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2023

DOI (link to publisher)
[10.5463/thesis.481](https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.481)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Nemeti, M.-F. (2023). The Political Theology of Richard Wurmbrand: A Case Study on the Tension Between Christianity and Communism in Wurmbrand's Life and Thought. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. <https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.481>

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VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF RICHARD WURMBRAND

A Case Study on the Tension Between Christianity and Communism in Wurmbrand's Life
and Thought

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor of Philosophy aan
de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. J.J.G. Geurts,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de Faculteit Religie en Theologie
op maandag 18 december 2023 om 9.45 uur
in een bijeenkomst van de universiteit,
De Boelelaan 1105

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
1. STATE, SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN THE ROMANIA OF LATE MODERNITY	36
1.1 Monarchy, Dictatorship, Politics and the Churches (1866-1944).....	37
1.1.1. A.I. Cuza and the Churches	37
1.1.2. Carol I and the Churches	41
1.1.3. Ferdinand I and the Churches	44
1.1.4. Carol II, The Legion of Archangel Michael and the Churches	48
1.1.5. Mihai I, Marshall Antonescu and the Churches	51
1.2. Steps Toward “Popular Democracy” (1944-1948).....	54
1.2.1. Annihilation of Political Opposition	57
1.2.2. Subordination of the Religious Realm	58
1.3. Stalinism and National Communism (1948-1965)	67
1.3.1. Subjugation of Civil Society, Intellectual life and Culture	69
1.3.2. Communist Church Management	72
1.4. The Jewish Dimension	77
1.5. Preliminary Conclusions	88
2. RICHARD WURMBRAND – A BIOGRAPHY	91
2.1. Family and Childhood (1909-1924).....	93
2.2. The Communist Activist and Siguranța Asset (1924-1937)	94
2.3. Jewish Christian Convert (1937-1941).....	103
2.4. Underground Christian pastor (1941-1948).....	110
2.5. Prisoner: First Term (1948-1956).....	119
2.5.1. Calea Rahovei Detention	119
2.5.2. Ministry of Interior Prison	121
2.5.3. Văcărești Prison	123
2.5.4. Târgu Ocna Prison Sanatorium	125
2.5.5. Craiova and other Prisons	126
2.6. Prisoner: Second Term (1959-1964)	127
2.6.1. Uranus Detention Center	129
2.6.2. Gherla Prison	129
2.7. Voice of the Underground Church Worldwide (1965-2001)	132
2.8. Preliminary Conclusions	145
3. A POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF MARXIST COMMUNISM	147
3.1. A Concept of the Times	147
3.2. Communism Anti-Theistic Political Religion.....	155
3.2.1. Communist Elite Under Evil Influence	155
3.2.1.1. Karl Marx	156
3.2.1.2. Friedrich Engels and Other Communist Leaders	163
3.2.2. The “Pitfalls” of Communist Ideology	169
3.2.2.1. Militant Anti-Theism	170
3.2.2.2. A New (Political) Religion	174

3.2.2.3. Limited Materialistic Perspective	179
3.2.2.4. Incompatibility with Human Nature	185
3.2.3. The “Bitter Fruit” of Communist Reign	188
3.2.3.1. The Reign of Lies and Deceit	188
3.2.3.2. The Reign of Demonic Terror	191
3.2.3.3. The Reign of Economic Failure	197
3.3. Preliminary Conclusions	201
4. A POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF THE VARIEGATED CHRISTIAN CHURCH	206
4.1. The American Context	207
4.2. The Official Church	217
4.2.1. Historically Compromised	217
4.2.2. Compromised Leadership	222
4.2.3. God’s Tool	227
4.3. The Underground Church.....	229
4.3.1. General observations	230
4.3.2. Corpus of Beliefs	234
4.3.2.1. Unsystematic Theology	234
4.3.2.2. Based on the Sacrificial Paradigm of Jesus Christ	239
4.3.2.3. Based on Unity with The Man of Sorrows	243
4.3.2.4. Based on the Model of The Early Church	252
4.3.2.5. Based on Lives of Saints and Martyrs	258
4.3.3. Organization	263
4.4. Preliminary Conclusions	270
FINAL CONCLUSIONS	277
SUMMARY	295
BIBLIOGRAPHY	299

INTRODUCTION

The journey of exploring the life of a person, in order to discover what someone was thinking at a certain time, about a certain topic or a certain array of topics, is a complex undertaking to say the least. The existence of a person is moulded, shaped, and reshaped by a complex set of factors and the endeavour to decipher some of this intricate process can be challenging. Through the peruse of the present work the reader can attain a clearer perspective of an outstanding life shaped by extraordinary times.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand (1909-2001) from Romania was one of the individuals who, after many years of communist imprisonment because of his religious beliefs, brought to the western world the truth about the religious persecution suffered by the people of Romania. His theological thinking is a particular theological contribution to the field of Church and State relationships. The complicated relationship between the Church and the State, that is the rapport between the spiritual power and the temporal power, still presents interest for researchers and for the main public. This relationship took many forms in history. Sometimes, it meant close collaboration between the two for a mutual benefit, and at other times the representatives of the State attempted and succeeded to subject the Church to their own interests.

To this day there is a lack of scientific research in examining the theological contribution of Wurmbrand to this ever-growing field of Church and State relationships. It is my aim to fill this gap in our knowledge. It is important that younger generations of Christians, who live in times of freedom and democracy, understand that in Romania in times of communism, when the oppressive state did everything in its power to subject and control the religious realm, some of our forefathers, people like Wurmbrand, fought against this. He did this, paying a high personal cost, to keep the Christian faith alive and to convey it to the coming generations. His thoughts on how the Christian Church and the Christian individual should relate to the oppressive, secular State gives us valuable information in dealing

with similar situations that can still be found in the present in different areas of the world.

1. The scope of the study

The theological exploration of the thinking of Wurmbrand in the area of church and state relationships, because of its complexity, must be situated and conducted considering the historical, geographical, and political context of its time. The historical timeframe of the present work is mainly subscribed to the life of Wurmbrand, the years 1909-2001. Given the complexity of the State and Church relationships in Romania, in order to establish a broader context and a better understanding of the subject this work also addresses shortly relevant events starting with the reign of the Romanian ruler A.I. Cuza in 1866. To motivate this incursion before the time of Wurmbrand, we must mention that Cuza introduced extensive reforms in the Romanian religious realm that limited the power of the Orthodox Church and subjecting it to the power of the national state, setting a path followed more or less by the coming Romanian rulers until the arrival of the totalitarian communist regime during the life of Wurmbrand.

2. Setting the stage: Church and State and Richard Wurmbrand in Romania

Researchers approached the difficult relationship between the eastern European religious realm and the Communist regimes even before the demise of these regimes. For example, the collection of articles edited by Pedro Ramet/Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*¹, as a result of a conference in 1982, deals with this topic and also *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR*² touched, amongst others, on the case of Romania.

¹ Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984). is the result of the Conference "Religion and Nationalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe" held at University of California in 1982.

² Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987)., see also Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Duke University Press, 1988).

The year 1989 witnessed the beginning of the end of communism in Eastern Europe. It also brought the demise of the communist regime of Romania and ushered in the beginning of the much-expected era of liberty. Freedom of speech and the gradual opening of various state-controlled archives for researchers in the 1990's made possible the writing of a series of valuable works, series of articles and books written by academics, historians and theologians from Romania and abroad. These analyse the way the communist totalitarian regimes of eastern Europe came to power, controlled their states, and the multifaceted relationship that existed between the spiritual realm and the temporal realm in this context.

2.1. Histories of Postwar Europe and Eastern Europe under Communism

Concerning Eastern Europe and the communist states, British-American historian Tony Judt's *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*³ masterfully chronicles the history of Europe after the devastating World War Two. His work utilizes the research done in six languages, which covers thirty-four countries spanning sixty years, and uses sources newly available after the dissolution of the Iron Curtain. He created a truly comprehensive account of the old continent's recent past. The postwar Europe, based on the negotiated spheres of influence, can be separated in Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Judt describes the radical transformation that happened in the Eastern European countries under the Soviet communist influence. He argues that the Soviet Union saw in communism the solution to old prewar problems and thus the whole Eastern European block suffered the consequences of the forced imposition of communist ideology upon themselves.

British political scientist Tom Gallagher in *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milosevic*⁴ focuses on two centuries of the historically troubled area of the Balkans. In Gallagher's view, many of the region's problems are of external origin. The instability, chaos, extremism, interethnic conflicts, and the fragmentation of political power that gave a bad reputation for this region stem from

³ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

⁴ Tom Gallagher, *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milosevic* (Routledge, 2013).

proximity to great powers and the political meddling in their internal affairs. The geo-political interests of Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, and, at the end, the United States, clashed in the Balkans. Here, Russia had imperial aspirations before the 1917 Revolution and after the Second World War the communist Soviet Union had an unprecedented expansion. Gallagher points out that the West is very much to blame because, historically, it had a reputation of meddling in Balkan affairs but never cared enough to work out lasting solutions for the complex problems of the region.

American journalist and historian Anne Applebaum, in her *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*⁵, masterfully describes the way the Soviet Communists, along with the local communists, subjected the national states of Eastern Europe, including Romania, to their totalitarian agenda, crushing all opposition. Her work employs extensive research in archives from government ministries, Polish military archives, secret police archives from Poland, Hungary, and Berlin, and the Russian state archives, as well as other archives and secondary material published by national researchers from eastern European countries. She also investigated the programmatic destruction of civil society and of small businesses from these countries by conducting in-person interviews with people who personally experienced those times. Concerning the religious establishment, an integral part of the civil society, but perceived by the communists as reactionary enemies, she unveils the way the communists sought not to destroy churches but to infiltrate and corrupt them. They could not tolerate the Churches continuing to be sources of moral authority and sources of alternative ideology. Their final goal was to shape these organisations into vehicles of state propaganda and eliminate all religious elements that stood in their way.

2.2. Histories of Romania under Communist rule

⁵ Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013).

British-Romanian historian Dennis Deletant, in his *Romania Under Communist Rule*,⁶ approaches the case of Romania from the establishment of the Romanian Communist Party in 1921 to the December revolution that led to the overthrow of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989. Based on extensive research in Romanian archives, including the secret police archives, and contacts with late political dissidents, especially poets and critics, he presents the Romanian communist regime's ascension to power, with the help of the Soviet Union, from 1947 to 1955. This period is followed by the Romanian Communist's struggle to achieve autonomy from 1956 to 1969, which resulted in the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania and the ascension to power of the last communist dictator. The final period that Deletant approaches is from 1969 to 1989, the time of the self-styled neo-Stalinist dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose regime ends with the 1989 December revolution.

Romanian-American historian and political scientist Vladimir Tismăneanu, in *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc*⁷ (*Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*), presents a comprehensive history of the Communist Party from Romania. Tismăneanu traces the inception of the small clandestine revolutionary group in the 1920s and follows their path through the years of ascension to national power in 1944, to their demise in 1989, and to its surviving elements after the 1989 revolution. Based on documents from Romanian national archives, Secret Police archives, and interviews with late party members from the Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceaușescu periods, he narrates the fascinating story of how the once belittled Romanian communists came to power with Soviet backing and, in time, managed to achieve a significant degree of autonomy from Moscow. He also examines the role of the Romanian communist regimes in international contexts like those of the Sino-Soviet conflict, the Middle East, European communism, and European security. Tismăneanu, positioning the ascension and demise of communism from Romania within the context of the world

⁶ Dennis Deletant, *Romania Under Communist Rule* (Bucharest: Civic Academy Foundation, 2006).

⁷ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (București: Polirom, 2005).

communist revolutionary movement, demonstrates that the history of communism in one country can help us to understand the development of communism on a macro scale in the twentieth century.

2.3. Political Religions in Totalitarian Regimes

Tismăneanu also presents in *Despre comunism: Destinul unei religii politice*⁸ (About Communism: The Destiny of a Political Religion) communism as a radical political, economic, moral, social, and cultural doctrine. Tismăneanu's approach to this matter is twofold. He combines the theoretical approach of political science with the genre of the memoirs from the era of radical ideologies, repressive regimes and their horrors. For Tismăneanu the communist doctrine is a political myth, a secular religion, a meta-narrative that had the audacious claim of explaining the functioning of the world and the mystery of life. According to Tismăneanu, communist doctrine can be viewed as a political religion given its universalist aims, its eschatological promises, and its all-encompassing ambitions, whose aim is fundamental transformation. The final aim of communism is the departure from the old problematic socio-political order and power structures and the creation of a New Man leading to the creation of an entirely new civilization that leads to a Golden Age.

At this point, we must mention that the discussion about political religions has a history that reaches back to the first half of the twentieth century and the emergence of modern totalitarian regimes. The work of German-American political philosopher Eric Voegelin, *The Political Religions*,⁹ must be mentioned here. According to Voegelin, the movements of his time were not only political but had a significant religious element as well. Looking into history, through the time of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, the problematic religious Middle Ages, English Puritanism, and Modernity, he saw that the political order was legitimated through symbolic, religious narratives that linked these societies to a higher-order of existence.

⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Despre comunism, Destinul unei religii politice* (București: Humanitas, 2011).

⁹ Eric Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Vol.5: Modernity without Restraint (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

Analysing the Nazi movement, he concluded that it was a political religion that emerged as a result of the secularization of the human spirit in the time of Modernity. Religion and Christianity were rejected and were replaced by new political religions with their own religious symbolism. Totalitarian political ideologies like German National Socialism and Marxist Communism are such political religions.

Italian historian Emilio Gentile, in his *Politics as Religion*,¹⁰ a specialist in totalitarian regimes, especially on fascism, argues that in modern history, politics often assumed the features of religion and went through a process of sacralization. Politics, according to Gentile, took upon itself the right to define the meaning and purpose of human life. Political constructs like the nation, state, and party became objects of devotion and adoration. According to Gentile, diverse secular political regimes like fascism, communism, and liberal democracies, like the American state, depended on faith, rituals, and symbols borrowed from the religious realm. Sacralised politics can manifest itself as a civil religion in democracies but can adopt the form of a political religion in totalitarian contexts.

2.4. The Romanian Communist State and the Romanian Christian Confessions

Turning to the relationship between the Romanian Communist state and the religious realm, in general, researchers focused on the Orthodox church from Romania because of its prominent role in the country. Olivier Gillet, in *Religion et Nationalisme L'Ideologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le Regime Communiste*,¹¹ (*Religion and Nationalism: The Ideology of the Romanian Orthodox Church Under the Communist Regime*) unveils how the Orthodox Church compromised with the Communist regime. We learn from his work that this cooperation, often blatant capitulation, was facilitated by a historical lack of separation between Church and State.¹² The compromise was clothed in the guise of

¹⁰ Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme: l'idéologie de l'Eglise orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1997).

¹² *Ibid.*, viii.

familiar historical themes like Fatherland and Nation, and used to justify the status quo. While Gillet's work was groundbreaking when it appeared we have to observe that it fails to address archival material that became available after the demise of the communist regime.

Finnish historian Kaisamari Hintikka, at present bishop of the diocese of Espo, also brought a valuable but limited contribution to this field because she studied only the relationship between the World Council of Churches and the Romanian Orthodox church. Her work, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1961-1977*,¹³ is valuable because it is based, amongst others, on historical resources from the archives of the Romanian Orthodox Church. She unveils how, through the presence of the Romanian Orthodox representatives at Geneva, the Romanian church officials spread the official communist propaganda of the chimeric Romanian religious freedom.

The scientific researcher Cristian Vasile published yet another appreciated work, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu communist*¹⁴ (*The Romanian Orthodox Church in the First Communist Decade*). As the title suggests, it has a limited scope, the first decade of interaction between the Orthodox church and the communist regime but is very well-researched and presents a good overview of the subject based on archival work. It presents, in detail, the political, social, and cultural aspects of this interaction, but its objectivity is clouded sometimes by a desire to diminish and rationalize the fault of some of the orthodox clergy who collaborated with the communist regime.

Historian George Enache's, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană*¹⁵ (*Orthodoxy and Political Power in Contemporary Romania*) is also based on rigorous archival research. Contrary to the work of Olivier Gillet, he labours to present not only the obedience of the Orthodox church toward the

¹³ Kaisamari Hintikka, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1961-1977* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2000).

