant ordered everyone present to do two hours' extra work the next day.

This might not seem a severe punishment but, tired and hungry as we were when we got in from our regular day of pushing cars or digging coal, it seemed like a long stretch. It was early summer and the guards decided that we should cut the weeds that had grown up between the barracks and the compound fence. It was tedious back-breaking work, but they stood over us and forced us to do it. Several prisoners had taken no part in the service but just happened to be sitting in that corner of the building, yet not one of them, even among the unbelievers, would disclose the identity of the Lutheran pastor, who was laboring there beside us on hands and knees cutting the weeds.

Many of the guards, however, had a tolerant, even cordial attitude toward religion; we noticed an interesting fact that, if a Russian guard walking his rounds alone came upon a group of us kneeling in prayer, he would generally walk right on and we could count on it that he would not make a report, but if two guards came in together, they were certain to report the incident. Neither could trust the other not to report it, and so they vied with each other in denouncing the prisoners. If either one failed to make a report he might well find himself joining the laborers in the mines.

Once when a Baptist service was being held in the din-

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ing room, one of the top administrators of the camp came in suddenly, saw us, and realized what was going on. We were all in dread, for the Baptist services, conducted openly as they so frequently were—and held almost daily at this time—were being reported by the guards. In fact, it reached a point where every time a religious meeting of any kind was discovered or religious literature confiscated, even if it came from Catholic Lithuanians, the guards would derisively snort, "*Babtisov!*" But this time, though the administrator himself had seen us, no report was made. I was increasingly certain that many of these Russians respected the courage with which prisoners held to their faith in God and that they would have liked to join us if they could.

Soon, I was to become convinced that the Russian people, including hardened Communists, are more ripe for Christian evangelism and conversion than even the most optimistic Christian in the free world dares hope.

## *An Unexpected Opportunity*

“**H**OW WOULD YOU like to work upstairs?”

This was the question that opened the door to a new opportunity for me. As I look back upon my experiences at Vorkuta, I marvel at the extent to which my life there fits into a pattern. Step by step, God's plan in sending me to Russia was unfolding.

The question was put to me by a foreman down in the mine who explained that there was a job open as an attendant in the locker room, if I wanted it.

*If I wanted it!* Not only did I want to get out of the mine where I had been for over a year, but the locker room—up in the mine tipple—was where the “free Russians” change their clothes before going down to work. The chance to talk to these men seemed the final step in my journey of discovery. My own faith had been tested again and again; I had experienced what I had come to accept as miracles; I had found among the slave laborers a vast yearning for God. Now I was to meet and know the free Russians themselves, to speak to them about God and learn from them directly what was in their hearts.

This was in February, 1953, when I had been at Vor-

kuta for two and a half years. For the first fourteen months, I had pushed the cars of slate. Then in January, 1952, I was pronounced physically fit enough to go down into the mines to work. I was assigned to the mine transportation brigade, taking loaded railway cars down the narrow winding tunnel to the elevator where they were lifted to the surface.

"We have no automatic switches here, *Amerikanetz*," the brigade boss told me, as he put me aboard the first string of little cars loaded with coal that I was to take down to the elevator shaft. The coal at Vorkuta lies in slanting seams deep beneath the tundra. The seams are two or three feet thick, hundreds of yards long, and thirty or forty feet apart. A shaft is sunk and then long, winding tunnels go up into the seams at various levels. The force of gravity pulls the cars loaded with coal down to the elevator where they are raised, two by two, to the surface. A string of empty cars is then pushed back up to the diggings where the miners, lying on their sides, drill holes into the narrow seams and then, after blasting, shovel out the coal.

As the coal is dug, the roof of the mine must be progressively shored up with wooden timbers. These are supposed to be placed every two feet, but in the interest of getting the coal out quickly, the Russians are constantly cutting corners. As a result, cave-ins are frequent, and more than once only a timely shout of warning enabled us to run to safety as overburdened timbers began snapping like match sticks, and tons of rock came crashing down from the tunnel ceiling.

My job was to stand on the bumper at the head of a long string of cars, peering into the darkness with the aid of a

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searchlight on my cardboard helmet and, when I saw an open switch ahead, to jump off and throw it, then to leap back aboard. Sometimes, if I didn't make it in time and the cars careened down the wrong track, headed for a collision or a pile-up, I would flatten myself against the mine wall and pray that I would not be crushed.

One day I saw a switch break open, just as my lead car passed over it. I leaped off, reached down and held it together with my hand, taking my fingers off just as the rear wheels passed over it. Between each two sets of wheels, I reached back and held the switch together again. If I had not done so, the cars would have derailed, overturned, and crushed me under tons of coal and slate. Praying desperately, I reached back and forth, keeping that switch closed while thirty cars passed over it. A slip of a fraction of a second and I would have had my fingers severed or been crushed by a derailed car. After such narrow escapes as that, I felt more certain than ever that the hand of God must be protecting me or I could not have survived unscathed.

Now I was to be transferred to a job as locker-room attendant where I would be on duty for an entire twenty-four-hour shift, then off for twenty-four hours. In that long shift on duty, there was plenty of time for conversation, especially when men on the night shift would come up to the washroom to pass a spare half-hour. The net result would be an opportunity to discuss philosophy, politics, and religion with men who for thirty-five years had lived in a society dominated by atheism.

All of the responsible jobs in the mines were held by "free Russians" who were at Vorkuta voluntarily and not as a result of penal sentences. They were the engineers,

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electricians, elevator operators, section foremen, and gang bosses. The prisoners, regardless of ability (and we had one man, for example, who had been Professor of Mathematics at Leningrad University), were at the mine for common labor only. They were treated with contempt and the Russian word for them was *rab* or, literally, "slave." I was often so addressed by a Russian engineer stepping out of his shower when he ordered me contemptuously to spread white sheets on the floor for him to walk on.

Despite their overbearing attitude they were, on the whole, an educated, intelligent, and relatively youthful group of Russians. They had come to Vorkuta not only because of the relatively higher wages offered there (Communists copy such capitalist devices as incentive pay boosts), but also due to idealism. Many had graduated from the Communist Youth Movement of the 1930's and 1940's imbued with the idea of building up Russia, particularly her untapped Arctic resources.

While they were an above-average group, in many respects, I think it fair to say that they were typical of Russia as a whole, since they came from nearly every part of the Soviet Union. I met Russian women, too, for they came to the washroom once a week to take showers since there were no bathing facilities in the crowded, jerry-built apartment houses which made up the "free city of Vorkuta."