¹⁴ Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu comunist* (București: Curtea Veche, 2013).

¹⁵ George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană* (București: Nemira, 2005).

communist regime but also examples of Orthodox clergy who resisted the intense communist pressure and who suffered for their convictions.

Lucian Leuștean, Professor at Concordia University, furthered the discussion on the topic of Church and State relationships. In his *Orthodoxy and the Cold War. Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65*,¹⁶ he examined the subtle way in which the Romanian Orthodox Church cooperated with the communist state and adjusted herself to this regime. Through robust archival research from Romanian and foreign archives, Leuștean shows how the Orthodox Church benefited from this relationship during the Cold War. The Orthodox Church, because of her rapport with the communist state, did not face widespread religious persecution. On a national level, the religious communities were controlled by the authoritarian state, but on the local level, religious conviction was seen as closely linked to the conservation of national identity. Addressing the institutional aspect of the Romanian Orthodox Church, this work focuses more on the compromise of the Orthodox Church and less on the resistance that existed within the Church against the communist regime.

When it comes to the Catholic churches from Romania and their relationship with the Communist state, the researchers focus more on the otherwise undeniable persecution of these churches. Concerning the Romanian Roman-Catholic Church, this can be seen, for example, in the work edited by historian Dănuț Doboș *Biserica Romano-Catolică din România în timpul prigoanei comuniste (1948-1989)* (The Roman-Catholic Church from Romania in the Time of Communist Persecution (1948-1989))¹⁷ and the in *Prigonirea Bisericii Romano-Catolice din România în timpul regimului comunist (1945-1989)* (The Persecution of the Roman-Catholic Church from Romania in the Time of the Communist Regime (1945-1989))¹⁸ of historian Daniel Hrenciuc. The situation is similar when one approaches the scene of the Greek-Catholic Church (Romanian Uniate church) as well. Researcher Cristian Vasile

¹⁶ Lucian Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁷ Dănuț Doboș, ed., *Biserica romano-catolică din România în timpul prigoanei comuniste (1948-1989)* (Iasi: Sapienția, 2008).

¹⁸ Daniel Hrenciuc, *Prigonirea bisericii romano-catolice din România în timpul regimului comunist (1945-1989): contribuții documentare* (Cluj Napoca: Mega, 2021).

in his *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica greco-catolică în timpul regimului communist* (Between Vatican and Kremlin. The Greek Catholic Church during the Communist regime)¹⁹ based on extensive archival research does an excellent job in presenting the communist efforts to forcibly subjugate and integrate this church in the Romanian orthodox Church and ultimately to annihilate the church presenting this together with the whole array of resistance and persecutions that this endeavour entailed. The focus in these works is primarily on the extreme lengths the communist regime travelled to extricate by all necessary means, through coercion and unashamed ferocious persecution, the Romanian Catholic churches from under the foreign influence of the Vatican.

The Protestant churches from Romania can be divided into two major groups: the older traditional Protestant churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Unitarian) and the newer Protestant churches (Adventist, Baptist, Christians According to the Gospel and Pentecostal)²⁰, also called neo-Protestant churches. The late Earl A. Pope, in *Protestantism in Romania*,²¹ presented the challenge the traditional Protestant communities presented to Romania in general and specifically to communist Romania. These religious communities, because of their diverse national identity, understood the church as a vehicle to preserve this identity. The communist regime viewed these churches as a threat to its nationalistic agenda and did all in its power to eliminate this “foreign” influence and to assimilate these German, Hungarian and other ethnic groups.

The Newer Protestant Churches and their relationship with the communist regime are less researched than that of the older, more traditional Churches from Romania. The Romanian Baptist Church, and its relationship with the Communist State, was presented by Marius Silveșan in his well-researched *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România între persecuție, acomodare și rezistență (1948-1965)*²² (The Christian

¹⁹ Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist* (București: Curtea Veche (Elefant Online), 2013).

²⁰ Sabrina P. Ramet, ed., *Protestantism and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia: The Communist and Postcommunist Eras* (Duke University Press, 1992), 159.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

²² Marius Silveșan, *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste Din România: Între Persecuție, Acomodare Și Rezistență (1948-1965)* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012).

Baptist Churches from Romania Between Persecution, Accommodation and Resistance (1948-1965)). Silveșan, based on substantial archival research, presents how the Communist State applied constant pressure on this Church through administrative harassment, the use of hostile laws, and how the State endeavoured to stifle the activity of the Baptist communities. The answer of Baptist leaders to the communist pressure was twofold, some collaborated willingly or out of necessity, and still others chose to resist and suffer the consequences. Still, Silveșan slightly errs on the side of caution in his approach to the issue of Baptist church leaders' collaboration with the oppressive regime. On the other side, Daniel Mitrofan in *Pigmei și uriași. File din istoria persecutării baptiștilor*²³ (Pygmies and Giants. Pages from the History of Persecution of Baptists) takes a more cutting approach to this issue, focusing too much on the phenomenon of collaboration in general and on particular examples of Baptist leaders who shook hands with the communist regime.

The Romanian Pentecostal Church, like the other Neo-Protestant Churches, had a troubled history in the 20th century. Pentecostal Pastor Vasiliță Croitor in his *Răscumpărarea Memoriei: Cultul Penticostal În Perioada Comunistă*²⁴ (Redemption of Memory: The Pentecostal Church in the Communist Period), in a thoroughly researched manner, writes about how the Pentecostals, communities with a prevalent democratic mindset, were targeted by the Communist State. Croitor presents how the Communists managed to infiltrate and, in various degrees, corrupt and subordinate this church to their political agenda. In a fairly objective manner, he presents how some leaders made the devilish pact with the oppressive state while others chose to resist and were savagely persecuted because of it.

Similarly, concerning the communities of Christians According to the Gospel, we need to mention the work of Bogdan Emanuel Răduț *Din istoria creștinilor după Evanghelie. Culegere de documente*²⁵ (From the History of the Christians According to the Gospel. Documents collection). He presents, in a rather sketchy mode the

²³ Daniel Mitrofan, *Pigmei Și Uriași. File Din Istoria Persecutării Baptiștilor*, Cristianus (Oradea, 2007).

²⁴ Vasiliță Croitor, *Răscumpărarea Memoriei: Cultul Penticostal În Perioada Comunistă* (Medgidia: Succed Publishing, 2010).

²⁵ Bogdan Emanuel Răduț, *Din istoria creștinilor după Evanghelie. Culegere de documente* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2013).

general history of these communities from Romania based on official documents that created the legal context of their existence, which, during communism, brought limitations, cultic pressure, and persecutions. This work offers yet another example of communist encroachment upon the religious realm, this time seen from the perspective of this religious denomination. The author also presents internal historical documents of these communities that defined their doctrinal framework.

2.5 Research Gap

All these aforementioned books are general presentations of one or the other church's history and its relationship with the communist regime. They do not deal with the subject of the present work, but they can be helpful for the researcher to understand the broader historical, political, economic, and religious contexts, as we will further see. To this date, we do not have a careful scientific examination of the history or thinking of Wurmbrand or his theological contribution to the field of the Church-State relationships. Wurmbrand's thinking must be carefully examined and presented to the wider public because he was one of the voices who, after years of imprisonment for religious reasons, brought to the Western world the truth about the persecuted churches from communist Romania. Through his writings and his fervent international activity, he fought to change the Western world's perception of the communist world, unmasking its true repressive nature. His importance can be understood when one sees the damage that his activity did to the religiously tolerant image that the communists cultivated in the West. Communist leaders from the highest Soviet and Romanian party echelon monitored his activity and ordered his annihilation. His theological thinking represents an important contribution to the theological field of the Church-State relationship. The history of the Christian Church is the history of a series of alternations between times of freedom and persecution. Unlike other religious leaders who accepted the compromise with the regime, in times of persecution, he had the courage to fight for his beliefs no matter the cost. His personal witness and his thoughts on how Christians should relate to the repressive,

secular State gives us valuable guidelines in dealing with similar situations in the present in different areas of the world where Christians are still persecuted.

2.6. Autobiographies, Biographies and Memoirs

Still, the person of Wurmbrand, his family, and his writings were scrutinized by several authors who analysed different aspects of his life and thinking. The writings concerning the person and the family of Wurmbrand can be divided into several categories. First, we can list autobiographical and memoir-type books. The Wurmbrand family members wrote one after the other of their own personal accounts about the family's ordeal. These accounts, as we will furthermore see, must be approached with care because they are highly subjective and, while they offer a lot of historical information about the family, they are selective like all recollections of past events and, as such, they are biased. Sabina Wurmbrand, his wife, in *The Pastor's Wife*,²⁶ written in 1970, tells her personal testimony regarding the time she was separated from her husband and then from her only underage son. The time spent fighting for the release of her husband and then spent in communist prisons and forced labour camps was the cost of being Richard's wife and a Jewish Christian. The aim of this book was to unmask the communist lies of their so-called "tolerance" of religious freedom and to raise international awareness of the persecutions of the Christian Underground church under different communist regimes.

His son Mihai (Michael) Wurmbrand, wrote in 1972, *Christ or the Red Flag*.²⁷ This is the recollection of the events his family experienced in Romania, a retrospective, the recollections of a young man after their immigration to America. It is a short, subjective narrative of his survival and how his Christian faith endured even when faced with devastating trials like the imprisonment of both of his parents. The purpose of this book was also to mobilize Western Christians to help the persecuted Christians under various communist regimes using contributions to the organization the Wurmbrands established for this purpose in the United States.

²⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2005).

²⁷ Michael Wurmbrand, *Christ or the Red Flag* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974).

Judy Wurmbrand, daughter-in-law of Richard and wife of Mihai (Michael), in *Escape from the Grip*,²⁸ written in 1979, depicts first her family and adolescent life in communist Romania along with the meeting of Mihai (Michael) Wurmbrand. After emigrating to Israel with the help of old Romanian Jewish friends, she became a Christian and then years later she married Mihai (Michael) Wurmbrand. Along with him, she started to work for the foundation started by the Wurmbrand family, Jesus to the Communist World, later called The Voice of the Martyrs, assisting persecuted Christians behind the Iron Curtain. *Escape from the Grip* is a chronicle of a journey to freedom from communist oppression and the discovery of the Christian faith and the Christian service of persecuted Christians.

A Ransom for Wurmbrand,²⁹ written by Anutza Moise is an interesting, often challenging, account of the life of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand and of the ministry that emerged out of their years of imprisonment for their faith in the Communist-held country of Romania. This warm, down-to-earth look at the Wurmbrands is possible given the fact that she was one of their closest friends. She recounts the years of personal persecution and the life of Jewry in pre-World War Two Romania. Afterwards, when she emigrated to Norway, it presented a life of constant prayer for the Wurmbrand's safety and release, along with the extensive efforts of raising the funds necessary for the paying of the ransom for the release of the Wurmbrand family from the clutches of Romanian communism. The aim of these books, written by the members of the Wurmbrand family and Anutza Moise, was to raise awareness of the religious persecution from Communist countries by telling their story and also to raise funds for their organization whose mission was to help the Underground church, the persecuted Christians and their families with Christian literature and material goods.

In this category of close eyewitnesses of the drama lived by the Wurmbrand family in Communist Romania, we can also include Alice Panaiodor with her personal testimony *La traversée du feu*³⁰ (*Crossing the Fire*). This book recounts her

²⁸ Judy Wurmbrand, *Escape from the Grip* (Glendale, CA: Diane Books, 1979).

²⁹ Anutza Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972).

³⁰ Alice Panaiodor, *La traversée du feu* (Paris: Apostolat des éditions, 1979).

conversion to Christianity through the missionary work of Wurmbrand and her involvement in assisting the Wurmbrands in Christian missionary work in Romania until their imprisonment. After that, she took care of the underage Mihai (Michael) until she too was imprisoned for five long years, where she endured, because of her strong Christian faith, unspeakable terrors. After her release, she continued to be involved in underground Christian work until she immigrated to France. Her story is a tale of faith, Christian love, persecution, and admiration of her close friends, the Wurmbrand family.

Wurmbrand is likewise mentioned in memoir-type writings by people he met before, during, and after his imprisonment. Dudu Velicu, the personal secretary of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Miron Cristea from 1936 and 1939 and cabinet director of Eugen Cristescu the Head of The Special Intelligence Service from February 1943 to 23 August 1944, in his recollections *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României, Însemnări zilnice*³¹ (The Romanian Orthodox Church in the Period of Romania's Sovietization, Daily Annotations) paints a picture of Wurmbrand as a Christian activist and mentions his controversial appearance at the General Religious Congress held in 16-17 October 1945 in Bucharest by the first Communist government.

Hungarian Reformed pastor, friend and fellow prisoner Visky Ferenc, in *Fogoly vagyok: 70 történet a börtönről és a barátságról*³² (I am Prisoner: 70 Stories About Prison and Friendship) narrates in an atypical style, using short stories full of pain and humour, episodes of his prison time and recounts, with consideration, the shared prison experiences with Richard. Ion Ioanid, political dissident, writer, and descendent of an old well-known Greek landowner family, in his extensive recalling of his time spent in communist prisons in *Închisoarea Noastră Cea de Toate Zilele*³³ (Our Daily Prison) an allusion to "give us our daily bread" references several opinions that circulated in prisons about Wurmbrand. Some of the opinions of the

³¹ Dudu Velicu and Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României, Însemnări zilnice*, vol. I, 1945–1947 (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2004).

³² Ferenc Visky, *Fogoly vagyok: 70 történet a börtönről és a barátságról* (Kolozsvár: Koinónia, 2002).

³³ Ion Ioanid, *Închisoarea noastră cea de toate zilele*, vol. II 1954–1957 (București: Humanitas, 2013).

clerics who had worked with him before prison, in relief contexts, were positive, while others were negative, given his Jewishness and communist sympathies in his youth. Still, his overall position is a positive one. He was helped by Wurmbrand in prison and, after his release and immigration to Germany, the relief mission founded by Wurmbrand helped him with small financial aid.

Another surprising testimony comes from Ioan Ianolide, Christian mystic and political prisoner, former Legion of The Archangel Michael member in *Întoarcerea la Hristos*³⁴ (The Return to Christ). He recalled with candour the spiritual torments of Wurmbrand, whom, for him, was a controversial individual. He writes about Wurmbrand's volcanic temperament, exacerbated by his severe illness, and his faith dealings with the orthodox mystic group of former Legion members who bolstered, in his opinion, Wurmbrand's struggle with the Christian faith. The testimony of Orthodox priest Mihail Lungeanu, collected by Monk Moise Valeriu Gafencu - *Sfântul Închisorilor, Mărturii Despre Valeriu Gafencu, Adunate și adnotate de Monahul Moise*³⁵ (Valeriu Gafencu – The Saint of the Prisons, Testimonies about Valeriu Gafencu, Gathered and Annotated by Monk Moses) brought additional testimonies from the same circle of former Legion members imprisoned with Wurmbrand. He also mentions Wurmbrand's irascible nature, and his ideological and theological clashes with different persons, and his sympathy toward the high level of Orthodox Mystical Christianity experienced in prison by this group of former Legion members.

Californian Baptist pastor Daniel Brânzei, a friend of the Wurmbrand family, in his *Amintiri cu Sfinți*³⁶ (Memories with Saints) volumes, recalls with fondness short episodes of his encounters with the Wurmbrand family after their immigration to America. During his periodic visits to the house of Wurmbrand he benefited from the wisdom and council in different church and faith matters of the by then old Richard and Sabina.

³⁴ Ioan Ianolide, *Întoarcerea la Hristos* (Bucuresti: Bonifaciu, 2006).

³⁵ monahul Moise, *Valeriu Gafencu - Sfântul Închisorilor, Mărturii Despre Valeriu Gafencu, Adunate Și Adnotate de Monahul Moise* (Alba Iulia: Ed. Reîntregirea, 2007).

³⁶ Daniel Brânzei, *Amintiri Cu Sfinți*, vol. III (Arad: Carmel Print, 2006).