Anyone who wants to understand the religious situation in Russia today must try first to realize what happens to people under a government which for more than four decades has denied that God exists, has taught its children that Christianity is an old-fashioned superstition no longer acceptable to progressive scientific minds, and has

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set up the immediate, expedient objectives of the State as the only standard of morality. From my observation of the personal lives of the Russians whom I came to know there in Vorkuta, I can say that the results are utterly tragic.

Some of the things I saw will seem to people in the Western world almost unbelievable. It is difficult to report the truth about the moral conditions of Russian life without giving offense, yet if we are to know why the Russian people hunger for a better way of life, we must know first the kind of lives they have been living.

## XVIII

### *Life Among the Godless*

**E**VEN after I had come to believe that this was part of the job God wanted me to do, I found daily close contact with some phases of Russian communist life was revolting and difficult for me.

The first thing that struck me was the language. Naturally, conditions in the mine were such that we could not expect polite language to be used there all the time, especially when some piece of machinery broke down or a particularly disagreeable task was assigned. Cursing is to be heard in any language under such circumstances. But to hear the same curses uttered by the Russian professional men, the engineers and supervisors, and even worse language by their wives, was a profound shock.

"You've got to learn to speak Russian the way we do, Johnny!" I had often heard from fellow workers. But that I could not do, and I believe that more than a little of the success I later had in gaining the confidence of the "free Russians" came from their surprised respect because I did not intersperse my everyday speech with curses. Some remarked on how "beautifully" I spoke their language, and since I was still having trouble with the difficult grammar,

I think what they meant was that I was the first person they had encountered who spoke Russian without cursing. I know some of them felt ashamed of their own crudity, for they were very defensive about it and explained again and again that their oaths were not meant to be taken literally.

The rough language used by the Russian people is only the first visible outward manifestation of the inner spiritual decay of a people cut off from Christianity and its moral teachings. Licentiousness is one of the inevitable consequences of atheism in any society. Its impact, I observed, was devastating in personal relationships and in the stability of that basic institution of human society, the family.

As the MVD men and engineers sat around the locker room daily at the change of shift to swap news and gossip, I overheard their conversations and was able to keep pretty well abreast of everything that was going on in their community. This room was the news center of North Vorkuta. There was a newspaper for the Russian residents of course, but it was devoted largely to propaganda—reports on the speeches of the party leaders, tables of the economic statistics of the five-year plan, ponderous editorials on communist philosophy, and the occasional grim warnings that Comrade So-and-so, found guilty by a People's Court of inefficiency or sabotage, had been sentenced to a term at hard labor. The life of individuals, except for an occasional notice of promotion or dismissal, finds no place in the Soviet newspaper. News of the personal happenings in such a community is spread by word of mouth and here was I in the place where all such news of Vorkuta was exchanged.

People cannot with impunity violate the Golden Rule

or defy the Ten Commandments. I cannot begin to detail the personal tragedies among these Russian men and their families which resulted largely from the lowered standards of personal morality. Some people in the free world declare that they would like to live in a society where "free love" is practiced and old-fashioned morality, derived from the Bible, is replaced by a "progressive" attitude. Let the still free agnostic or skeptic who casts aspersions on the work done by the churches, contemplate what happens in a society when the churches are torn down and there is no higher standard than expediency, no God but the totalitarian state!

Stories of sexual alliances were prime topics in the locker room. Marriage and divorce are simple civil ceremonies in the Soviet Union, although the Communists, evidently disturbed by the deterioration of family life and the haphazard upbringing of the young which resulted from easy divorce, have recently made divorce decrees somewhat harder to obtain than in the early years after the Revolution of 1917. Still it is necessary only for a man and woman to say that they have mutually agreed not to live together any longer for a Russian court eventually to enter a decree.

Marriage is no more than a civil contract. The words "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" are unknown in the marriage ceremony, as is the pledge "till death do us part." This removes the sanctity, the sense of a solemnly undertaken lifelong obligation on the part of the contracting parties; marriage is not considered a compact entered into before God. The most solemn moment in family life, the joining of two people in marriage, consists for these godless unfortunates merely in a visit to

a busy municipal office where a bored, harassed clerk holds a register open to be signed, and collects a fee.

The Russians, despite their cynicism and professed "modernism," are not without personal feelings in such matters. And for all the emancipation of "free love" extolled by the Communist Party theoreticians, the Marxists do not accept it readily when applied to their own wives.

Once when there was laughter in the locker room, it concerned our chief electrical engineer who had been at Vorkuta for about two years. He had a wife and small child; at least everyone in Vorkuta thought she was his wife. However, one day it developed that some years earlier in his career, while doing graduate work in Leningrad, he had married a fellow student, a young woman who had become a mining engineer. She had gone to Spitzbergen, an island far out in the Arctic Ocean where the Russians mined coal during World War II but from which they were belatedly evicted by Norway which owned the island. Our chief electrical engineer had never expected to see her again and, without benefit of divorce, had taken another wife. One day, he learned that his first wife had arranged to be transferred to Vorkuta and was coming to join him. He went to meet her at the station and tried to explain things, but she was in no mood to hear his explanations.

While neighbors in the apartment house watched with eager interest, the first wife strode into the apartment and told the second wife to pack up and leave. The second, never having heard of the first, refused. Thereupon, the first wife began a violent fight to throw her replacement out. The two women fought like tigers, inside the apart-

ment and out into the street. They knocked out teeth, tried to gouge eyes, and tore out handfuls of hair. At last, the bloody domestic struggle ended in victory for the Amazon from Spitzbergen who then, for good measure, proceeded to beat up her husband who had prudently stood aside during the fray. The vanquished second wife, bearing the marks of her beating, tearfully gathered her belongings, took her child and departed on the train for Moscow.

The Russians in the locker room found this incident a source of considerable amusement. It was one of the few really lively events that had happened in drab Vorkuta. The men speculated on what kind of domestic life their chastened comrade must be living with his engineer wife. I kept thinking of the stunned, evicted second wife taking that dreary train journey to Moscow with her child, a little boy who would in all likelihood never see his father again. What would become of her? Without special training, she would be obliged to find a taxing job in a factory and a room in some crowded apartment which she might have to share with others. And the boy would be relegated to a state nursery school.

"Free love," as advocated by atheistic Communism, is as big a fraud as most other doctrines the system has advanced for the "reform" of society! I saw again and again how it led to domestic disillusion and sometimes to life-long unhappiness.

One day one of our young work-crew superintendents announced that he had married. The girl and he had been living together in their little apartment for about six months when one evening they invited their friends in and said that they had been married that day at the civil

registry. The friends were delighted and broke out bottles of vodka for a celebration. It was not embarrassing to anyone that the couple was merely formalizing an already existing status. Such marriage announcements from persons living together often, in fact, came as a surprise to their friends. In this case, the formalization probably meant that the couple had decided they liked one another well enough to make the arrangement permanent and have children, or that they had found they had a child on the way and did not want to relinquish it to the state orphanage.