Secondly, after these memoir-type writings, we can mention some shorter biographies of Wurmbrand, written by people who came in contact or worked with the Wurmbrand family during their international Christian ministry, namely Jack Cole's *Richard and Sabina: A Biography of the Rev. Richard Wurmbrand and His Wife Sabina*³⁷ and Merv Knight's *Richard Wurmbrand: The Man and His Work*.³⁸ Both of these biographies, while presenting some useful information of their interaction with the Wurmbrands, do not meet the standard of scholarly biography.

2.7. Academical Works and Others

A third category of writings about Wurmbrand is made up of more academic-type works. Here, we can mention the published PhD dissertation of Professor Sabău,³⁹ *Literatură și convertire* (Literature and conversion), a work that focuses only on the conversion experience to Christianity of the Jewish authors Frossard, Steinhardt and Wurmbrand. Benefiting from the opening of Romanian archives after the demise of the communist regime at the end of 1989, Professor Maria Hulber, an astute student⁴⁰ of the detention literature originated from the Romanian gulag, painted a portrait of Wurmbrand based on and seen through, the looking glass of the documents found in the Romanian communist secret police archives in her work *În sfera tăcerii*⁴¹ (In the Sphere of Silence).

Finally, it is also worthy of notice that Wurmbrand is mentioned several times in the Final Rapport of the Romanian President.⁴² In the year 2006, the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania, consisting of a group of analysts and researchers led by historian Vladimir Tismăneanu, on the order of President Traian Băsescu, investigated the horrors of the past Communist regimes from Romania and condemned Communism in a comprehensive report. The

³⁷ Jack Cole, *Richard and Sabina: A Biography of the Rev. Richard Wurmbrand and His Wife Sabina* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2000).

³⁸ Merv Knight, *Richard Wurmbrand: The Man and His Work* (Lawson: Voice of the Martyrs, 2009).

³⁹ Adrian Vasile Sabau, *Literatura si convertire* (Iași: Editura Insitutul European, 2013).

⁴⁰ Professor Hulber wrote her PhD dissertation on this kind of detention literature, see Maria Hulber, *Memorialistica detențiilor postbelice românești* (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2015).

⁴¹ Maria Hulber, *“În sfera tăcerii”*: *Richard Wurmbrand în dosarele Securității* (Oradea: Ratio et Revelatio, 2018).

⁴² Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, *Raport final* (București, 2006).

findings of this Commission were presented before the Romanian Parliament and branded the past Communist regimes of Romania, from 1946-1989, as illegitimate and criminal.⁴³ This document is not only informative and symbolic but can also constitute the legal ground for reparative legislature in favour of the people who were wronged and harmed by these regimes.

All of the above-mentioned books, the histories of postwar Europe and the Communist states from Eastern Europe, the overall presentations of the Church's relationships with the communist regime, the autobiographical, memoir-type and biography type books, along with the few more scholarly dealings with Wurmbrand, do not deal with the subject of the present work.

2.8. Inferences from the Historical and Political Context

Still, the present research work benefits from each of these writings starting with the general historical presentations. Each of these books has its inherent limitations but each contribute their specific nuance to the great picture of different Church relationships with the communist regime.

Regarding the histories of Europe after the Second World War, we learn from Tony Judt's about the postwar split between Eastern and Western Europe. Both East and West sought to solve the prewar problems of their societies. The West, under American pressure and with American financial aid, avoided radical changes. On the other hand, Eastern Europe, under Soviet influence, underwent a more radical transformation. The Soviet Union, with the tanks of the Red Army, imposed communism as the solution to old prewar problems. Thus, with the descent of the Iron Curtain, the whole Eastern European block suffered the consequences of the forced imposition of communist ideology. On the positive side, Judt remarks that in spite of the East-West split, Europe has a common social and cultural underlining spirit that disdains external influence. On the negative side, a possible weakness of

⁴³ Ibid., 636.

his work is that he too often sidelines military issues and major political alliances, focusing more on the social, cultural, and administrative aspects instead.

Tom Gallagher in *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milosevic* rightly points out that the Balkans, the powder keg of Europe, has a special status. On the positive side, it rightly points out its special status, which is based on the history and geography of the Balkan region, and it stresses that many of the region's problems historically stemmed from the external pressures of empires and superpowers whose interests clashed in this region. We learn that because of international agreements, countries of the Balkans, like Romania, were left by the Western powers to the mercy of the communist Soviet Union. On the negative side, it slightly diminishes the faults and the responsibility of each of these states and their individual contribution in giving the Balkans a bad name.

Anne Applebaum, in her *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956*, reveals the way the Soviet Communists, along with the local communists, crushed all opposition in the national states of Eastern Europe, including Romania. On the positive side, we learn from her, in a very down-to-earth manner, about the programmatic destruction of civil society and small businesses from these countries. The religious establishment, an integral part of the civil society, was especially in the attention of the communists because it was an alternative source of ideology and authority that could frustrate their goals. Applebaum describes how the communists did not destroy the churches but infiltrated these organizations and sought to use them as vehicles of state propaganda. On the negative side, this work focuses more on the cases of East Germany, Poland, and Hungary and less on the case of Romania.

Dennis Deletant in *Romania Under Communist Rule* presents the case of the Romanian communists from the beginning of the Romanian Communist Party in 1921 to its demise in the December Revolution in 1989. Deletant's account is extensive because, besides Romanian archives he includes material gained from his contacts with first-hand witnesses, late political dissidents, especially poets and critics.

Vladimir Tismăneanu in *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (*Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*) offers a comprehensive history of the Communist Party from Romania that is very helpful to the researcher who wants to understand the ups and downs of the Romanian communists. From Tismăneanu's account, we learn to put Romanian communism into its international context, which naturally influenced decisions taken by the Romanian leaders.

Tismăneanu also in *Despre comunism: Destinul unei religii politice* (*About Communism: The Destiny of a Political Religion*) presents communism as a radical quasi-religious doctrine. On the positive side, from Tismăneanu, we understand that the communist doctrine is a political religion that unavoidably clashes with the religious realm because of its claim to explain the workings of the world and the mystery of life. This secular religion, given its all-encompassing ambitions, cannot tolerate alternative meta-narratives. Tismăneanu's account explains the faith and perspective of the first generations of communists, who were true believers in the communist utopia in contrast with the later cynical apparatchiks that took over. On the negative side, when reading Tismăneanu, one has the feeling that he reads too much into communist history, imposing theoretical notions that were not adopted by Romanian communists, or were not consciously adopted.

The discussion about political religions does not start with Tismăneanu. Eric Voegelin in *The Political Religions* already approached the issue that possibly influenced Wurmbrand's thinking. Voegelin's important contribution to political scholarship is his observation that secular political movements had a significant religious element. After the rejection of the Christian faith and the secularization in the time of Modernity, political religions emerged to fill this void. The root of the problem, Voegelin believed, for the totalitarian political ideologies like German National Socialism and Marxist Communism was that there was evil at work. To Voegelin, this evil is not something indefinite but a force, a satanic force, that has to be denounced and countered by the forces of good, the forces of religion.

Emilio Gentile, in his *Politics as Religion*, likewise argued, in the vein of Voegelin's ideas, that in modern history, politics often assumed the features of religion, going through a process of sacralisation. The political realm, according to Gentile, like religion, took upon itself the prerogative to answer fundamental questions like the meaning and purpose of human life. Fascism, communism, and liberal democracies, the American state included, depended on concepts borrowed from the religious realm. Sacralised politics is not necessarily evil, believes Gentile. It can manifest itself either as a civil religion in democracies or it can adopt the form of a political religion within totalitarian regimes.

2.9. Inferences from the Religious Context

Turning to the relationship between the Romania Communist state and the Churches from Romania and starting with the majoritarian Orthodox Church, we learn from Gillet's work *Religion et Nationalisme. L'Ideologie de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Roumaine sous le Regime Communiste (Religion and Nationalism: The Ideology of the Romanian Orthodox Church Under the Communist Regime)* of a strong fusion between Orthodoxy, the nation, and the idea of ethnicity in Romania. The majoritarian Orthodox Church, following old historical Byzantine habits, chose, in general, not the path of confrontation with the communist regime but the way of submission and compromise. Leuștean (*Orthodoxy and the Cold War. Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65*) fairly underlines that the Orthodox church benefitted from this relationship. Gillet points out well enough that the existing fusion between the Orthodox Church and the Romanian nation, the strong historical relationship between the religious and the secular contributed to the subservience of the Orthodox Church to the communist regime and was an instrument used by this regime to attain control over the church and society. Hintikka (*The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1961-1977*) underlines one very important aspect of this instrumentalization, a fact also decried by Wurmbrand in his writings. The representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Geneva, at the meetings of the World Council of Churches, spread the official unfounded

communist propaganda of religious tolerance and religious freedom that existed in Romania. The larger part of the Orthodox clergy collaborated with the regime, as we learn from Vasile (The Romanian Orthodox Church in the First Communist Decade), who tries to somewhat vindicate this questionable behaviour, but still, as Enache correctly points out (Orthodoxy and Political Power in Contemporary Romania), we see that there were numerous cases of orthodox priests who chose to defy the communist regime and suffer the inevitable consequences.

From the encounter with the works that deal with the Catholic churches from Romania, we learn of their open persecution by the communist regime because both the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek-Catholic Church were, in contrast with the Orthodox Church, perceived as controlled by foreign interests. Doboş (The Roman-Catholic Church from Romania in the Time of Communist Persecution (1948-1989), Hrenciuc (The Persecution of the Roman-Catholic Church from Romania in the Time of the Communist Regime (1945-1989) and Vasile (Between Vatican and Kremlin. Greek Catholic Church during the communist regime) reveals to us that the Romanian communists used all available tools to extricate these churches from under the influence of the Vatican and bring them in the communist fold.

The communists viewed the different Protestant and Newer Protestant churches with hostility because these churches, with their ethnic and linguistic diversity, were a challenge to the nationalistic agenda of the Romanian communists. Pope (Protestantism in Romania) highlights how these diverse ethnic groups fought to preserve their identity using the church as a tool. From Silveşan (The Christian Baptist Churches from Romania Between Persecution, Accommodation and Resistance (1948-1965)), Croitor (Redemption of Memory: The Pentecostal Church in the Communist Period) and Răduţ (From the History of the Christians According to the Gospel) we learn of the immense pressure applied by communists to these minoritarian churches favoured by Wurmbrand because of their piety. We see in each of these books people who buckled under the pressure and collaborated with the regime, and we also see heroes of the faith who, like Wurmbrand, refused to yield and suffered persecution and imprisonment.

2.10. Inferences from the Biographical Context

The autobiographical and memoir-type books written by the Wurmbrand family members and those of close friends are remarkable because they offer a firsthand account of the family's tribulation. The lack of a scholarly biography on Wurmbrand forces us to rely too much on these biased accounts. On the positive side, after the books written by Wurmbrand himself, each of these accounts brings more details to the overall story. They offer a lot of information that helps us to understand the timeline of events and, many times, they reveal the inner struggle of each individual confronted with the traumatic events of different types of communist persecution. These writings are understandably biased toward the Wurmbrand family and, in general, present the better version of the events. Still, these are not "hagiographies" because they do not hide the human traits of the Wurmbrands and some of the inner struggles of the family. Sabina Wurmbrand (*The Pastor's Wife*) writes with great candour about her and her husband's life, revealing sometimes intimate details like their love of parties and mundane life before their conversion, her thoughts about another man after years of separation from her husband because of his imprisonment, and the impulsive nature of her husband. Mihai (Michael) Wurmbrand (*Christ or the Red Flag*) does not hide his disagreements with his father and the differences that produced tensions between them. Judy Wurmbrand (*Escape from the Grip*), being Jewish, does not hide her struggle with the Christian faith professed by her future husband Mihai (Michael). Anutza Moise (*A Ransom for Wurmbrand*) recounts with humour the too rationalistic, even sometimes strange, sermons of Wurmbrand at the beginning of his preaching. In contrast, Alice Panaiodor's testimony (*La traversée du feu, Crossing the Fire*), the stories of Visky Ferenc (*I am Prisoner: 70 Stories About Prison and Friendship*) and Brânzei's (*Memories with Saints*) are presenting Wurmbrand in only a positive light.

On the negative side, the weakness of these writings is that they cannot be viewed as objective accounts, understandably, they show Wurmbrand and his family in a heroic light. Likewise, they are written years after the events occurred, so it is possible that they show a distorted image of the actual events. Also, the motive

behind the writing of these books (behind Sabina's, Michael's, Judy's and Anutza's book) is to strengthen the personal testimony of Wurmbrand in the West expressed through his own books. One must not neglect that these books also had a fundraising purpose for the mission of the Wurmbrand family.

In the same category of the memoir-type books, after those written by the Wurmbrand family members and their close friends, are the ones written by people Wurmbrand met before and during his imprisonment. On the positive side, these books add their own personal touches, observations, and objectivity to the Wurmbrand story. Velicu, (*The Romanian Orthodox Church in the Period of Romania's Sovietization, Daily Annotations*) from a fairly detached Orthodox perspective, talks about Wurmbrand as the converted Jew and his evangelistic and relief work, along with Solheim, as representatives of the Norwegian-Swedish Mission to the Jews. Still, he wonders who is really behind all of this foreign-funded relief work. Ioanid, (*Our Daily Prison*) shows us that regarding the imprisoned Wurmbrand, there existed divergent opinions amongst the imprisoned clerics. Some who were familiar with his aid work before his incarceration had positive attitudes, while others scorned him given his Jewishness and his youthful communist sympathies. Furthermore, Ianolide (*The Return to Christ*) writes about the inner spiritual struggles of a severely ill Wurmbrand that made him very irritable and argumentative. But on the negative side, we can detect in both Ianolide and Lungeanu's (*Valeriu Gafencu – The Saint of the Prisons, Testimonies about Valeriu Gafencu, Gathered and Annotated by Monk Moses*) testimony their affiliation to The Legion of Archangel Michael far-right group. Both present Wurmbrand, the Jewish Christian, condescendingly as a kind of reluctant, conflicted neophyte who is sympathetic toward and is spiritually guided by the high level of Orthodox Mystical Christianity experienced in prison by this group of Legion members.

When talking about biographies, we have to mention that, to this date, we do not have a scholarly biography written about Wurmbrand. Some people who interacted with the Wurmbrand family through their international Christian ministry, Cole (Richard and Sabina: *A Biography of the Rev. Richard Wurmbrand and His Wife*

Sabina) and Knight's (Richard Wurmbrand: The Man and His Work) made a poor attempt to write a biography. Both of these writings, while presenting some useful information, do not meet the standard of scholarly biography. They are not based on thorough research they rely on their author's recollections, and autobiographic material from Wurmbrand's book. These writings are not based on archival research and they are only partial, not full biographies.

There are also a few academic writings that deal extensively with Wurmbrand. Sabău (Literature and conversion) has a very limited approach to Wurmbrand. He focuses only on the conversion experience to Christianity of the Jewish authors Frossard, Steinhardt, and Wurmbrand. This work claims that it compares these three authors but it lacks balance because it mainly deals with Steinhardt, the other two, Wurmbrand and Frossard, are only lightly examined. Hulber (In the Sphere of Silence, Richard Wurmbrand in the Securitate files) offers an excellent tool for those who want to examine the thousands of documents found in the Romanian communist secret police archives concerning Wurmbrand. This work is light on the analysis side, in her introductory study, she puts together only a short biography based on the documents from the archive and based on the sequence of events found in Wurmbrand's writings. On the positive side, she arranges all the documents in chronological order, offering a good map for those who want to orient themselves through the thousands of documents about Wurmbrand and explore the extensive surveillance and persecution orchestrated by the communist regime against him.

3. Research Questions

Main Research Question:

How did Richard Wurmbrand approach and manage the tension in his life and thought between Christianity and Communism, against the background of his Romanian experiences in the Communist era?

Sub question 1 - How did the relationship between Church and State evolve in Wurmbrand's Romania?

Sub question 2 - How did the life of Wurmbrand unfold given the political and religious context of his time?

Sub question 3 - Why is communism a theological problem from Wurmbrand's Christian perspective?

Sub question 4 - How did the Christian church adapt to the communist regimes according to the "American" Wurmbrand?

4. Methodological Description

This research project proposes to fill this aforementioned gap, the lack of a careful scientific examination of the history of the thinking of Wurmbrand and his theological contribution to the field of Church and State relationships, by the use of a historical theological method and methods of qualitative analysis like narrative and text analysis. We will look at the life of Wurmbrand and analyse his theological response to the Romanian version of Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist communism. The present work, is mainly a work of ecclesiastical history, and not a work of systematic theology, although it deals with theological images, ideas and concepts.

In this endeavour, the primary emphasis of this work is the qualitative analysis, the examination of the primary sources, namely the critical analysis, comparison and interpretation of the relevant texts written by the author mostly after his release from the Romanian communist gulag, and his immigration to the West.

In the first chapter we use the methods of historical research and presented the findings in a diachronic way. In the second chapter we used biographical research as part of qualitative research, in a sense, the chapter is the putting together of a microhistory, because it brings attention to the tribulations of a marginal individual who until now was given little attention. Moreover, in the third and fourth chapters, we also used the methods of qualitative research, namely the textual analysis and narrative analysis of Wurmbrand works, to distil from the varied primary and

secondary sources, what was Wurmbrand thinking related to the present research topic.

The books written by Wurmbrand used in this research are: *Tortured for Christ* (1967), *The Wurmbrand Letters* (1967), *In God's Underground* (1968), *The Soviet Saints* (1968), *Sermons in solitary confinement* (1969), *If That Were Christ Would You Give Him Your Blanket* (1970), *Christ on The Jewish Road* (1970), *If Prison Walls Could Speak* (1972), *Victorious Faith* (1974), *The Answer to the Atheist's Handbook* (1975), *Was Karl Marx a Satanist?* (1976), *Reaching Towards the Heights* (1979), *Where Christ Still Suffers* (1982), *100 (One Hundred) Prison Meditations* (1982), *The Total Blessing* (1983), *Marx and Satan* (1986), *From The Lips of Children* (1986), *Alone With God* (1988), *Proofs of God's Existence* (1988), *The Sweetest Song* (1988), *My Correspondence With Jesus* (1990), *From Suffering to Triumph* (1991), *Oglinda sufletului omenesc (The Mirror of the Human Soul)* (1994), *Avraam tatăl tuturor credincioșilor (Abraham the Father of All Believers)* (1994), *Cele șapte cuvinte de pe cruce (The Seven Words on the Cross)* (1995), *Isus prietenul teroriștilor (Jesus Friend to Terrorists)* (1995), *The Oracles of God* (1995), *In the Face of Surrender* (1998), *The Overcomers* (2006). These sources were used to recreate Wurmbrand's personal history and to investigate his political theology.

As secondary material, this work interacted with authors who have written monographs, memoirs, biographies, theological studies, articles in theological and political journals relevant to the present subject, and resources already mentioned a little earlier. In establishing the Romanian Historical context, we used first histories like Tom Gallagher's *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milosevic*, Keith Hitchins' *Rumania 1866-1947*, Ioan Aurel Pop and Ioan Bolovan's *Istoria României (History of Romania)*, Dan Berindei's *Istoria Românilor (History of Romanians)*, Dennis Deletant's *Romania Under Communist Rule, Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940 -1944*, and *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965* Vladimir Tismăneanu's *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc (Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism)*, Radu Ioanid, *The Sword*

of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania and Tismăneanu's Despre comunism: Destinul unei religii politice (About Communism: The Destiny of a Political Religion).

In establishing the context for the relationship between Church and State in Romania we used J. M. Hussey's *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, John Meyendorff's, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu's, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* and In Search of 'Twin Tolerations': Models of Church State Relations in Romania, Lucian Leuștean's *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65*, Cristian Vasile's, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu communist (The Romanian Orthodox Church in the First Communist Decade)*, Dănuț Doboș' *Biserica romano-catolică din România în timpul prigoanei comuniste (1948-1989) (The Roman-Catholic Church from Romania in the Time of Communist Persecution (1948-1989)*, Cristian Vasile's *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului communist (Between Vatican and Kremlin. Greek Catholic Church during the communist regime)*, Marius Silveșan's *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România: Între Persecuție, Acomodare și Rezistență (1948-1965) (The Christian Baptist Churches from Romania Between Persecution, Accommodation and Resistance (1948-1965).*

To establish Wurmbrand's Jewish historical background we used Heiko Haumann's *A History of East European Jews*, Carol Iancu's, *Evreii din România (1866-1919): De la excludere la emancipare (The Jews from Romania (1866-1919): From Exclusion to Emancipation (1866-1919))*, *Le combat international pour l'emancipation des juifs de Roumanie: Documents et temoignages* and *La Shoah en Roumanie*, Andrei Oișteanu's, *Inventing the Jew: Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romanian and Other Central-East European Cultures*, Radu Ioanid's *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*, Liviu Rotman's *Evreii din România în perioada comunistă: 1944-1965 (The Jews from Romania in the Communist Period 1944-1965)* and Radu Ioanid's *Răscumpărarea evreilor: Istoria acordurilor secrete dintre România și Israel (The*

Ransoming of the Jews: The History of the Secret Agreements between Romania and Israel)

To establish further details of Wurmbrand's personal history we used as secondary sources Sabina Wurmbrand's *The Pastor's Wife*, Michael Wurmbrand's *Christ or the Red Flag*, Judy Wurmbrand's *Escape from the Grip*, Anutza Moise's *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, Alice Panaiodor's *La traversée du feu*, Visky Ferenc's in *Fogoly vagyok: 70 történet a börtönről és a barátságáról* (*I am Prisoner: 70 Stories About Prison and Friendship*), Jack Cole's *Richard and Sabina: A Biography of the Rev. Richard Wurmbrand and His Wife Sabina*, Merv Knight's *Richard Wurmbrand: The Man and His Work* and Maria Hulber's *În sfera tăcerii* (*In the Sphere of Silence*).

In order to investigate Wurmbrand's political theology, his thoughts on the tension between Christianity and Communism the most important secondary sources used are Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, Miklós Tomka's *Expanding Religion: Religious Revival in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Werke and Collected Works*, Dimitry V. Pospelovsky's *History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious: A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice and The Believer*, Franz Mehring's *Karl Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens*, Robert Payne's *The Unknown Karl Marx; Documents Concerning Karl Marx*, Edited with an Introduction by Robert Payne, Paul Kengor's, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism's Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration*, Boris Souvarine's *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, James A. Kapaló and Kinga Povedák's *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, Zoe Knox's, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia After Communism*, Eric Voegelin's *The Political Religions*, Emilio Gentile's *Politics as Religion*, Paul Matzko's, *The Radio Right: How a Band of Broadcasters Took on the Federal Government and Built the Modern Conservative Movement*, David E. Settje's *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975*, Daniel K. Williams' *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*, Markku Ruotsila's *Fighting Fundamentalist: Carl*

McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism, Thomas C. Reeves' America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen.

This work also includes documentary material from special archives. The National Council for the Study of the Security Archives, an independent agency under the Romanian Parliament, since 2008 manages the former Communist Secret Police archives and facilitates the access of researchers to material relevant to their research. This archive contains thousands of pages detailing the secret police's surveillance of the Wurmbrand family, along with declarations of Wurmbrand, written during his interrogations in detention, and all of his prison records. The present study takes into consideration documents from this archive from the Penal Fond, Dossier Numbers 001079 and 001814, from the Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 157078 and from the SIE Fond, Dossier Numbers 33446 and 7804. These dossiers were chosen, because they contain amongst others, Wurmbrand's several holograph declarations from prison detailing his life, which were useful for filling knowledge gaps from his biography. His prison records contained in these dossiers record his movement from prison to prison. The SIE dossiers show how, after his emigration to the West, he was constantly monitored by the Romanian and Soviet intelligence agencies, and show the countermeasures used to limit the international harm done by Wurmbrand to communist interests.

Other archivistic sources used by the present research are from the General CIA Records, the Congressional Record Appendix, and the CIA Propaganda Perspectives that are made up of documents from the American Central Intelligence Agency's archive declassified under the Freedom of Information Act.

The relevant works and articles from the Library of Judaic Studies from Cluj Napoca (Romania) and the Vrije Universiteit Library from Amsterdam were very helpful. We also attempted to clarify questions regarding Wurmbrand's biography and others regarding his theology relevant to the present research by contacting his son, Mihai (Michael) Wurmbrand, but he refused to comment.

The primary and secondary sources were examined and filtered from the perspective of the Church-State relationship to find out what Wurmbrand thought

about the tension that appeared during the encounters between the Communist regimes and Christian churches, denominations and individuals. Therefore, these books were searched for references to Wurmbrand's personal experiences in the Romanian communist context, namely his thoughts on the Romanian and Eastern European communist history, communist ideology, its encounter with his personal history and his thoughts on how the persecuted Christian churches should respond to the challenges of the communist regime. This was done, using a method close to content analysis, by following keywords like Richard Wurmbrand, Wurmbrand, communism, communist, Marxism, atheism, satanism, Christianity, Christian, church, churches, Christian church, Official church, Underground Church, Western church, suffering, persecution, compromise and collaboration. The passages that contained these keywords and others related to these concepts were then analysed, correlated, structured, categorized, recorded in writing and interpreted.

1. STATE, SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN THE ROMANIA OF LATE MODERNITY

This first chapter aims to provide an answer to the relevant sub-question: How did the relationship between Church and State evolve in Wurmbrand's Romania? Therefore, this chapter is about the forces that shaped the historical, political, economic, and religious context before Wurmbrand was born and which forces shaped the context during his life.

Individuals are shaped by a multitude of events and forces that unravel around them. In order to comprehend the theological thoughts of Richard Wurmbrand, someone must first endeavour to comprehend broadly the events that unfolded in his time and left their mark on his life and Romania, his country. To understand what he was thinking about, the complex relationship between religion, churches, Christian individuals, and the state one must follow the evolution of this relationship in Romania from 1866 to and through the time of his life.

The first half of the 20th century represented a time of major change for Romania. The country in this period went through extensive geopolitical, ideological, and societal transformations. These alterations reshaped the Romanian political and religious landscape and moulded the life of Wurmbrand. The aim of this chapter is to follow, in general, the problematic Romanian geopolitical, ideological, and religious transformations from the beginning of the 20th century to 1965, the year that Wurmbrand left Romania. In order to understand the impact of these forces upon Romanian society and Romanian individuals like Wurmbrand, we have to untangle its complexly interwoven historical threads.

This chapter follows the evolution of the relationship between the state and the religious sphere in two major periods, the Pre-communist Romania of the first half of the 20th century and Romania under the communist totalitarian regime (1945-1989). In the first part, we will follow the historical and political path taken by the state through times of constitutional monarchy and dictatorship and its relationship with the religious realm. In the second and third part, we need to observe the history of

the period between 1944 and 1965 with the profound transformations brought about by the installation of the communist regime. In the first decades of communist rule, the regime began to impose an all-encompassing control over all aspects of society. Communists worked tirelessly to exert their control over the political, the ideological, and the religious realms. By all available means, they wanted to transform the whole society to fit their utopia of a socialist state. In this section, we will analyse how, through Soviet influence, coercion, propaganda, and new legislation, they influenced all aspects of the state, society, historical churches and religious minorities.

And last, in the fourth part, given the ethnicity of Wurmbrand, we will try to understand the intricate relationship of the Romanian state with its inhabitants of Jewish origin. The broad picture of this relationship enables us to understand another dimension of Wurmbrand's life, a feature that gave his life and thought more colour and distinctiveness.

1.1. MONARCHY, DICTATORSHIP, POLITICS AND THE CHURCHES (1866-1944)

1.1.1. A.I. Cuza and the Churches

In order to understand the Romanian state in the 20th century and its relationship with the church, one has to start with the formation of the modern Romanian state and must seek the roots of these relationships in the previous century. Romania, as a country at the beginning of the 20th century, was situated at the crossroads of three major empires: the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, and the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, its geopolitical history was shaped by its relationships with these three empires and by the constant frictions between these powerful neighbours.

In this context, the year 1859 has great historical significance for Romania. It marks the unification of the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova after the election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza⁴⁴ as ruler in both principalities on the 5th and the 24th of January. This *de facto* union was treated with suspicion in the beginning by the European powers because it had the potential to ignite old rivalries in the sphere of

⁴⁴ Dan Berindei, "Constituirea României. Alexandru Ioan Cuza, domnul Unirii și al reformelor," in *Istoria Românilor*, ed. Dan Berindei, vol. VII.I (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 485.

influence of the aforementioned three empires. Still, after sustained diplomatic efforts, it was internationally recognized *de jure* by 1862. From the beginning of his reign, Cuza launched an ambitious and extensive reform program that sought to bring change in the lives of the inhabitants of the new country.

An important part of his reform program was the redefinition of the relationship between the newly formed state and the religious establishment. In Romania, according to the law approved by Cuza in February 1863, all religions who requested to be officially recognized by the state were equally protected.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the Orthodox Church was the principal religious denomination. Besides the majoritarian church, there were also other officially recognized smaller religious groups like the Roman Catholics, Protestants, Mosaic Jews, and Muslim groups.⁴⁶ In terms of dealing with religious denominations, Cuza's main concern was directed toward the Orthodox Church, the others were treated with condescension or were outright persecuted, like the Mosaic Jews and the different kinds of Protestants.⁴⁷

The Orthodox Church, since the founding of the two Romanian Principalities in the 14th century, had strong connections with the Byzantine world. These were reflected in the ecclesiastical allegiance to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the canonical relationships with other Eastern Orthodox patriarchates and in the Old Cyrillic language that was used as an official language in the affairs of the church and state bureaucracy.⁴⁸

In order to strengthen the sovereignty of Romania, Cuza wanted an independent Orthodox Church. The independence from the Patriarchate of Constantinople would fit nicely in Cuza's plan to subordinate the church to his high-reaching reforms. Therefore, Cuza took advantage of the traditional policy of the Orthodox Church concerning church and state relationships.⁴⁹ Starting with the Byzantine Empire, the

⁴⁵ Ovidiu Iacob, "REFORMELE RELIGIOASE ALE LUI ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA," „Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «George Barițiu» Din Cluj-Napoca”, Tom LIII (2014): pp.19-29.

⁴⁶ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Communist Romania* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

⁴⁷ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, "In Search of 'Twin Tolerations': Models of Church State Relations in Romania," *ENDS Proceedings*, no. 12 (2009): 175, www.ceeol.com. (accessed on 03.07.2015)

⁴⁸ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 2.

⁴⁹ Stan and Turcescu, 18.

Eastern Church held that there was a special relationship between the Christian church and the emperor. This was polity assumed in the days of Emperor Constantine I, and it was declared outright by Emperor Justinian I in his *Novellae*.⁵⁰ Justinian, in his 6th *Novella*, talks about God as the giver of two great gifts to humanity; the first gift is the priesthood, *hierosyne/sacerdotium* and the second is the imperial dignity, *basileial/imperium*.⁵¹ The priesthood must concern itself with spiritual affairs, while the emperor's concern lies with the administration of human affairs. If, in both spheres, obligations are fulfilled, then the result is a great harmony, *symfonia*⁵², for the benefit of humanity. This harmony between divine and human affairs, later called the "Byzantine symphony", in the thinking of Justinian, is modelled after the Incarnation of the Son of God. In him, the two natures, the divine and the human natures are united. Consequently, for Justinian, the person of Jesus Christ is the unique origin of the ecclesiastical and civil ranks.⁵³ The priesthood and the emperor must work together; the priesthood, upholding orthodoxy and the emperor, governing the human affairs. Furthermore, the emperor had the responsibility of enforcing not only civil law but canon law as well. This policy granted absolute authority to the Byzantine Emperor, being restrained only by his "responsibility for good government in all spheres of the Christian life".⁵⁴

Cuza saw in this age-old church policy of harmony between church and political rulers and hushed compliance with the existing political leadership, a good Trojan horse for his plans. He wanted, with the help of an autonomous Orthodox church, to build a nation and state and to plug the massive leak of income flowing from the country to monasteries on Mount Athos and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.⁵⁵ Romania, in the time of the unification under the reign of Cuza, was still an agrarian society, agriculture made up the base of the country's income.⁵⁶ The challenge facing

⁵⁰ J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 300.