The young man and his wife were both fanatical Communists, graduates of the Communist Youth Movement where he had been a leader. They had both gone to youth camps from the age of fourteen. These Soviet youth camps are not conducted for recreation but involve hard work by young "volunteers" who harvest the crops in areas where there is labor shortage. There is marked relaxation of sexual restraints in this atmosphere and many illegitimate children are born from the casual couplings of such summer youth camp excursions. The Soviet state provides for the offspring who are taken into state orphanages where, removed from all modifying influences of family life, the children are raised to be zealous, dedicated Communists. Quite a few MVD agents are recruited from among the graduates of such state orphanages. They have no ties but their loyalty to the State, no allegiance to God or family, no principles to stand in the way of their performing any assignment given them.

When a young man marries a girl who is a dedicated member of the Communist Youth Movement, he does not look for purity in his bride. He knows that she has prob-

ably shared her favors with a number of other young men whom she has met in the movement. But even under Communism does this increase his respect for her? Of course not! Such promiscuity destroys the very basis for lasting love essential to a happy marriage.

Many Russians find relief from the unbearable tension and frustration of their personal lives in alcohol. The average Russian does not earn enough money to drink often. But when he can, he drinks to get drunk. And the Russians are drinking more heavily all the time, so that alcoholism is coming to be a serious problem in their society. This is attested by the increasingly thunderous warnings against losses of production resulting from alcoholism to be found in the communist press. The Russians were completely unable to understand my views of temperance although I tried to explain that it was part of a personal moral code, like refusing to swear. I would ask them, in turn, why they did not, if need be, take just one or two drinks, instead of drinking enough to get dead drunk. They could not understand my point: that limited alcoholic indulgence was preferable to intoxication. So far as they were concerned, the object of drinking was to get intoxicated, so that the world about them would take on a pleasant glow. It is a form of temporary release from the stark reality of their surroundings, and they have no moral scruples about it.

The licentiousness and debauchery which young people in Russia see all around them leads, of course, to juvenile delinquency the extent of which is obviously beginning to worry communist leaders. From the earliest days, the children learn dishonesty. Life is hard in a majority of families and if the children can obtain a few luxuries

from the State stores by petty shoplifting their parents do not reprimand them. After all, they are "only stealing from the government," an attitude not confined to Soviet Russia.

More serious still, children are also taught in school that they must constantly be on the lookout for "reactionaries" and, further, must report any neighbor who talks against Communism or acts suspiciously, even if this may come to involve their own parents. Children see, too, that the way to advancement in the Soviet system is to be ruthless in destroying whoever stands in your way, and to shift the blame adroitly to other persons when you make mistakes. The generation now growing up, which will eventually take over leadership of the country, is inevitably a cynical one deprived of ideals and of scruples.

I would be more seriously concerned, however, about the future of Russia and particularly about the young people coming to maturity in places like Vorkuta, if evil behavior were really "popular." Actually the Russians are surfeited with free and easy sex, alcoholism, petty dishonesty, widespread cursing and vulgarity of all kinds. They are hungering desperately for something better.

The Russian people are ripe today for Christian evangelism for much the same reasons that the pagans of Imperial Rome were ready to listen to the preaching of St. Peter. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has something to offer them that is far better than the uninspiring and hopeless way of life they have now. Will they respond in vast numbers to the message of Christianity? I believe I found the answer to that question as I worked among the Communists in the locker room at Vorkuta.

## *The MVD Men Read the Bible*

“**W**ELL, *Amerikanetz*, tell us about your rich American workers!”

A ripple of laughter would rise in the locker room as one of the husky MVD men, rubbing himself briskly with a towel after coming out of his shower, would open a typical badgering conversation with me. The men were intensely interested in hearing about America. Although they often ridiculed my answers—especially if other Communists were present—the ceaseless questions which they put to me showed me that they had grave doubts about the grossly distorted accounts of unemployment, race riots, and gangsterism in the United States which the Communist press constantly published. And no phase of American life interested them more than religion.

It was difficult to explain to them about our spiritual life. America's industrial accomplishments they could understand: automobiles and bathtubs are tangible things. Even though I told them about Detroit in the post-depression years, as I had known it when I left in 1938, a boy of fourteen, their eyes would open wide with wonder at the luxuries of life enjoyed by the typical worker. When I told

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them that the average assembly-line worker had his own automobile to drive to work; his own home with a yard around it, a home containing a radio, refrigerator, and a washing machine, and with an indoor bathroom; possibly he had also a little summer cottage by the lake, with an outboard motorboat, these things were difficult for the Russians to believe, but they could manage to visualize it. After all, a few of the wealthy industrial managers and party officials, the new elite of Russia, had attained a standard of life somewhat comparable to that of the average American factory worker.

But religion and the intangible spiritual values of American life were much more difficult to explain; when I finally did get the idea across to the Russians of what Christianity meant to me, and what the Christian moral code can mean to society, I could see that this had an impact on them even greater than my description of America's material luxuries.

To convince them of the truth of what I was saying, I tried to be a living Christian example myself there in their midst. They watched every step I took and listened critically to every word I spoke. As it turned out, this was a wonderful opportunity to testify for Our Lord, for these men were nearly all under forty years of age, that is, they had been brought up and educated since the Revolution of 1917 and were thoroughly indoctrinated with Communism. Some of them had never seen a church building, much less been inside one, and very few had ever seen a Bible. Only a few families owned Bibles in the old days for the rate of illiteracy was high and the people were poor. The Communists confiscated and burned all the Bibles they could find, and such few as remained are worn

from use and are kept carefully hidden away by their elderly owners.

In the schools, students are taught that Jesus was a Jewish mystic and religious fanatic put to death by the Roman authorities for radicalism. After His death, his cult was taken over by the Roman Empire to be used as an opiate to drug the workers by promising them a reward in an imaginary spiritual world after death to compensate for the drudgery they suffered here. Students are cautioned that belief in such religious superstition, or practice of its rites, constitutes anti-state activity.

Educated engineers and MVD security men knew no more about Christianity than that. If they had observed any religious ceremony at all, it was the surreptitious sprinkling of incense and holy water on the coffin of some aged relative or the scattering of sanctified earth upon the grave. They laughed the whole thing off as out-moded superstition. It is no wonder, then, that as I was apparently intelligent and young, they asked me why I believed in all this "nonsense." Since religion was only a superstition, they saw little point in all the atheistic propaganda with which they had been bombarded at school. Seeing no churches in use in their communities and few believers save old people, they were inclined to feel that Christianity was something that had largely disappeared with the advent of Marxism. Lectures on atheism went in one ear and out the other, as did so much of the incessant Communist propaganda. They did not really believe in militant atheism. They had no beliefs at all.