⁵¹ Rudolf Schöll, ed., *Corpus iuris civilis*, vol. 3, *Novellae* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1928), 35.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵³ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1987), 214.

⁵⁴ Hussey, 300.

⁵⁵ Stan and Turcescu, 19.

⁵⁶ Hitchins, 8.

Cuza's administration was that at that time one-fourth of the country's land was in the property of different Eastern Orthodox monasteries as the result of previous donations of Wallachian and Moldovan heads of state. The outgoing income from these properties was sapping the country's financial strength at times when all its resources were needed for the reforms in the agrarian, justice, military, infrastructure, civil, culture and education⁵⁷ domains. To solve this problem Cuza developed with the help of his chief adviser Mihail Kogălniceanu, the Law of the secularization of the properties of monasteries,⁵⁸ which was adopted by the Parliament in December 1863. This Law stipulated that the properties of all monasteries were confiscated by the state, including monasteries with external ties and those with no external connections.⁵⁹ In order to cushion the stripping of the Orthodox Church of its financial autonomy Cuza "pledged state financial support for church activities and clergy salaries".⁶⁰

After this crippling blow to the Church's finances, the Orthodox clergy suffered further demeaning changes in status. The church legislation from 1864 and the Civil Code from 1865⁶¹ legalized a series of measures with the purpose of further subordinating the Church to the State.⁶² The upper ranks of the Orthodox clergy were relieved from their previous high-profile secular positions as "members of the highest administrative and judicial councils of state".⁶³ The lower ranks, the parish clergy had lost the civic duties of officiating and keeping the record of births, marriages, divorces and deaths.⁶⁴ The Orthodox Church faced increasing control and the meddling of state bureaucrats in her private affairs dealing with the education of clergy and the discipline in the monasteries.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Cuza sanctioned the use

⁵⁷ Stan and Turcescu, 19.

⁵⁸ Cristina Diac, "Cum a lăsat Cuza Vodă Biserica în sapă de lemn," *Historia*, 20.08.2012, http://www.historia.ro/exclusiv_web/general/articol/cum-l-sat-cuza-vod-biserica-n-sap-lemn. (accessed on 02.07.2015)

⁵⁹ Ioan Aurel Pop and Ioan Bolovan, eds., *Istoria României: Compendiu* (Cluj Napoca: Institutul Cultural Român, 2004), 503.

⁶⁰ Stan and Turcescu, 19.

⁶¹ Diac.

⁶² Hitchins, 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴ Diac.

⁶⁵ Hitchins, 10.

of the Romanian language as the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church; he replaced the Old Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin characters.⁶⁶ The Orthodox Church continued to have in Romania a great moral status as a national institution despite all the meddling in its affairs by the state⁶⁷ Cuza's wish to see an independent Romanian Church was realized in 1865. One year before his overthrow through a coup by military officers, the Romanian Orthodox Church declared its independence⁶⁸ from the Patriarchy of Constantinople.

Under his short reign, Cuza managed to lay down some of the basic principles of controlling and using the Christian church to strengthen the national state. First, cleverly using a dogmatic principle (the Byzantine Symphony), Cuza managed to extricate the Orthodox Church from under external ecclesiastical jurisdictions and tied her loyalty to the national state. Secondly, by secularizing the extensive church properties, he made the Orthodox Church financially dependent on state-issued financial sustenance. Thirdly, Cuza diminished the influence of the Church in high politics and the local administration. After these measures, the Orthodox Church was stripped of most of its financial and political power, becoming more and more subjected to the control and manipulation of the national state.

1.1.2. Carol I and the Churches

The place of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, at the helm of Romania, was taken by the installation of a foreign dynasty as the result of the wide consensus among the Romanian political elites. Ion C. Brătianu, the radical liberal, with the agreement of the government, extended the invitation to Prince Karl Ludwig von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen to accept the leadership of Romania under the name Prince Carol I.⁶⁹ Prince Karl encouraged by his relative the French ruler Napoleon III, and by the powerful German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, also taking into account the extensive popular support from Romania accepted the offer. Prince Karl Ludwig von

⁶⁶ Stan and Turcescu, 19.

⁶⁷ Hitchins, 10.

⁶⁸ Stan and Turcescu, 19.

⁶⁹ Pop and Bolovan, 507.

Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen became Prince Carol I. On May the 10th 1866, received with ovations by the inhabitants of Bucharest,⁷⁰ he was sworn in before the representatives of the Romanian nation.⁷¹

An essential step on the road to the establishment of modern Romanian society was, immediately after the ascension of Carol I, was the ratifying of the Constitution of 1866, which Carol I also swore to uphold. This Constitution “limited the powers of the prince to those of a constitutional monarch, provided for representative government”,⁷² and “proclaimed the rights of the Romanians, accentuating the principle of the separation of powers and the one of the ministerial responsibility.”⁷³ Through this Constitution which “resembled liberal fundamental laws in place in Western Europe”⁷⁴ the political elites wanted to align the country to the more developed European countries.⁷⁵

The Constitution of 1866 also laid down the fundamental rules for the relationship between the Church and the State. Article 21 held, in a very liberal manner, that “the liberty of conscience is absolute. The liberty of all the religions is guaranteed as far as their practice does not upset public order or good manners”.⁷⁶ This was tempered by the recognition in the same article of the primacy of the Orthodox Church “the Orthodox religion of the East is the dominant religion of the Romanian State. The Orthodox Church is, and shall remain, independent of all foreign authorities; but, it will keep its unity with the Ecumenical Church of the East with regard to its dogmas”.⁷⁷ Thus, the Orthodox Church kept only a dogmatic unity with the Ecumenical Church otherwise being the subject of the Romanian State.

The interdependence between the Orthodox Church and the state is further delineated in articles 22 and 82. Article 22 echoes the legislation from the time of Cuza. The issue of birth certificates, marriage, divorce, and death certificates is the

⁷⁰ Dan Berindei, “Începuturile Lungii Domnii a Lui Carol I,” in *Istoria Românilor*, ed. Dan Berindei, vol. VII.I (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 558.

⁷¹ Pop and Bolovan, 507.

⁷² Hitchins, 17.

⁷³ Berindei, 561.

⁷⁴ Hitchins, 17.

⁷⁵ Berindei, 561.

⁷⁶ “Constituția României din 1866,” <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1866.htm>. (accessed on 03.07.2015)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

responsibility of the civil authority. The issue of these documents had to precede the religious ceremony, which was mandatory with only a few exceptions.⁷⁸ Article 82 is the corollary of the Romanian version of the Byzantine symphony. It talks about the hereditary succession to the throne of the line of Carol I, who was a Roman Catholic. All of his heirs “shall be raised in the orthodox religion of the East”.⁷⁹ The rulers from Carol’s line also considered themselves protectors of the faith and were “given most of the privileges accorded to Byzantine emperors”⁸⁰, of course in the limits of the Constitution.

The irony of the situation is striking because this Constitution, in theory, upholds liberal values like freedom of conscience and equal religious rights for all faiths. It recognizes the primacy and independence of the Orthodox Church from foreign intervention and invests it with the power to legitimize the political head of the state, only to subject it in practice to convenient reasons of the state. Still, the Orthodox Church with all its freedoms, in the end, did not have control over the revenues of the monasteries and the nomination and removal of the head of the church.⁸¹

The eastern crisis of 1875-1878 and the resulting Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878 offered Carol I and the Romanian political leadership the much-expected chance to achieve the independence of the country. In the spring of 1877, Romania declared war on Turkey and permitted the transit of Russian forces on their way to attack the forces of the Ottoman Empire. Romania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire on 9 May 1877.⁸² Following the defeat of the Ottoman forces by the Russians with the assistance of the Romanian army, Romania became a kingdom and Prince Carol became King Carol I of Romania on 26 March 1881.⁸³

Another major episode in the story of modern Romanian state building represents the participation of the country in the Great War, World War I. In the first two years

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Stan and Turcescu, 20.

⁸¹ Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, “In Search of ‘Twin Tolerations’: Models of Church State Relations in Romania,” 157.

⁸² Pop and Bolovan, 508.

⁸³ Hitchins, 53.

of the war, Romania adopted a neutral stance, conducting international political negotiations with the aim of enlarging its territories with the annexation of the provinces of Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina provinces that held a majoritarian Romanian population. In this time of awakening of national consciousness throughout Eastern Europe the Orthodox Church adopted the stance of advocate for the Romanian identity, which, allegedly, supersedes other regional loyalties. The Orthodox Church projected in public the image of the defender of national identity, “the unifying force which helped the people to confront their troubled history”⁸⁴, and posed as helper of the state in extending its borders to incorporate the predominantly Romanian provinces.⁸⁵

Under the long reign of Carol I (1866-1914) the relationship between the religious realm and the national state continued on the path delineated by Cuza. In a landscape of apparent religious freedom, the Orthodox church retained and asserted her primacy legitimating the ruling dynasty that started with Carol I. But her stance was weakened because financially she was at the mercy of the state. The state and the church lived in a state-controlled harmony (symphony) for the benefit of the national Orthodox Christian society. It fell on the shoulders of the state to safeguard the Orthodox Christian culture and on the shoulders of the Orthodox Church to help the state in this time of fashioning the Romanian national identity.

1.1.3. Ferdinand I and the Churches

The death of King Carol I in 1914 brought with it the ascension to the throne of King Ferdinand, nephew and heir of Carol I. In the first years of his reign, he continued the policy of neutrality adopted by Romania at the beginning of World War I. Following a period of secret negotiations, the leader of the government Ion I.C. Brătianu signed on August 4 the political convention with the representatives of the Entente⁸⁶ subsequent to receiving guarantees that Romania after the war would

⁸⁴ Stan and Turcescu, 176.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Pop and Bolovan, 521.

obtain the territories from the Austro-Hungarian Empire where Romanians were majoritarian. Thus, in August 1916, Romania entered the international conflict.

The next two years were times of heavy fighting for the Romanian army with the forces of the Triple Alliance. The entering of Romania into the war meant that important German and Austro-Hungarian armed-forces had to be diverted from the Western front to the East, giving time to regroup for the western forces of the Entente. Following these two years, Romania emerged at the end of the First World War on the winning side. Still, Romania paid a heavy war price consisting of the sacrifice of 3% of the country's population⁸⁷ accompanied by major economic losses. This sacrifice was not in vain because, at the end of the war in 1918, Romania became the beneficiary of huge territorial gains, leading to the formation in the same year of Greater Romania.

The emergence of the modern Romanian state brought with it the challenge of integrating religiously and ethnically diverse groups into the Romanian state.⁸⁸ This new situation was problematic because until this time adherence to the Orthodox Church was presented as a central feature of Romanian ethnic identity and "religious conformity became a badge of political loyalty and conformity".⁸⁹ All the laws after the 1918 unification, the electoral law of 1918, the agrarian law of 1921, the Constitution of 1923, the administration law of 1925, the education law and the law of religious groups of 1928 reflect in some measure the thought given to the principle of ethnic and religious non-discrimination.⁹⁰

Amongst these of central importance is the Constitution of 1923. It reflects the efforts of its architects to respect the will of the international powers and to alleviate the fears of ethnic and religious minorities, and residents of the newly acquired lands. According to this constitution, a person can be a Romanian citizen and have a different ethnicity than Romanian and a different religion than Orthodox. Article 5 specifies that "Romanians, without ethnical, language or religious differentiation

⁸⁷ Ibid., 526.

⁸⁸ Stan and Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Comunist Romania*, 20.

⁸⁹ Stan and Turcescu, "In Search of 'Twin Tolerations': Models of Church State Relations in Romania," 176.

⁹⁰ Ion Agrigoroaiei and Ioan Scurtu, "Teritoriul, Populația, Starea de Spirit," in *Istoria Românilor*, ed. Ioan Scurtu, vol. VIII (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 57.

enjoy freedom of conscience, freedom of education, freedom of press, freedom of meetings, freedom of association and all freedoms and rights established by laws".⁹¹ Article 8 stipulates that all Romanians without ethnical, language or religious discrimination "are equal before the law and have the responsibility to contribute without differentiation to public taxes and duties".⁹²

Article 22 lays down the ground rules for the relationship between the state and the churches. First, we can see the liberties and, after that, the limitations: "The liberty of conscience is absolute. The state guarantees both freedom and protection for all the religions as far as their practice does not upset public order, good manners and the laws of the organization of the state"⁹³. The equalities stop here because what follows can only be labelled as religious discrimination:

The Christian Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic are Romanian churches. The Orthodox Church being the religion of the majority of Romanians is the dominant church in the Romanian State, and the Greek-Catholic has priority over other denominations.⁹⁴

Even if the Romanian state granted many freedoms to ethnic or religious minorities, in the end, failed to fully acknowledge its religious diversity. The majoritarian Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches were put on a pedestal above the Roman Catholics, Hungarian Protestants, German Protestants, Jews and Muslims.⁹⁵ Article 72 granted to high-ranking orthodox clergy members membership in the Senate and Article 77, like the Constitution of 1866, maintained the obligation for the ruling family to instruct the heir to the throne in the Christian orthodox religion.⁹⁶ Furthermore, rules for religious minority groups (called religious associations), like the request to officially register if they wanted to obtain legal status in the country, restricted their activity.

The same is true about the General Law of Denominations adopted in 1928. Article 21 upholds the primacy of the Orthodox Church and states that the following

⁹¹ "Constituția României din 1923," <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1923.htm>. (accessed on 10.07.2015)

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "Constituția României Din 1923."

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Stan and Turcescu, *Religion and Politics in Post-Comunist Romania*, 21.

⁹⁶ "Constituția României Din 1923."

denominations: Greek-catholic, Roman Catholic, Reformed (Calvinistic), Evangelical-Lutheran, Unitarian, Armenian-Gregorian, Mosaic, and Muslim are recognized as having legal status in Romania.⁹⁷ In addition to these churches, Article 53 mentions the Baptists. This article upholds the decision Nr. 2680 from 21 November 1927 of the Council of Ministers that gave legal status to the Baptists.⁹⁸

The Orthodox Church took a further step towards complete independence from all foreign interference in 1925 when the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate was established.⁹⁹ An autocephalous Orthodox Church (stipulated in Article 22 of the Constitution of 1923), an idea inherited from Cuza, fitted perfectly in the plans of the political leaders. The Orthodox Church became the perfect prey, free from foreign entanglements, isolated and ready to be subjected to the whim of the national state. Through all the privileges and the financial support accorded to the Orthodox Church the state tried to emphasize the country's national Romanian Orthodox character.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the state aspired to win the collaboration of the church as a very useful political and electoral accomplice.¹⁰¹

Romania under King Ferdinand experienced a time of consolidation in times of war and after in the time of the newly unified state.¹⁰² The constitutional monarch, legitimated by the support of the Orthodox church, constituted a unifying and consolidating force. This period presented further challenges in the area of the relationships between state and the expanding religious scene. The Romanian national identity continued to be mainly tied to the Orthodox religion. The Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Churches had primacy in Romania. They were continually funded and used by the state to further its nationalistic interests. Still,

⁹⁷ Ioan Scurtu, Theodora Stănescu-Stanciu, and Georgiana Margareta Scurtu, *Istoria românilor între anii 1918-1940: documente și materiale* (Editura Universității din București, 2001), <http://ebooks.unibuc.ro/istorie/istorie1918-1940/5-7.htm>. (accessed on 14.07.2015)

⁹⁸ Marius Silveșan, *Bisericile Creștine Baptiste din România: Între Persecuție, Acomodare și Rezistență (1948-1965)* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012), 96.

⁹⁹ Ioan Scurtu, Ion Agrigoroaiei, and Petre Otu, "Instituțiile," in *Istoria Românilor*, ed. Ioan Scurtu, vol. VIII (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 210.

¹⁰⁰ Stan and Turcescu, 21.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Pop and Bolovan, 594.

concessions were made in legislation for the other officially recognized religions and ethnic minorities that became part of Greater Romania.

1.1.4. Carol II, The Legion of Archangel Michael and the Churches

Things were about to change in 1930 with the ascension to the throne of Carol II, the crown prince who, in 1926, relinquished his succession rights on a whim and was disinherited in consequence. Prince Carol, after the death of his father Ferdinand, was recalled by the political leadership and, on 8 June 1930, ascended to the throne under the name King Carol II. He disliked a democracy mitigated by a constitutional monarchy. Carol II understood his role not as the supporter of the government policy but as the one who imposed his will upon the government.¹⁰³ The political scene was overshadowed by institutional corruption¹⁰⁴ and a thorough decline of democratic institutions.¹⁰⁵ The cherry on top was the personal authoritarian touch that Carol II brought to these troubled times surrounded by his unscrupulous camarilla.

General political decline, widespread corruption and the questionable behaviour of the monarch, led to the political disillusionment of the masses. The situation was further aggravated by the widespread economic hardship amid the lower classes. The fields of idealism in the minds of the young university students and those of dissatisfaction amongst the impoverished peasantry became fertile breeding grounds for radical right-wing movements.

Starting with A.C. Cuza's League of National-Christian Defense (L.A.N.C.), later joined by other extreme right movements, these radicals preached nationalism, anti-Semitism and spiritual renewal. This radical ideology of A.C. Cuza was transposed into action by his disciple and colleague, the political agitator Corneliu Zelea Codreanu who used murder, political assassination, and terror to attain his purpose. Codreanu, in 1927, created in Jassy the extreme right-nationalistic movement, the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 595

¹⁰⁴ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 29.

¹⁰⁵ Hitchens, 416.

Legion of Archangel Michael and later, in 1930, the Legion's militant political wing, the Iron Guard.¹⁰⁶

Codreanu's movement was a very uncommon modern political experiment with a religious structure.¹⁰⁷ The Legion appealed to the faith of the masses, which is why legionary mysticism was expressed in orthodox terms. At the heart of Legionary ideology were religious themes like belief in God and faith in human salvation.¹⁰⁸ Codreanu attempted a sort of syncretism between national feelings, Christian orthodox faith, Christian mysticism, and politics. This led to the "incorporation and subordination of orthodoxy to political agenda ...and the recognition of a Christian Spirituality as a behavioural norm or a source of ethical and social directives."¹⁰⁹ Legionary performance and rituals borrowed heavily from biblical imagery, orthodox rituals and Orthodox religious symbols like the cross and the icon.¹¹⁰

The mix of nationalism, religious practices, Christian mysticism and charismatic leadership had a significant appeal in interwar Romania. The Legion was very popular in rural areas, amongst university students and it drew to itself even members of the intellectual elite. Furthermore, the appeal of the Legion seduced important numbers of lower-echelon Orthodox clergy. In 1937, approximately two thousand orthodox priests were adherents or sympathizers of the Legion, from a total of ten thousand.¹¹¹

Ilie Imbrescu one of the prominent legionary orthodox priests and legionary ideologue propagated the view that "the Legionary State of Romanian Christendom will be realized and it will be "the political expression of the orthodoxy""¹¹² and "any true priest will be (...) a legionary and any true legionary will be (...) the best son of

¹⁰⁶ Deletant, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 140.

¹⁰⁸ Constantin Iordachi, "Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania's Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael," in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 31.

¹⁰⁹ Ioanid, 140.

¹¹⁰ Constantin Iordachi, "Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania's Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael," 31.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹² Ilie Imbrescu, *Biserica și mișcarea legionară: apostrofa unui teolog* (București: Cartea Românească, 1939), 186.

the Church".¹¹³ At times even higher echelon Orthodox clergy made an effort to exploit the Legion as a political manoeuvre to put pressure on the government. The religious pluralism after the realization of Greater Romania eroded the influence of the Orthodox Church. As a countermeasure in defence of their institutional and political interests, for a while, Orthodox officials viewed the Legion as a possible political ally.¹¹⁴

Eventually, the ways of the Church and the Legion parted in ideology and practice. The Orthodox Church labelled the Legion as a heretical movement in spite of all its religious veneer. Orthodox leadership realized that in the Legion, they had a rival for the hearts and minds of the masses; therefore, they agreed to its suppression by the authoritarian regime of Carol II.¹¹⁵

Carol II underscored in his public speeches the importance of the Orthodox Church in the lives of Romanians and his special relationship with the church to avoid full cooperation of the Orthodox Church and the Legion.¹¹⁶ The collaboration between Carol II and the Orthodox Church rose to its pinnacle in February 1938. Carol II abolished the dysfunctional democratic regime and replaced it with his authoritarian regime. The king appointed Orthodox Patriarch Miron Cristea as prime minister of the country, and the patriarch subserviently, in his public speech, criticized the old multiparty political system and hailed its dissolution.¹¹⁷

This appointment contrasts starkly with the new constitution of 1938, which clearly reflects the authoritarian straits of Carol and gives him almost unlimited powers. Article 8 reveals the monarch's concern about the involvement of religious actors in the political sphere. This article, directed toward the lower echelons of orthodoxy with legionary sympathies specifies that:

It is forbidden to priests, of any rite and religious belief, to subject their spiritual authority to the service of political propaganda, in the places destined to religion and official

¹¹³ Imbrescu, 201.

¹¹⁴ Iordachi, 33.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁶ George Enache, "Biserică, societate, națiune, stat în România Interbelică: Biserica Ortodoxă Română și „ispita totalitară” de dreapta," *Revista Teologica*, no. 2 (2012): 289.

¹¹⁷ Sorin Liviu Damean et al., *Evoluția instituțiilor politice ale statului român din 1859 până astăzi* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), 96.

functions, as well as outside of these. Political propaganda, in the places destined to religion, or during religious manifestations it is not allowed to anyone. Any political association based on religious pretexts it is forbidden.¹¹⁸

Undisguised subservience to Carol II came back later to haunt the higher echelons of Orthodox priests who, after the resignation of the King, were faced with harsh criticism from those who were about to attain power.

The reign of Carol II was marked by political scandal, corruption, dictatorship and widespread poverty. The rise of the Legion of Archangel Michael and the Iron Guard, the militant wing of the Legion, both very popular amongst the masses, represented a serious challenge to the power of the King, the state, and the Orthodox Church. In the face of this threat, the relationship between the King and the Orthodox Church progressed to an unprecedented level of complicity. The Orthodox Patriarch, the Highest representative of the Church, was appointed prime minister by the King and, subserviently, the Patriarch defended the authoritarian rule of the King and the dissolution of the democratic multiparty system.

1.1.5. Mihai I, Marshall Antonescu and the Churches

Carol II, due to internal and international political pressure, abdicated in September 1940 in favour of his son Mihai I and left the country. King Mihai I abolished the Constitution of 1938 and entrusted to General Ion Antonescu the task of forming the new government. This is how, on September 14, Romania became a National-Legionary State.¹¹⁹ In the short-lived National Legionary State, the Legionaries, who had previously been decimated by the oppression of Carol II, now came back with a vengeance.

They took over the Ministry of National Education, Religions and Arts and sought to reform the Orthodox Church. In the mentality of the Legionaries, the church had a major role in society and the nation. For the church to fulfil its central role, reforms were needed. The Orthodox leaders, who had collaborated with the old regime, had

¹¹⁸ "Constituția României din 1938," <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1938.htm>. (accessed on 15.08.2015)

¹¹⁹ Damean et al., 100.

to be replaced with those who understood the times.¹²⁰ The Legionary pressure resulted in the Synod of the Orthodox Church on 2 December 1940. Patriarch Nicodim Munteanu and other high church officials survived this Synod given their influence in the government and with the help of General Antonescu who, at this point, had already decided to get rid of his unconformable Legionary government partners.¹²¹

The political animosities between General Antonescu and the Iron Guard, driven by the desire of the Guard to have all the power in Romania, led to an armed rebellion by the Iron Guard. On 22 and 23 January 1941, with the aid of the army, Antonescu defeated the revolt of the Iron Guard and ended the still-young National Legionary State. On 17 February 1941, he inaugurated his own pro-German military dictatorship. Legally, after the abrogation of the 1938 Constitution, the Orthodox Church functioned based on the Constitution of 1923. The special Law of the Religions of 1928 was modified to mirror the policy of Hitler's Germany concerning the Jews and complementing the national fascist radicalism of the Iron Guard, which sought to maintain the Romanian ethnical cleanliness and Orthodox Christianity. Accordingly, Jews were forbidden to change their religion and by the decree of July 1943 Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals were stripped of legal status.¹²²

Antonescu decried the crimes of the Iron Guard and ordered investigations for the prosecution of its crimes. He treated the Churches with military strictness, often annoyed that they did not react as swiftly to his desires as a company of soldiers. He prosecuted and sentenced orthodox priests who were involved with the Legion. Ion Sandu, the Secretary of State for Religions, informed the General in a meeting in December 1941, that 262 priests involved in the Legionary Rebellion stood trial. From these, 190 were exonerated, 14 were fined, 67 were found guilty sentenced to up to 5

¹²⁰ George Enache, "Biserică, Societate, Națiune, Stat în România Interbelică: Biserica Ortodoxă Română și „ispita totalitară” de Dreapta,” 294.

¹²¹ Ibid., 296.

¹²² Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria Românilor de la Carol I la Nicolae Ceaușescu* (București: Mica Valahie, 2010), 115.

years in prison, and 7 were sentenced to prison up to 7 years. All those condemned were suspended from their offices and were denied their wages.¹²³

Despite this harsh treatment, Antonescu continued to have a good working relationship with important representatives of the Orthodox Church. This is reflected in the numerous meetings over the years recorded in his Journal, meetings with the Patriarch Nicodim¹²⁴ and Mytropolit Bălan.¹²⁵ The Antonescu regime recognized the important status the Church had and tried to fashion it into a tool¹²⁶ of state control over the civil society once Romania entered the Second World War.¹²⁷

In June 1941, Romania entered The Second World War and, together with Germany, her ally, participated in the military campaign against the Soviet Union. A good example of “church militarization” is the participation of the Orthodox Church in the Romanian offensive in the East. Orthodox priests took over parishes from liberated areas and started to organize their religious life.¹²⁸ Another example is the Orthodox mission to the occupied territories of Transnistria. Antonescu, in an effort to integrate these territories, encouraged the Orthodox Church to contribute to the spiritual revival of these Soviet territories, stricken by atheism, by sending priests to rebuild churches and to officiate religious ceremonies like marriages, baptisms, and funerals.¹²⁹

In Antonescu’s time, the state constantly meddled in religious affairs, weakening the Church instead of strengthening it, subjecting the majoritarian Church to state control and persecuting the religious minorities who had no place in this unitary vision of Church and state. The only exception to this was Antonescu’s policy of neutrality toward the Roman Catholic Church. In his plans this Church, with ties to Western Europe and indirectly to the Allied forces, had an important role in

¹²³ Adrian Nicolae Petcu, “Despre o altă istorie a vieții religioase din Transnistria,” in *Istorie și Societate*, ed. Stela Cheptea, Marusia Cîrstea, and Horia Dumitrescu, vol. II (București: Mica Valahie, 2011), 487.

¹²⁴ Gheorghe Buzatu et al., eds., *Pace și Război (1940 – 1944): Jurnalul Mareșalului Ion Antonescu*, vol. II (Iași: Demiurg, 2010), 621.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 613.

¹²⁶ Enache, 297.

¹²⁷ Scurtu, 116.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Romania's potential negotiations for exiting the war¹³⁰ once Hitler's Germany began to lose the war.

1.2. STEPS TOWARD "POPULAR DEMOCRACY" (1944-1948)

The alteration in the fortunes of war for Hitler's Germany and his allies in 1942-1943, in World War II, signalled major changes for Romania. During these years fruitless negotiations were conducted by Marshall Antonescu, King Mihai I and the political opposition with the allied Western powers in order to secure an armistice.¹³¹ In 1944, the situation became desperate for Romania; the eastern part of the country was occupied by the Soviet Union and the future spelt total occupation.

Desperate times required desperate measures. In June 1944, the Liberal and the Peasant Party overcame their natural aversion and formed an alliance with a small fringe party, the Communists, with the purpose of removing Antonescu from power and negotiating an armistice with the Soviet Union. The Western powers suggested this line of action to the Romanians.¹³² This so-called National Democrat Block became the political base of the coup d'état on 23 August 1944, led by Mihai I, which removed Antonescu from power.¹³³

The coup d'état of 23 August 1944 revived for a short period the democracy and the constitutional monarchy. Accordingly, Romania exchanged loyalties; the Romanian army turned against the German forces and, in concert with the Soviet army, endeavoured to drive the German forces out of Romania. The provisional government of Sănătescu negotiated an official armistice with the Soviet Union. The harsh terms of the armistice were mainly dictated by the Soviet side with little Western interference giving the Soviet Union tremendous political and economic power over Romania.¹³⁴ Given a large number of Soviet troops on Romanian soil, and, as a result of the secret arrangements from the 4th Moscow conference on 9-19

¹³⁰ Enache, 299.

¹³¹ Pop and Bolovan, 609.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Hitchins, 503.

October 1944, the country came under the pervasive soviet influence.¹³⁵ At this meeting between Churchill and Stalin matters concerning Western and Soviet spheres of influence,¹³⁶ were discussed and the Soviet Union received 90% control of Romania.¹³⁷

Before 23 August 1944, the Romanian Communist Party existed in illegality and exile, being previously outlawed for anti-national ideology and activity. Compared to other Communist Parties from neighbouring countries, the Romanian Communist Party had few members, and in the *Comintern*, the international communist organization, had a pariah status. The party by the time of the coup d'état had 80 members in the Romanian capital and less than 1.000 members in the whole country, including the incarcerated members in prisons or concentration camps.¹³⁸

The ascension of the Communist Party to power was gradual; their efforts in the beginning were frustrated by their numbers and the lack of legitimacy in front of the general population.¹³⁹ But given the presence of the Red Army, the Romanian Communist Party in spite of its small numbers enjoyed a privileged status of political and logistic superiority compared to the other Romanian historical parties.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, to counter their limitations and achieve total control the Communist Party, they adopted a three-phase strategy.

The aim of the first phase was to widen its electoral basis by increasing the party numbers. They did this by accepting virtually any willing person. So, from the less than 1.000 members¹⁴¹ in August 1944, within three months, the numbers had swollen close to 6.000. In February 1945, the number rose to 15.000, and by April of the same year, it grew to a staggering number of 42.653.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Pop and Bolovan, 610.

¹³⁶ Tom Gallagher, *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milosevic* (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), 149.

¹³⁷ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 101.

¹³⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (București: Polirom, 2005), 109.

¹³⁹ Pop and Bolovan, 612.

¹⁴⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului: Europa Răsăriteană de la Stalin la Havel* (București: Polirom, 2007), 47.

¹⁴¹ Judt, 130.

¹⁴² Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 109.

The second phase consisted of the struggle to acquire key government positions by first toppling the existing government through demagoguery, massive demonstrations and political agitation. The Communist Party, advised and coordinated by the Kremlin,¹⁴³ conducted a political smear campaign against the existing traditional political parties and against the two Prime Ministers, Sănătescu and Rădescu, appointed by Mihai I to lead the three governments from 1944 to 1947. The leading accusations against them were “anti-Soviet behaviour, collaboration with the Iron Guard before 1940 and residual fascism”.¹⁴⁴

A key role in this process was played by Andrei Ianuarievici Vîșinski, first deputy commissar of foreign affairs of the Soviet Union, assigned by Stalin to deal with Romanian affairs.¹⁴⁵ Vîșinski, in the context of large scale communist organized demonstrations in the country, declared that the existing government was unable to maintain public order, and on 28 February 1945 forced Mihai I to dismiss the existing government and transfer power to another government¹⁴⁶. This new cabinet was installed on the March 6th. It was led by Dr. Petru Groza, the man trusted by the Soviet Union¹⁴⁷ and was the first government dominated by communists. The Communist Party obtained the Ministries of Justice, Communications, Internal Affairs, Propaganda, and under-secretariats in the Ministry of Agriculture and Communications.¹⁴⁸ In the years of 1945-1947, the communist party gradually assumed control of the Police, Gendarmerie, and the Special Service of Information, all of these state institutions that had repressive or informative tasks.¹⁴⁹ The original task of these state institutions, to guarantee constitutional order, was subverted by the communists and they were used as a weapon in the political struggle against the political opposition and any anti-Communist structure of power.¹⁵⁰ These privileged

¹⁴³ Ibid., 111.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Pop and Bolovan, 614.