As we sat around the locker room on the late night shift, I could see the effect it was gradually making on them to learn that the ethical teachings of Jesus, as embodied in

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the Sermon on the Mount, are a central part of the Christian faith. When they first heard some of the words of the Master, they were as little children to whom new wonders are revealed. When they understood that such ideals as love, trust, honesty, idealism exist in the world, they began to hunger and thirst after them. And the slightest manifestation on my part of following these teachings impressed them—as, for instance, the fact that I did not steal their belongings out of the locker room despite the many chances I had to do so!

Also, I think perhaps it impressed them that I was actually carrying out the Lord's command to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44). Certainly they realized that I was not there because the Russians loved me, and it was borne in on them with equal certainty that I was very much their friend. The more intimately I knew these men, the more I liked them and the closer we became; they were not my enemies at all but fellow victims of the same system. And although they never said so, I sensed that this idea was beginning to burgeon in their minds too.

Communism seems unconsciously to compensate for its lack of spiritual values, and has tried to make a religion out of itself, creating its own gospel, prophets, evangelists, believers, heretics, fanatics, and even (secretly) skeptics. Marx and Engels are its prophets; their writings the gospel; Lenin the chief apostle and, in 1953 when I began to work in the locker room, Stalin was still its undisputed living godhead. But the communist "religion" has failed so consistently to meet men's spiritual needs that the temper of the religious climate in Russia today is disillusionment. In the locker room at the time of Stalin's death, I had a ringside seat to watch the effect upon lifelong Com-

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munists of the death of their living god. There was jubilation rather than mourning; they were devoutly thankful that he was gone. There can have been little or no shock when later the truth about the man came to light and he was denounced and discredited by his Party, nor was there great surprise when, still later, one after another of his successors fell by the wayside.

Even among our own ranks there in the room were cases of cruel injustice which must have disillusioned them all. We had one young supervisor, for instance, a completely dedicated Communist and a skillful blasting engineer. One day when something went wrong and a blast did not go off as scheduled, everyone in the mine knew that it was not his fault. He went up into the coal seam to check the cause, and then shouted a warning that saved the lives of several others; he himself did not make it to safety before the blast came and he was killed. Dead, he made a safe scapegoat for the authorities who would admit to no errors of their own: the delayed detonation was called a case of sabotage, and our self-sacrificing engineer called a "traitor" who had blown himself up in his efforts to wreck the mine.

The day after this happened, I was taking a walk around the compound when I saw a sight I shall never forget: the man's young widow and seven-year-old son trudging down the muddy road, pulling the little boy's express wagon on which was a rude pine coffin containing what was left of the father's body. This was the State's reward for loyal service, and only one of many striking examples open for all of us to see.

Just exactly how interested my friends were in Christianity came as a surprise to me. I wanted a Bible, and had

## MVD MEN READ THE BIBLE

had none since my imprisonment. Some of the Baltic prisoners had been receiving Bibles from their families hidden in food packages, and from time to time the guards would seize them and turn them over to the MVD. One day I found that the MVD were not destroying the Bibles, written in Russian, of course, but were reading them. I finally spoke to an elderly prisoner in charge of sweeping and dusting the MVD rooms, asking him if he could not get me one of the Bibles which I saw in plain view on an upper shelf. He refused gently, saying that he did not dare remove one as they would be certain to miss it. "Nonsense," I countered, "if they miss one they will simply think it has been thrown out."

"That's what you think, Noble," he told me seriously. "They know exactly how many Bibles they've got. They come in here at night sometimes and read them when they think no outsiders are looking. I don't dare take the chance."

As I look back on it now, I think I know why they were reading the Bibles. They were mystified by the faith of so many of their prisoners, a faith that even persecution could not stamp out. They had begun to wonder if they were not wrong, and if there were not a God, after all. They felt that they must try to find out for themselves what was in that Book, the most heavily banned behind the Iron Curtain.

Whatever the immediate cause, the fact remains that the MVD men, the hard, rugged core of the Soviet secret police, were slipping into that room secretly at night and reading the Bible. Can Christians of the Western world fail to realize what this means for the ultimate conversion of Communist Russia? Must we not recognize in this how

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deep is the spiritual hunger that exists in the Russian soul?

The Russians have as deep a need for love as any other people, but love is to be seen at present in only one phase of their lives. I was always struck by the tender devotion the Russians lavish on their children. In a land marked by general cynicism, distrust, and opportunism, this is the one outstanding human quality. Every Russian, no matter how hard-boiled, will spend many hours outdoors in the summer playing with his children. I became convinced that the reason these people so love children and enjoy being with them, is that the young child is innocent of guile and deception. His smile is genuine; his affection comes from the heart; and he does not attempt to hide any reaction.

Except where children are concerned, there is no place for love in Soviet society. The "Party line" is based upon hate, hate for the old Czarist system, hate for the Trotskyite heretics, hate for the capitalists of the West, hate for the dissident Tito, hate for other nations and other ideologies. Hatred is drummed into the people every day by incessant propaganda—yet love is what they crave! They are not beasts, but human beings. There is something finer and better in them than organized hatred.

The greatest weakness of the Soviet system, as I observed it, is that it does not fulfill the spiritual needs of the Soviet people. Whatever it has achieved for them in a material way or may achieve in future, they are not satisfied to be godless xenophobes. They long for the security of a faith in which they can believe, a faith based on God's eternal values, on man's capacity to love his fellow man.

When I discussed religion with the Russian men there

in the locker room during the quiet hours of the night shift, I could see that my answers about Christianity had an effect. I could see that they were hungry in their souls for the spiritual bread of life that only Christ can give. Nor was this hunger confined to the Russians whom I met in Vorkuta. One time, the chief engineer of our mine questioned me about religion after a vacation he had spent visiting relatives in Moscow. He was a fanatical Communist and he told me frankly that he was surprised to see the churches full of worshipers and particularly to notice the number of young people who were attending service. If old people went to church, he told me, he could understand it because they had been born under the superstitious influence of the old regime. But he said that it did not make sense to him for young people, given the advantage of a good Communist education, to risk their future careers in this way. He had sought me out, he said, to ask me what I thought could be the attraction those churches had for the young.

I replied that the young people were seeking in Christianity a meaning for life they were not finding in atheistic Communism. They were finding love for one another, respect for integrity and for the eternal worth of the human soul. They were finding Christ and, through Him, redemption and salvation. The engineer was angry at my forthright answer, but he was troubled by it too. He had to concede that these young people must be finding something worthwhile in the churches or they would not risk their preferment by going there. Communism was obviously failing them at some point. It was clear to him that religion was not going to die out with the older generation, as he had long believed.