¹⁴⁷ Dennis Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist* (București: Fundația Academia civică, 2010), 65.

¹⁴⁸ Tismăneanu, 112.

¹⁴⁹ Florian Banu et al., *Securitatea: Structuri - cadre, Obiective și metode*, ed. Florica Dobre, vol. I 1948–67 (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2006), xxvi.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, xxiv.

positions permitted the launch of the third phase in the attempt to achieve total control of the society.

1.2.1. Annihilation of Political Opposition

The third phase in the Communist strategy was the political purge and ideological cleansing of the country.¹⁵¹ Starting with the Groza cabinet on 6 March 1945, the Communists subjected the government to their will. They perceived the historical political parties as a major obstacle on the road to total control over the society.¹⁵² These parties were the only existing form of official opposition for the Communist Party, therefore, they had to be systematically annihilated.¹⁵³ One of the methods employed for clearing the political scene of opposition was the forging of the parliamentary elections on 19 November 1946,¹⁵⁴ which resulted in an electoral landslide for the communists.¹⁵⁵ From 1946 the Communist Party controlled not only the government, but the Parliament as well.

Another method employed by the communists was the staging of a flight from the country of top representatives of the Peasant Party. In July 1947, several officials of the Peasant Party were ambushed while attempting to leave the country in order to form an alternative government in exile.¹⁵⁶ Under this pretext, the Communists arrested all the leadership of the Peasant Party and, in August the same year, the Peasant and the Liberal Party were dissolved¹⁵⁷ by official decree of the Council of Ministers.¹⁵⁸ Social democracy, like in many eastern European countries, soon disappeared from the political landscape,¹⁵⁹ the Social Democrat Party was absorbed by the Communist Party in 1948 giving birth to the new all-encompassing Romanian

¹⁵¹ Pop and Bolovan, 613.

¹⁵² Tismăneanu, 113.

¹⁵³ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2012), 54.

¹⁵⁴ Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 113.

¹⁵⁵ Gallagher, *Outcast Europe: The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milosevic*, 172.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁵⁷ Tismăneanu, 114.

¹⁵⁸ Pop and Bolovan, 615.

¹⁵⁹ Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 249.

Workers Party.¹⁶⁰ The majority of the leadership of the historical political parties ended up in communist prisons where most were exterminated.¹⁶¹

The communists, in accordance with their creed from the Communist Manifesto, identified the constitutional monarchy as of “bourgeois” origin. To counter this “bourgeois” political system the Communist Party led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej and Ana Pauker promoted in the beginning the ideal of popular democracies.¹⁶² King Mihai I was maintained in office for a while by the communist for strategic and practical reasons, to maintain internationally the artificial image of political plurality. King Mihai I was gradually marginalized and finally, when he was left without Western support, on 30 December 1947, he was forced by communist leaders Petru Groza and Gheorghiu Dej¹⁶³ to resign and leave the country.¹⁶⁴

1.2.2. Subordination of the Religious Realm

The religious realm did not escape the communist power grab. The problem was that the majority of the Romanian population, by the end of World War II, had a considerable religious history and traditions and adhered to a Christian worldview. This worldview and the communist ideology were clearly at odds.¹⁶⁵ The Marxist communists sought to remove from the collective conscience the idea of faith in God, and the existence of another ontological reality besides the one experienced scientifically.¹⁶⁶ Communists wanted to break ties with the past,¹⁶⁷ to build a new society and to socially engineer the new man.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, subjugation of the existing religious denominations was a sine qua non. Every aspect of public and

¹⁶⁰ Tismăneanu, 115.

¹⁶¹ Pop and Bolovan, 615.

¹⁶² Tismăneanu, 114.

¹⁶³ Pop and Bolovan, 615.

¹⁶⁴ Tismăneanu, 115.

¹⁶⁵ Gheorghe Enache and Adrian Nicolae Petcu, “Biserica Ortodoxă Română și Securitatea, Note de lectură,” in *Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare și represiune în România comunistă* (București: Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, 2001), 116.

¹⁶⁶ Enache and Petcu, 116.

¹⁶⁷ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria contemporană a României: (1918 - 2007)* (București: Ed. Fundației “România de Măine,” 2007), 122.

¹⁶⁸ I. Rockmore et al., *Marxism and Alternatives: Towards the Conceptual Interaction Among Soviet Philosophy, Neo-Thomism, Pragmatism, and Phenomenology*, (Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, U.S.A.: Hingham, MA: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1981), 25.

private life had to be fashioned after communist ideology¹⁶⁹, including the religious aspect.

In the beginning, during the years 1945-1946, suffering from a lack of legitimacy, the communists sought to establish their control gradually over the churches, trying to win their support and alleviate the fears of the international community. They sought to subject and manipulate, first and foremost, the majoritarian Orthodox Church. This endeavour found support in the way the Orthodox Church understood its relationship with the state fashioned by the Byzantine symphony principle¹⁷⁰, i.e. the principle of harmony between the state and the church. From the beginning of the Soviet influence in Romania at the end of World War II, just a few months after the 23 August 1944 coup d'état, Patriarch Nicodim, through an official Pastoral Letter, expressed the support of the Orthodox Church for the Soviet regime.¹⁷¹ Prime Minister Petru Groza, in the first communist-controlled government, grasped this open hand extended from the Orthodox side and tried to win religious and electoral support for the communist regime using familiar nationalist and religious language.¹⁷²

Furthermore, communists supported the advancement in the local eparchial councils¹⁷³ and in the hierarchy of clergy open to their influence.¹⁷⁴ One of the most notorious examples of quick promotion was Justinian Marina, the next Patriarch after Nicodim. He was an ordinary priest from Râmnicu Vâlcea who, because of his leftist views, was set on a fast track of advancement by communist high officials like Ana Pauker or Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej. From ordinary priest, he was promoted to monk and after another day, he was elevated to the office of bishop in the Metropolitanate of Moldova and Suceava.¹⁷⁵ Father Constantin Burducea is another good example.

¹⁶⁹ Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, 57.

¹⁷⁰ Olivier Gillet, *Religion et nationalisme: l'idéologie de l'Eglise orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1997), 6.

¹⁷¹ Lucian Leuștean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 58.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷³ Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în primul deceniu comunist* (București: Curtea Veche, 2013), 138–39.

¹⁷⁴ Leuștean, 69.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

Burducea, before World War II, was a member of the Iron Guard. Because of this stain on his history, he was easily co-opted and manipulated by the communist party.¹⁷⁶ In the Groza government he was chosen to be Minister of Religious Confessions¹⁷⁷, which was perceived as subservience to the regime.¹⁷⁸

To send a clear message to the international community about religious openness, the Groza government held a General Religious Congress on 16-17 October 1945 in Bucharest. To this Congress, representatives of all officially recognized religious confessions from Romania were invited, along with representatives of Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian Orthodox churches. Minister Burducea, at the same time President of the Democratic Union of Priests, wanted to put on a good show¹⁷⁹ for his political masters. In his inaugural speech, he presented the Church as the bearer of a great unifying mission in the Soviet sphere of influence:

A precious collaborator of the state, because the Romanian Church is older than the state and because it conducts the soul of the Romanian people... Today this collaboration between church and state is something normal, because the government belongs to the people, the Church is of the people, and all these three belong to God.¹⁸⁰

Similar language, a mixture of religion and politics, can be found in the discourses of other clergymen who supported the regime. Bishop Justinian Marina, later Patriarch Justinian, in his speech given on 9 May 1946 commemorating the Romanian War of Independence, said that the new regime would bring political ascension for Romania and its people, clearly borrowing from the religious significance of Ascension Day.¹⁸¹

The communists exploited the relationship between the Orthodox Churches of the Soviet Union and Romania to entangle the country into the Soviet web and distance it from the Western Catholic and Protestant Churches.¹⁸² The Orthodox Patriarch Alexius of Moscow was invited by the Groza cabinet to visit the sister church from

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 62.

¹⁷⁷ Stan and Turcescu, 22.

¹⁷⁸ Dudu Velicu and Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României, Însemnări zilnice*, vol. I, 1945–1947 (București: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2004), 16.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁸⁰ Leustean, 62.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸² Ibid., 69.

Romania between 29 May and 12 June 1947. The Groza regime used this visit as a piece of communist propaganda to show that there was religious freedom in the country and good cooperation between the church from Romania and the Soviet Union.¹⁸³

Due to pressure from the Americans and the British on the Soviets to allow a democratic system in Romania, general elections were held on 19 November 1946. The goal was to win as many as possible from the 414 seats of a single chamber parliament.¹⁸⁴ As a result of massive fraud, the Communist Left obtained an 84% landslide majority in parliament, 348 seats compared to the 66 seats of the opposition.¹⁸⁵ Legitimated by these results the communists started to apply more pressure on the Churches. Bishop Justinian, due to his pro-communist sympathies, was propelled upwards in the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. On May 24 1948, the Electoral Collegium, controlled by the communist parliament members, elected him as Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, strengthening communist domination over the church.¹⁸⁶

After the communists took over the political power, the next logical move was the creation of a legal context that legitimated the new regime. The first of the communist constitutions, the Constitution of 1948, adopted by the Great National Assembly on 13 April 1948, heralded problems for the churches. The constitutional formulations try to appease fears using terms like equality and freedom, in accord with the Perestroika of those years¹⁸⁷, but limitations and coercion lurk in the shadow. According to article 16: "All citizens of the Romanian Popular Republic, without differentiation of sex, nationality, race, religion or degree of culture, are equal for the law".¹⁸⁸ Article 27 follows suit in the first part speaking about liberties:

¹⁸³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁸⁴ Dennis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965* (C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1999), 78.

¹⁸⁵ Leustean, 66.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 74.

¹⁸⁷ Gillet, 2.

¹⁸⁸ "Constituția României din 1948," <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1948.htm>. (accessed on 28.10.2015)

Liberty of conscience and religious liberty are guaranteed by the State. Religious denominations are free to organize and can freely function if their ritual and practice are not contrary to the Constitution, public security and good morals.¹⁸⁹

The second part introduces the limitations: “No denomination or religious community is allowed to open or maintain institutions of general education, but only special schools for the preparation of the denominational personnel under the control of the State”.¹⁹⁰ This directive with one strike outlawed all confessional gymnasiums and high schools laying the foundation for the re-education along communist lines of the children and youth in state-controlled public schools.

The progressive control over the religious scene took an unexpected turn with the adoption of the Law of Religious Confessions on 4 August 1948.¹⁹¹ This law, called Decree Nr.177 for the General Regime of Religious Confessions became the legal base of all relationships between the religious confessions and the state during the communist period in Romania. Based on this law, fashioned after soviet legislation¹⁹² the communist could control every aspect of religious life.¹⁹³

Article 1 emulates previous legislation that guarantees freedom of religion: “The state guarantees freedom of conscience and religious liberty on all the territory of the Romanian Popular Republic. Anyone can belong to any religion or embrace any religious belief...”¹⁹⁴, but the second part can be easily interpreted “...if its exercise does not contravene to the Constitution, security and public order or good morals”.¹⁹⁵ Article 3 furthermore forbids any prosecution of an individual on a religious basis or his religious discrimination in the area of civil and political rights. Religious denominations can organize themselves after their own norms, teachings and traditions according to Article 7.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Pop and Bolovan, 627.

¹⁹² Cristian Vasile, *Biserica Ortodoxa Romana in primul deceniu comunist* (București: Curtea Veche (Elefant Online, 2013), 282.

https://books.google.ro/books/about/Biserica_Ortodoxa_Romana_in_primul_decen.html?id=D4iTDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false Accessed on 2 January 2020.

¹⁹³ Leustean, 78.

¹⁹⁴ “Decret Nr. 177-1948 Pentru regimul general al cultelor religioase,”

<http://www.anrp.gov.ro/uploads/pdf/DECRET%20%20Nr%20177-1948.pdf> (accessed on 26.10.2015)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Any illusion of religious freedom starts to dissipate with Article 12: “Recognized religious denominations will have a central organization, which will represent the denomination...”. Denominations like the Baptists with no hierarchical top-down organization had to adapt and create a more centralized structure. Time showed that control over the central organization facilitated overall control of a denomination.

Fundamental in exerting control over religious denominations are Articles 13, 14, 16, 17 and 21. Article 13 states that religious denominations are accredited by the state and they also can be banned:

Religious denominations, in order to organize and function will have to be recognized by decree of the Presidium of the Great National Assembly, given at the proposal of the Government, after the recommendation of the Ministry of Denominations. In well-motivated cases the recognition can be withdrawn in the same way.¹⁹⁶

Article 14 introduces another control tool, a mandatory statute for every denomination. In order to be recognized, every denomination had the obligation to submit “through the Ministry of Denominations for examination and approval, the statute of organization and functioning, including the system of organization, leadership and administration, accompanied by the profession of faith”.¹⁹⁷ Article 16 forbids political parties organized on a religious basis. Article 17 introduces mandatory registration of religious communities, creating an efficient tool for the communist police state:

The local components of recognized religious denominations, like communities, parishes, units, groups, will have to be inscribed in a special registry of the City Hall, showing nominally the leadership and control organs and indicating the number of its members.¹⁹⁸

Furthermore Article 21 introduces other disgraceful obligations. Leaders of all officially recognised religious confessions will be recognised by the state only by decree of the Presidium of the Great National Assembly, given at the proposal of the Government, after the recommendation of the Ministry of Denominations. These

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

religious leaders will have to swear an oath of allegiance to the state in front of the Minister of Religious Denominations as follows:

As servant of God, as man and as citizen, I swear to be faithful to the people and to defend the Romanian People's Republic against enemies from outside and within; I swear that I shall respect and that I shall ensure that my subordinates respect the laws of the Romanian People's Republic; I swear that I shall not allow my subordinates to initiate and to take part and I shall not initiate and take part in any action which would violate public order and the integrity of Romanian People's Republic. So help me God!¹⁹⁹

The Decree Nr.177 for the General Regime of Religious Confessions affected the organization of the Orthodox Church, reducing the number of existing bishoprics, because Article 22 stipulated that the minimum number of adherents in a bishopric should be 750.000. The Orthodox church had no alternative but to obey this arbitrary measure, created a more easily controllable centralized structure.

Articles 29-36 legislates state control over matters of properties, budgets and salaries for religious personnel. All denominations were requested to remit to the Ministry of Religious Denominations an inventory of all of their properties. The budgets of the churches were also subjected to the control of the Ministry of Religious Denominations. The state gave subsidies for the economic needs of the religious confessions, but the state could permanently or temporarily deny payment of salaries to insubordinate religious personnel.²⁰⁰ Article 49 reduced the number of theological institutes for the Orthodox Church to two, for the Catholic and Protestant Churches to a single theological institute for each church and according to article 53 all theological seminaries of secondary education were dissolved entirely.

The Decree Nr.177 came as a shock for all the religious denominations because it legalized the all-encompassing control of the state. It introduced rules that lead to an easier to control, more centralized, structure of the officially recognised religions disregarding their historical way of organisation. Furthermore, it subjected all of their finances to state control and eliminated or severely restricted the institutes of religious education.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ "Decret Nr. 177-1948 Pentru Regimul General al Cultelor Religioase."