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The Soviet system has been trying to turn out by assembly-line methods a nation of twentieth-century pagans. But apparently the theoreticians have miscalculated somewhere. On the basis of discussions I had with Communists, I would venture to say that their failure is this: Christianity is intrinsically superior to godlessness and wherever the Christian gospel has been preached in this world at any time in history, it has always defeated its adversaries. It conquered the paganism of ancient Rome; then converted the pagan barbarians who later overran Christian Rome; it swept the false gods from the ancient steppes of Russia; and in modern days it is overcoming great obstacles to win millions in Asia and Africa. Where Christianity is preached in Russia today, the modern paganism of Communism melts as does the ice of Vorkuta in the warm rays of the midsummer sun.

## *The Trial of Unanswered Prayer*

FOR NEARLY two years before my release, a group of Americans were praying for me every Wednesday night in a little church in Lincoln Park, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. While I labored in Vorkuta 5,000 miles away, my name was being borne on high by the earnest supplications of their prayer. These people whom I had never seen, of whom I had never heard, and who themselves knew me only as Charles Noble's missing son, prayed for me at every midweek service.

On the first Easter morning after my father's repatriation (he had been released on July 4, 1952, after seven years spent in East German prisons), he went looking for a sunrise service that he could attend. The first one he came to was at this little white church affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a small, evangelical denomination. My father's heart was heavy for he knew I was last seen with a group of prisoners at Weimar who had received long sentences at hard labor and were to be transported to the Soviet Union. To all his subsequent re-

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quests for information about me, the Russians had simply turned a bland face to the American authorities and said they knew nothing of my whereabouts.

On this Easter morning of 1953, my father had slipped into the church service and, as the congregation sang the joyous hymns of Easter, his heart was lifted up. Suddenly, he told me later, he was confident that all was well with me. His confidence was amply justified for this was the very time I was given my unexpected transfer from the dangerous work in the mine to the job in the locker room.

Professor Charles Shaw of the Detroit Bible Institute was conducting the sunrise service. At its conclusion, noting tears glistening in my father's eyes, he came up to him, greeted him, and asked him if there were any burden on his heart that he and his group could take to the Lord in prayer. When my father told him about his missing son, John, who was lost in a communist slave-labor camp, Dr. Shaw invited him to return for the midweek prayer service. My father did so and, as is their custom, he was asked if he could offer testimony to the Lord.

"As we heard Charles Noble tell briefly of his experience in communist prisons," Dr. Shaw was later to write me, "all of us were conscious we were in the presence of a man who had suffered much yet had a firm faith that God answers prayers.

"When he told us of his son Johnny, still held somewhere in Russia, not heard from in three years," Dr. Shaw continued, "the fact that John Noble was a prisoner of the Reds became a challenge to our faith and prayers. He was the subject of prayer every Wednesday night and of the daily prayers of those who took this burden upon their hearts. Eagerly, we watched for any news that

## THE TRIAL OF UNANSWERED PRAYER

might shed light on the whereabouts of Johnny. Days, weeks, and months passed and still we prayed. Never did Mr. Noble falter in the firm belief that John would come back to us."

As Professor Shaw wrote, days, weeks and months passed. How foolish, skeptics would say, that this little band of Christians in a church in distant America could expect to move the mighty Kremlin by their prayers. After all, the reason the Communists continued to hold me was that I knew too much. There was little use in hoping that such a prisoner would ever be released alive. Yet this small group prayed on and their ranks were swelled by students at Professor Shaw's classes at the Bible Institute. It was, as he said, a challenge to the power of prayer.

Meanwhile, in Vorkuta we too had new hope. Things seemed to be astir and moving. With Stalin's death in March, 1953, our spirits rose. One old prisoner who had lived under Stalinist tyranny for twenty-nine bitter years got down on his knees when Stalin's death was announced and said, "Thank God! Someone still looks out for the wretched!" He expressed the feelings of us all. During April and May, while the new Premier, Georgi Malenkov, made promises of peace and prosperity, we waited for an improvement in our condition. The Russians did institute one reform. Borrowing an idea from the capitalist incentive system, they began to pay us a few rubles bonus if we met our production goals. And, on June 18, 1953, came electrifying news. The workers in East Germany had revolted! They had thrown down their tools and were on strike. Even *Pravda* did not try to conceal the seriousness of the general strike.

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Then revolt swept into Vorkuta! Elsewhere<sup>1</sup> I have given a full account of all that occurred during the Vorkuta strike, the first, historic uprising of slave laborers in the Soviet Union. Suffice it to say that we drew up a list of demands, including review of the trials of all political prisoners, release of all who were proved innocent, and reduction of sentences for all who had served ten years or more (I myself had served eight). For a few days, the Russians, taken aback by the boldness of our stand, negotiated. Then they tried to deal with us with guns, as they have with all strikes in mines or factories since the glorious "revolt of the workers" in 1917. I was pinned against the administration building when the Russian troops opened fire on us. Praying desperately, I flattened myself against the wall. As I looked toward the gate, I saw an extraordinary sight: many of the Red Army men and even some of the MVD agents had deliberately disobeyed orders to fire on the unarmed strikers. One soldier stubbornly pointed his submachine gun at the ground. With a curse, an officer grabbed it from him and fired it point-blank at the workers.

But the Russians, faced with possible mutiny in their own ranks, hesitated to continue the slaughter. They retreated for twenty-four hours to try other means, and during this one-day period the most moving of all the worship services I attended at Vorkuta was conducted, a religious funeral for two of the strike leaders who had fallen. One was a Lithuanian named Machnevicius, the other a Ukrainian whom I did not know. For all the thousands who had died previously, no rites at all were permitted. Now, for these two fallen heroes, carpenters in

<sup>1</sup> I WAS A SLAVE IN RUSSIA.

the woodworking shop had made handsome coffins. The bodies were laid out in the compound side by side, and more than 1,000 men knelt in prayer while a Ukrainian priest solemnly intoned the office of the dead. It was the first public Christian worship service ever conducted in this bleak area of the world. After the service the men filed by the biers and each dropped a tiny piece of some sweet into the coffins—an old custom in their land, the Ukrainians told us.

We now appointed a strike committee to deal with the Russians. This group included a former professor at the University of Leningrad; a brave Pole who spoke on behalf of all the foreign prisoners; and a clergyman, a red-bearded Russian monk. Apparently, the monk had resisted the Communists for years until, like the nuns whose story I told, his tormentors decided simply to let him alone. He lived in another barrack, kept strictly to himself, and did not have any work assignment. The Communists discouraged all conversation with him and, for the sake of his fellow prisoners, he never said much. Age and suffering had lined his face but his eyes blazed as he addressed General Maslennikov, sent up by Moscow to arbitrate the strike. He spoke to the general in biting words, as though he were addressing the personal representative of Satan on Earth. The aged monk was so eloquent in demanding a redress of our grievances that it reminded me of the words the signers of our Declaration of Independence had used to denounce the tyranny of King George III. I only wish his denunciation could have been preserved for posterity.

Maslennikov made a show of negotiating but, on the morning of August 1, 1953, he lost his patience and

again resorted to machine guns. This time he selected elite Communist guards who could be counted on to fire at unarmed workers when ordered. In all, he killed more than 1,000 men before the strike was broken.

Then 7,000 more men were arrested. From our compound alone four hundred were seized, more than one in every ten. At least 2,000 were publicly executed while others were arrested and sent to eastern Siberia where, we were told, they were liquidated. Only a few received heavy additional sentences and were taken to various other labor camps. One of the few who returned was the red-bearded monk. He alone among all those who spoke out for the prisoners at the meeting with General Maslennikov returned after the mass arrests.

The Russians again left him strictly alone in his little corner of the barracks, as they had done before. What power he had to make the Russians respect him so I do not know, but he was a "believer" and the less the Russians had to do with the "believers" the better they liked it. The "veriuischii" had a power that even the MVD respected.

The strike was now completely broken and our working conditions became worse, not better. During the strike, hundreds of men who had never prayed before joined us in prayer. They had prayed simply for the success of the strike. Now their hopes were dashed and they said bitterly that God had not answered their appeal.

The Russian guards were keeping a much closer eye on us and it was difficult to hold worship services. For a few weeks, even our Baptist meetings were discontinued. It was a time for the testing of our faith. How hard it is

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to be patient when things do not work out the way we want, how difficult to understand that things must happen in God's good time!

In distant America the prayers which were being offered for me also seemed to be going unanswered. A full year had passed since my father first went to that Easter service and still he had had no word of any kind from me. He had been rebuffed in every effort he made to get the State Department to make further inquiries on my behalf. The officials in Washington said that, without actual proof that I was in Soviet hands, there was nothing more they could do since the Russians denied holding me.

Professor Shaw interested a Michigan Congressman in my case, Representative Alvin F. Bentley (R., Mich.) who, prior to his election in 1952, was a State Department foreign service officer. Mr. Bentley was stationed at Budapest when the Communists took over Hungary and was an official American observer at the infamous trial of Josef, Cardinal Mindszenty, when that great Roman Catholic leader was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1949. Mr. Bentley knew of communist tactics at first hand and, although my father was not a resident of his district (the Owosso area), he agreed to take up my case with the White House. But no sooner did this happen than on March 1, 1954, three Puerto Rican terrorists drew guns in the gallery of the U.S. House of Representatives and began indiscriminately shooting at members on the floor.

Five Congressmen were shot down, the most seriously wounded being Rep. Bentley who was not expected to live through the night! At the Lincoln Park Church and all through the nation prayers were offered for his recov-

ery. Next morning, he was near death. The Chaplain of the House of Representatives, Dr. Bernard Braskamp, called on him.

"Shall we pray?" the Chaplain is reported to have asked.

"Yes," whispered the Congressman, "but first let us pray for those who did the shooting. They did not know what they were doing."

With such an indomitable Christian spirit, Congressman Bentley passed through the crisis and, in a few days, was on the road to an almost miraculous recovery.

Meanwhile, in this same week of March, 1954, although my family could not have known it, there was further bad news for us prisoners. A directive came from camp headquarters at Vorkuta that all men who were able-bodied should be performing hard labor and those not on such assignments were to be reassigned immediately. The camp authorities were also determined to break up "fraternizing" between the free Russians and the prisoners. Abruptly, I was transferred from the locker room to a work detail at Mine 29 where my job was to unload timber from railroad cars. One hundred miles south of Vorkuta lay the forests of the Ural Mountains. There teams of slave laborers were constantly at work felling trees. The logs were dragged to railroad spurs and loaded onto cars for transportation up the long line to Vorkuta where they were cut into props to shore up the ceilings of the mine tunnels. Logs went up the railroad and coal came down. Sometimes when I saw the amount of lumber going into the mines and the poor quality of the coal coming out, I wondered if the Russian economy was gaining anything by the exchange, but the

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Soviet government did not worry about such considerations as depletion of its vast forests.

This new labor assignment was the hardest of all those I endured in my entire decade of imprisonment. Three or four of us lifted each log and pushed it off the pile, back-breaking work in the fullest sense of the term. Only the youngest and hardiest prisoners could do it competently and, having passed my thirtieth birthday and lived for nine years on a substandard diet, I was far from being in good condition. Many months in the warm, humid air of the locker room made the bitter cold outside almost impossible to bear. I was on the night-shift and even in April the temperature would drop to 40 degrees below zero. The snow whipped our faces and blinded our eyes. Our wrists became red and raw due to exposure when our coat sleeves would pull away from the top of our gloves as we lifted the heavy logs.

As Easter Day came, in 1954, my situation seemed more desperate than at any time since the day of my arrest. Once again, I could feel my body being destroyed by overwork and malnutrition. Every bone ached with agony. I had served less than four years in Vorkuta and eleven years of my sentence still stretched endlessly before me!

My constant prayers had the same tenor as a stanza of that great hymn of George Croly's, "Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart":

Teach me that Thou art always nigh,  
Teach me the struggle of the soul to bear,  
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh,  
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.

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It is hard to learn the patience of unanswered prayer but, when the hour is darkest, if the roots of our faith go deep we will trust in God.

Just as the Arctic blizzards blow their worst before the midnight sun returns and the weather changes, so at this very moment I was about to be given an opportunity to get my first message out to the free world.

## *Land of Disenchantment*

AS I LABORED with the logs, the midnight sun began to return and the spring thaw set in; in time, the snow melted, the entire tundra filled with color, and a host of tiny Arctic flowers appeared. And with the signs of spring came signs that my mission at Vorkuta was drawing to a close. Early in May came the chance for which I had waited prayerfully for nearly nine years to get a message through to the outside world. Quite a number of German prisoners were in Vorkuta and some of them had been given permission to write home, one of the small concessions that had emerged after the bloody East German strikes of the previous year.

I sent out an odd postcard indeed: it was signed with another man's name, addressed to someone I had called "uncle" as a child, and referred to myself as "the noble nephew." But it served its purpose, eventually reaching my father who identified my handwriting and at last had proof to show to the State Department authorities at home. Later, from the repatriation camp at Potma, where I stayed from June 30, 1954, to the first week of January, 1955, I sent another card, this one signed with my own

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name and addressed to an aunt in Germany. She sent it on to my father, of course, and she also sent me a parcel of food. However, it was not the food that mattered so much when her welcome parcel arrived as the picture of my father she enclosed. From that, I believed at last that he had been released and was alive and well.

Father had had previous word about me from an indirect source. Homer Cox, an American GI who had been arrested by the Russians in East Berlin and had wound up in Vorkuta serving a long term as a "spy," had been released unexpectedly in December, 1953. From time to time, I learned through the camp grapevine of other American prisoners in Vorkuta, just as, evidently, the grapevine had carried word to Cox about me. He had told newspaper reporters on his release that there was an "English prisoner" named Noble at Vorkuta. A writer for a major British daily looked into the matter and came to the conclusion that it was I. A friend sent my father a clipping of the British story.

And now, nearly a year later, came my card which permitted my family to bring the powerful machinery of the U.S. State Department into play on my behalf.

The excitement of leaving Vorkuta was indescribable. I was sitting eating my salted fish, cabbage, and black bread, as usual, when on the tenth of June, 1954, the supervisor came around and told me that I was leaving camp. My first reaction was that he must be making a clumsy joke, but he wasn't the joking type, so I went to see the chief of the camp who had sent the message. Sure enough, it was true: first thing next morning I was to be ready and waiting at the camp gate to be picked up. I had never prayed for release but only that the Lord sustain me until

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the day came for my return to freedom. And now that day seemed to be at hand.

Next morning, as instructed, I stood at the camp gate with my remaining possessions in a small bundle, and watched the other prisoners start off for their day's labor. A Russian guard came by and picked me up in a jeep. To my surprise, we stopped a mile down the road at the entrance to another compound and took on two more American prisoners. They were William Marchuk and William Verdine, young American GI's who had been arrested after allegedly crossing the demarcation line into the Russian Zone of Germany. They had received long sentences at hard labor as "spies" but, like me, were being released from Vorkuta unexpectedly.

Down the long rail line to Moscow, some 1600 miles away, we now went with two MVD officers accompanying us. On this journey, I again had an opportunity to observe Russian life at first hand. I was astonished by the number of beggars we encountered at every station. Several ragged, starving men said that they were crippled veterans of the war and loudly complained that the government was not helping them, something they would not have dared say if it was not patently true. Poor as I was and undernourished, yet some of these men were in far worse condition than I, and I gave them a few of the rubles I had earned at slave labor. When I did so, they crossed themselves and said fervently, "God bless you!" As I watched them move down the car to other compartments, I noticed that they made this religious sign every time they received alms. Thus, in the midst of an atheistic society, charity is still recognized as related to the Christian religion.

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Another vivid symbol of the survival of Christian tradition came into view as we neared Moscow and we began passing through some of the older towns and villages. In every one I could see the domed spire of a Russian Orthodox church. Whether these buildings were still being used for worship or not, I do not know, but I consider it significant that they were still standing and that the Communists, despite their hostility to organized religion, have never dared tear them down or alter their distinctive architecture. In the midst of an atheistic society, the skyline is still dominated by the great onion domes of the Christian churches.

In Moscow we found quite a reception committee awaiting us, about twenty MVD agents! The door to freedom was not yet open for me. Instead, we three Americans were taken to Butirskaya Prison and, after a few days, were escorted under heavy guard to a train which conveyed us to the repatriation camp at Potma, located 200 miles southeast of Moscow.

Potma is the center through which pass prisoners who have completed long sentences of ten, fifteen or even twenty years at hard labor. And here once again I had to learn the patience of unanswered prayer as the days lengthened into weeks, the weeks into months, while somewhere in the mysterious recesses of the Kremlin the question was debated as to whether we should be released, sent back to labor camp, or perhaps executed.

In our case, I believe that the Kremlin had decided to put us "on ice" for awhile, hoping that the hue and cry from America would die down. I am sure that the Soviet security chiefs would have preferred to keep me in custody the rest of my life because I had seen too much. On

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the other hand, the foreign policy of the Soviet Union was one of official "smiles" at the United States as they prepared the groundwork for the famous Summit Conference at Geneva in 1955. My fate would be determined, as would that of the other prisoners at Potma, not by considerations of justice for the individual, but by those of expediency for Moscow.

There was an unusually large number of Yugoslavs in the Potma camp. Their sentences had long since run out but they were being held as human pawns in an international chess game while the Kremlin wooed the dissident Marshal Tito. Week after week they waited, not knowing what fate held in store for them.

I was disappointed but not bitter to find my hopes for freedom once more dashed. I could see the hand of God moving slowly. I had been released from Vorkuta and its inhuman toil and had been preserved from all dangers there, just as previously I had been saved in the Communist prisons in East Germany. I was confident that God would preserve me now at Potma and I remained quietly in prison, performing whatever further mission I could, content to wait for my freedom until in God's good time it should be granted.

One group of prisoners at Potma suffered particularly. These were victims of tuberculosis, invalidated home because they were no longer able to perform any useful labor. Most of these prisoners were bedridden and were spitting blood. For many, freedom would come too late. But others showed a dogged determination to live. Although freedom must have seemed an empty reward in their weakened physical condition, they looked forward to it with hope and were determined to live to greet the

day when they could pass through the camp gates as free men.

The tuberculosis victims received little attention. The other prisoners were afraid to help them for fear they would contract the dread disease themselves. I was confident that God would somehow protect me and began to do what I could to ease their suffering. I got a supply of empty tin cans from the kitchen for them to spit into. It was messy work to try to clean up their bunks and empty these cans each day, but they were so pathetically grateful that I did not mind. After a few days, Verdine offered to help me. Together we made notable progress. We often used to talk about the Bible and faith in God and one day he said to me, "Johnny, you're doing more for me than anyone else in my life."

At Christmas time, 1954, the people who had the assignment of gathering firewood for the barracks brought in a number of little evergreens and we decorated the tubercular ward for Christmas. We had no services of organized worship at Potma. The prison population was too transient to permit the necessary organization. But on Christmas Eve we gathered in the tubercular barracks and sang a few Christmas carols. Then one of the t.b. victims, whom we knew to be desperately ill but who refused to let this quench his spirit, rose and made a little speech. He offered thanks to God that all present had managed to survive another year and then he expressed in words of gentle thanks the gratitude the t.b. patients felt for the care we were giving them.

While in Russia, I had met Russian officials, Russian soldiers, Russian fellow prisoners but not until I reached the camp at Potma did I meet someone who had moved

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in Kremlin circles: Madame N.K., former wife of the man who has now achieved his ambition of becoming Premier and First Party Secretary. Mme. Gorskaya (for she had resumed her maiden name) has now been released, I have heard, but at that time she had served an eight-year sentence at hard labor in Siberia which had long since run out, yet she was still being held. The reason for this, she believed, was that K. who, in late 1954, ranked about fourth in the Kremlin hierarchy, was making a last desperate effort to reach the top and for some time had not wanted her around to witness his rise. Mme. Gorskaya had been an opera singer in Warsaw and Moscow before her marriage. She still had a beautiful voice and used occasionally to sing to us. Her husband, she said, was driven by ambition and cared little for his family or for anything except his own advancement. They had been married for a number of years and had a son and a daughter when suddenly one day she was arrested, denounced, and sentenced to hard labor in the mines. That same week N.K. divorced her.

The personal life of the present leader of the Soviet Union is, I am told, cloaked in secrecy. The plump, stolid peasant woman who is currently called Mme. K. is rarely seen and never speaks to foreigners. She and her imposing spouse are almost never together in public. It may be that even K. is a little embarrassed by details of his life and, in that respect at least, a fitting figurehead for the people over whom he rules. In his own power-hungry, boastful, and often bibulous way K., I believe, stands for Soviet man, the sinner in process of disillusion who would abolish God because he can no longer stand the sight of his own defiance, the man disenchanted with

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atheism just as every sinner against God in any land or age sooner or later becomes disenchanted with his sin.

When I left Russia, as a foreigner who had seen and learned more about the Soviet people than most visitors are ever privileged to do, I knew that I was leaving the land of disenchantment.

It was still a long way, and an age of time, to West Berlin.

## *Return to Freedom*

**W**HEN I got ready to leave the repatriation camp at Potma for Moscow on January 2, 1955, I had only one possession in the world except my prison clothes: a book of Bible stories in German that another prisoner had given me a month before, the only religious book I had had during my entire confinement. But even this I did not take with me; an Austrian girl at Potma had asked me for it.

In Moscow we saw the Kremlin. At one corner of the Kremlin wall is an ancient, imposing Orthodox church. Scaffolding surrounded it and some reconstruction work was being done. The officer in charge told us that it was the first time since the Revolution that any repairs on churches had been made. Why this restoration was going on at that time I do not know but at least within the walls of the Kremlin itself stands a mute symbol of God, one which is not being allowed to crumble and disappear.

In countless ways, the foreigner can see how deep the religious tradition runs in Russian life. In everyday speech, the Russian people are constantly calling upon God—albeit many times blasphemously—to right their

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wrongs or punish their enemies. That subconscious recognition is always present in the Russians and I was reminded of the communist official in Vorkuta who, when he arrived at the camp movie theater and found a seat still vacant, crossed himself and said "Thank God!"

While we were in Moscow, Marchuk and I were lodged in a luxurious suburban villa where General Von Paulus, captured German Commander at Stalingrad, had been entertained while the Russians were trying to win him over to the communist side. For the first time in nearly a decade, I now slept between clean sheets on a comfortable bed and wore a new suit of civilian clothes. A smartly uniformed colonel and several lesser officers, smiling and courteous, spent three days escorting us around the city. The situation was incongruous. Here were two former slave laborers, subjected for years to humiliation and degradation, now being treated as honored guests of the Soviet government.

It was January 5, Christmas Eve by the Russian Orthodox calendar, when I walked through the Moscow streets for the last time; I could only look around with sorrow at those other prisoners, the Russian people themselves, who were not going to get away from Communist tyranny so soon or so easily as I. The next day, their own neglected Christmas Day, I would be on my way to Berlin. Thanks to my father's authentication of my handwriting on the postal card, the wheels had begun in God's good time to turn. Congressman Bentley, now recovered, had taken the case to President Eisenhower, and Charles E. Bohlen, our Ambassador to Russia, had set in motion the final "investigation" by the Soviet state.

When I passed through that last door into West Berlin

and freedom, one of my first stops was at the American Military Hospital. After my check-up and in spite of being so emaciated, with calluses on hands, wrists, and shoulders, the doctors said I was in perfect condition. They could hardly understand this—but I could. Once more, at the end as at the beginning, God had shown me His hand.

When I went into my aunt's Berlin apartment with her (she had formally identified me at American Headquarters), the radio was playing the grand old hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God" (*Nun Danket*). We did not say a word, but just stood listening with our heads bowed. And although when I found my mother and father in New York on January 17, no radio was on, the *Nun Danket* was playing louder than ever in my heart. By January 19 I was home in Detroit and on the twenty-second, at a reception given for me at the Detroit Bible Institute, I wanted to meet all those people who had prayed for me on Wednesday nights. It was a wonderful time for all of us, for our prayers had indeed been answered.

The Lord, who had literally prepared a table for me in the presence of mine enemies when I was starving in Dresden Prison, now filled my cup to overflowing with human, as well as divine, love and happiness. To top it all, came my happy marriage. Professor Shaw, who had led the prayers for me at the Lincoln Park Church, introduced me to his son Herbert. We became friends and one day Herbert urged me to visit his wife's family when I went to Chicago. There were still a couple of good-looking sisters, he said! After my arrival in Chicago that evening, I went to call on Mr. and Mrs. L. H. Hedstrom in suburban Bloomington. The moment a beautiful light-haired girl,

## I FOUND GOD IN SOVIET RUSSIA

their daughter Ruth, came down the stairs, my heart skipped a beat and I knew that Herbert had not exaggerated.

In a remarkably short time, I had arranged that Ruth spend her two-week vacation with her relatives in my home town, Detroit, and before her visit was over she had accepted my ring. At Thanksgiving we were married at the Bible Church of Wheaton, Illinois, the campus church of Wheaton College. If I had searched the whole world during those ten agonizing years, I could never have found a bride so sweet and lovely. Truly, the Lord had rewarded me far beyond my deserts.

About the same time I also received the rite of Christian baptism, confirming at last the commitment to Christ which I had made alone in my cell in prison ten years earlier, and my new life had begun—the life God had saved that I might be His witness.

"... not just a bleak account of the terrible things that happened to John Noble during ten years in the concentration camps of Muehlberg and Buchenwald, and prisons all the way from Dresden to the Arctic, but an amazing account of the survival of Christian faith in Communist prisons and camps he has known." — Billy Graham in the Introduction

"An epic of our day." — The Life of Faith



**THE AUTHOR** — Born in the United States, John Noble and his family were living in Germany all through the Hitler regime. Shortly after V-E Day in 1945, he disappeared into the Russian Zone in Germany. For the next ten years he was a prisoner of the Communists. While in solitary confinement in a Communist cell he experienced conversion.