Relationships between the Romanian state and the Roman Catholic Church before World War II were regulated by the Concordat with the Vatican signed on 10 May 1927.²⁰¹ This agreement guaranteed to the Roman Catholic Church official recognition, freedom of worship, freedom of organization, freedom to own properties, and the right to keep primary and secondary religious schools. With the ascension of communists, the relationship with the Catholic Church changed. This church was seen by the Soviets and their minions as the centre of international reactionary forces²⁰² against communism.²⁰³

If the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church was infiltrated by the communist regime, the same cannot be said about the Catholic Church because its leadership was appointed directly by the Vatican. The communists perceived the Catholic organizational structure and the international policy of the Vatican as a threat to their agenda.²⁰⁴ To eliminate any hindrance, the government annulled the Concordat with the Vatican on 17 July 1948.²⁰⁵ In the fall of 1948, the communist government tried a forced takeover of the Catholic Church. They rejected the fundamental organizational principles of this church, and its leadership could not accept this.²⁰⁶ Persecution followed, and many Catholic priests and members of the catholic hierarchy were arrested. The existing six archbishop seats were reduced to two.²⁰⁷ In the end, following fierce reactions from the Vatican and the international community, the communists decided to confer a semi-legal status to the Catholic Church. This tolerated status meant that the Roman Catholic Church continued to function without official registration; the previous material subsidiaries from the state stopped, and its activities were dramatically reduced²⁰⁸ and restricted.²⁰⁹

²⁰¹ Pop and Bolovan, 627.

²⁰² Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist* (București: Curtea Veche (Elefant Online), 2013), 21.

²⁰³ Dumitru Cătălin Rogoianu, "The Relationship between State and Church during the Petru Groza Government (1945-1947). The Greek-Catholic Church of Romania and Vatican's Attitude," *Postmodern Openings* I (April 2010): 39. <http://postmodernopenings.com/archives/86> (accessed on 13.11.2015).

²⁰⁴ Leustean, 76.

²⁰⁵ Scurtu, 126.

²⁰⁶ Dănuț Doboș, ed., *Biserica romano-catolică din România în timpul prigoanei comuniste (1948-1989)* (Iasi: Sapienția., 2008), 16.

²⁰⁷ Pop and Bolovan, 627.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Stan and Turcescu, 22.

Communist control over the religious sphere continued with a shift in focus from the Roman Catholic Church to the Greek Catholic church. The Greek Catholic Uniate church was formed in 1697-1701 as a political manoeuvre to divide the orthodox religious community from Transylvania.²¹⁰ By 1948, this denomination was the second largest community in the country. The communists sought to break the ties of this church with the Vatican and to “reunite” it with the Orthodox Church under their control.

The first step in September 1948 was the removal from office of bishops Ioan Suciu of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș, Valeriu Traian Frențiu of Oradea, Alexandru Rusu of Maramureș and Ioan Bălan of Lugoj.²¹¹ The second was a communist propaganda action. The communist regime fabricated a so-called Popular People’s Movement as coming from the inside of the Greek Catholic Uniate Church. The claim of this fake movement was a desire for unification, a yearning of its believers to return to the mother church, the Orthodox Church.²¹²

On 1 October 1948, in Cluj, at a congress organized by the communist regime, under tremendous political pressure, 38 delegates and 423 priests manifested their desire to return to orthodoxy. The Greek Catholic hierarchy excommunicated all those involved in the congress. Communist retaliation followed this clear rejection of the communist agenda by the Uniate hierarchy. In November, all the Greek Orthodox bishoprics were dissolved, and in December, all Greek Catholic dioceses and communities were disbanded.²¹³

Finally, precisely on the date of the 250th anniversary of the Greek Catholic Church on 1 December 1948, Orthodox Patriarch Justinian in the Cathedral of Alba Iulia read the proclamation of the union²¹⁴ of the two churches, and thus officially the Uniate church ceased to exist.²¹⁵ Members of the Uniate hierarchy and clergy who refused to recognize the unification were arrested and imprisoned, many paying with their

²¹⁰ Pop and Bolovan, 628.

²¹¹ Leustean, 79.

²¹² Ibid., 80.

²¹³ Pop and Bolovan, 628.

²¹⁴ Leustean, 80.

²¹⁵ Pop and Bolovan, 628.

lives for their lack of submission to political control. At this time the Greek Catholic Church had 1.5 million believers and 1.725 churches. Some of its believers were integrated into Orthodox churches, and others continued to practice their religion illegally. All properties of the disbanded church, except those taken over by the Orthodox Church, were confiscated by the state.²¹⁶

The Protestant Churches and other religious minorities who wanted to continue to be officially recognized by the state had to adjust their bylaws²¹⁷, submitting their organizations to the control of the Ministry of Religious Denominations. Starting in 1948, all the officially recognized religious denominations succumbed to the extensive control of the state.

1.3. STALINISM AND NATIONAL COMMUNISM (1948-1965)

By 1948, the communists in Romania were in control of the state. They continued through sustained efforts to “establish monopolistic systems, single party, passed on the ideological dogmas that sprung from the interpretation Stalin gave to bolshevism”.²¹⁸ The communists gradually shed the benign “popular democracy” mask labouring to build “dictatorships of the proletariat of the soviet type”.²¹⁹ The Stalinist plan for Eastern Europe was to shape national political cultures after the soviet model.²²⁰

Accordingly, led by the Romanian Communist Party, the state, the society and the economy became steadily a carbon copy of the Soviet Union.²²¹ Officially, Soviet sympathies were inscribed in the Constitution of 1952, which, from the introductory chapter, is full of deference towards the Soviet Union. The birth of the Romanian People’s Republic is solely due to “the victory of the Soviet Union over German Fascism and to the liberation of Romania by the glorious Soviet Army”.²²²

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ see the example of the German Evangelical Church in, Ottmar Trașcă and Remus Gabriel Anghel, *Un veac frământat. Germanii din România după 1918* (ediția a 2-a) (Cluj Napoca: Editura ISPMN, 2019), 231.

²¹⁸ Tismăneanu, 144.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 144.

²²⁰ Ibid., 144.

²²¹ Pop and Bolovan, 625.

²²² “Constituția României din 1952,” 2015, <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1952.htm>. (accessed on 30.10.2015)

At the beginning of the fight against the political opposition it united the ranks of the Romanian Communist Party. But the elimination of external rivals was followed by soviet style political infighting; different communist power groups sought the control of their party. Fratricidal political purges were directed toward prominent members. The Byzantine style conniving “devoured the Romanian communist elites, the mystical internationalism of the cominternist period was gradually replaced by a cynical, pragmatic, cosmetized with nationalistic motives even xenophobic attitude”.²²³

The power group of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej eliminated their rivals from the higher echelons of the party. Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, a prominent communist figure and former Justice Minister, was purged from the Communist Party in 1948. He was accused of all kind of imaginary mortal sins like: bourgeois origins, influenced by the bourgeois, exponent of bourgeois ideology, and later as titoist-fascist secret agent of the western powers.²²⁴ Pătrășcanu was kept for 6 years in prison; he was brought to trial in 1954 and executed the same year.²²⁵

Dej and his group strengthened their position in the state apparatus following the local and parliamentary elections of 1951.²²⁶ Another high-profile purge conducted by Dej in 1952 was directed against his colleagues from the Secretariat of the Central Committee, against External Affairs Minister Ana Pauker, Finance Minister Vasile Luca and Internal Affairs Minister Teohari Georgescu. Vasile Luca, accused of anti-party and anti-state attitude, was removed from office, was tried and died in prison in 1963. Teohari Georgescu and Ana Pauker were accused of “deviations to the right”, consequently, they were stripped of all official positions and excluded from the Party.²²⁷

²²³ Tismăneanu, 165.

²²⁴ Ibid., 152.

²²⁵ Ibid., 150.

²²⁶ Ibid., 165.

²²⁷ Ibid., 168.

1.3.1. *Subjugation of Civil Society, Intellectual Life, and Culture*

The annihilation of political opposition and the subordination of the churches were only a stepping stone for the Romanian Communists in order to achieve total control. To further this purpose, they attempted the “total destruction of the civil society and the regimentation of intellectual life and of culture”.²²⁸

Communist ideology is based on the Marxist idea that the Communist Party is the only “beneficiary of direct access to historical truth”.²²⁹ Class struggle is the overarching truth of history in the opinion of Marx and Engels. The aim of the communist party as the representative of the oppressed proletariat is to form the working class, the proletariat, into a class that can overturn the ruling bourgeois class and take over political power.²³⁰ Once this is realised and the old society is revolutionised, the class struggle will disappear and a utopian society will take over, characterised by equality and freedom for the “development of all”.²³¹

Lenin modified this by emphasising that the Communist Party was the forerunner of the revolution, not the proletariat. The revolution must begin not in a developed Western European country but in a less developed country like Russia. The dictatorship of the proletariat will lead the Communist state towards a mature, full-grown socialism. Lenin’s Bolshevism represented a fusion between Western social democratic values and Russian violent revolutionary traditions.²³²

The Romanian variant of Bolshevism, according to historian Vladimir Tismăneanu, can be called National Stalinism. National Stalinism is an anti-liberal and anti-democratic ideology. National Stalinism “adhered to a summa of presupposed universal laws of the socialist revolution and any deviation from these laws were considered a betrayal of class principles”.²³³ Its aim was the fulfilment of Marxist-Leninist utopia indifferent to what this would cost the country.

²²⁸ Ibid., 147.

²²⁹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Despre Comunism, Destinul unei religii politice* (București: Humanitas, 2011), 46.

²³⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), 48.

²³¹ Ibid., 59.

²³² Tismăneanu, 46.

²³³ Ibid., 74.

Human relationships as the basis of civil society came under siege. The task of Marxist-Leninism in its Romanian National Stalinist manifestation was to dominate the public and private life: “man as individual and as *citoyen* had to be massified”.²³⁴ Individualism had to disappear, “the self, had to be denied in order to achieve real *fraternité*”.²³⁵ To accomplish uniformity and obedience “individuals were induced a universal sentiment of fear, these were treated as simple cogs in the gearbox of the totalitarian state machinery”.²³⁶

To ensure a good surveillance of the society and the repression of reactionary forces, the communist regime formed on 28 August 1948²³⁷ a specialised new institution, the General Directorate of the People’s Security, commonly known from this moment on as *Securitatea*. It was modelled after the Soviet NKVD, and its policy was under Soviet direction.²³⁸ By the Decree nr.221 of 1948 that stipulated the forming of the security police, the communist regime officially legitimated itself as a police state²³⁹, i.e., with the help of this new state structure the communist regime launched the extensive surveillance of its citizens and suppressed all elements from the society who refused to accept the new status quo.

The repression orchestrated by the security police paired with the communist regimentation of the legal system contributed to the universal feeling of fear.²⁴⁰ Under the Groza cabinet, the communists took over the Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs²⁴¹ and gradually the legal system was redesigned and turned upside down to strip the individual of any protection. The communists appointed new judges, and the judicial process became a sham.²⁴² Terror campaigns were unleashed over all categories of Romanian society, from the old class enemies of the communists to members of the communist elites.²⁴³

²³⁴ Ibid., 60.

²³⁵ Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, 61.

²³⁶ Tismaneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 147.

²³⁷ Banu et al., *Securitatea*, ix.

²³⁸ Deletant, 114.

²³⁹ Banu et al., ix.

²⁴⁰ Tismaneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, 56.

²⁴¹ Tismaneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 147.

²⁴² Tismaneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, 56.

²⁴³ Tismaneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 147.

Another area over which the communists spent considerable efforts to exert their control was the intellectual life, seen as a potential breeding ground for opposition. They tried to neutralize any critique directed toward communist ideology and crushed all divergence of opinion in the party and the society.²⁴⁴ All forms of originality and creativity in intellectual life were extinguished. The whole Romanian cultural tradition was revised and reconstructed. All literature, history, sociology, arts, and philosophy had to serve the officially accepted ideology.²⁴⁵ Historical literary works were reinterpreted, or removed from official publications, and all forms of “nationalism”, “cosmopolitanism”, “objectivism” or other forms of “bourgeois decadence”²⁴⁶ were purged by censorship. The Romanian Academy, founded in 1866 to be totally separated from the state²⁴⁷, was reorganized, and some of its prominent members accused of “bourgeois” views were replaced by writers like Mihail Roller and Petre Constantinescu Iași, subservient to the Communist Party.²⁴⁸ The previously prestigious Academy became an instrument in the hands of the propaganda sector of the Communist Party.²⁴⁹

The purpose of this all-encompassing enslavement of civil society and intellectual life was to aid the communists in the creation of a utopian society based on a new kind of man, a man “extremely moldable, fully controllable by the party”²⁵⁰ called by some dissident soviet writers as “homo sovieticus”.²⁵¹ The communists employed subservient intellectuals to create a new culture based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology.²⁵² Communist institutions like the Writers Union, the Composers Union and the Plastic Artists Union were the main instruments of the party in “controlling, corrupting and co-opting”²⁵³ intellectuals. The result of subjecting all aspects of

²⁴⁴ Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, 56.

²⁴⁵ Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 147.

²⁴⁶ Tismăneanu, 147.

²⁴⁷ Pop and Bolovan, 626.

²⁴⁸ Tismăneanu, 148.

²⁴⁹ Pop and Bolovan, 626.

²⁵⁰ Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, 57.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate*, 148.

²⁵³ Ibid.

intellectual life to “social realism”²⁵⁴ was devastating because it perpetrated “lie, hypocrisy and moral turpitude.”²⁵⁵

1.3.2. Communist Church Management

The Communist regime, at first, saw the churches as potential political rivals, given the fundamental difference between their atheistic ideology and the religious theistic stance. The people’s diverse religious convictions were an obstacle in the path of the communist agenda. This is why they spent considerable effort to control the religious scene. Once the state achieved control over the religious denominations, it continued to manipulate and use them as policy tools.²⁵⁶ The communists, until 1965, made sustained efforts to weaken the role of the churches in Romanian society. Communist religious policy, in the opinion of author Pedro Ramet, a specialist in this area, was fashioned by five important aspects, through which they filtered religious denominations:

(1) the size of the religious organization in question; (2) the organization’s disposition to subordinate itself to political authority and amenability to infiltration and control by the secret police; (3) the degree of allegiance to a foreign authority; (4) the loyalty or disloyalty of the organization during World War II; and (5) the ethnic configuration of the country.²⁵⁷

Communist religious legislation of 1948 reduced officially recognised denominations from 60 to only 14²⁵⁸ because, like Ramet observed, only these denominations made it through the communist filter. The officially recognised denominations were the Orthodox, the Reformed, the Lutheran, the Unitarian (Sinodal-Prezbiterian), the Mosaic, the Armenian-Gregorian, the Muslim, the Old Rite Christian, the Evangelical

²⁵⁴ Tismăneanu, *Reinventarea politicului*, 57.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Pedro Ramet, *Cross and Commissar: The Politics of Religion in Eastern Europe and the USSR* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 4.

²⁵⁷ Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984), 7.

²⁵⁸ Alexandru Voicu, “Culte neoprotestante în România comunistă (1948-1960),” http://www.historia.ro/exclusiv_web/general/articol/culte-neoprotestante-n-rom-nia-comunist-1948-1960#. (accessed on 09.11.2015)

(Augustan Confession), the Baptist, the Pentecostal,²⁵⁹ the Brethren, and the Seventh Day Adventists.²⁶⁰ The Roman Catholic church had a semi-official status.

The first concern of the communist was the majoritarian Orthodox Church. The hierarchy of the Orthodox Church and the body of orthodox priests can be divided into two categories: those who, for selfish reasons, collaborated with the regime and those who were against it.²⁶¹ The communist mimicking the Stalinist model²⁶² persecuted all elements of resistance from the church, all “reactionary clerics” were targeted by communists.²⁶³ To secure the collaboration of the church some orthodox archbishops were killed, arrested, or interned in concentration camps. By January 1953, close to 500 Orthodox priests were imprisoned in Romanian concentration camps.²⁶⁴

These purges instilled fear, weakening the Orthodox Church and facilitating the subordination of its hierarchy to state control.²⁶⁵ The state, after the purges, formed a particular relationship with the orthodox. In exchange for limited ecclesiastical freedom, the church became the staunch backer of communist policies.²⁶⁶ By appointing leaders obedient to the new power,²⁶⁷ the communist controlled the church during all the communist era. The patriarchs selected by the communists were Justinian Marina (1948-1977), Iustin Moiescu (1977-1986) and Teoctist Arăpașu (1986-1990, 1990-2007). The three patriarchs were exceedingly obedient toward the Communist Party. Instead of placing the interest of the church first and instead of speaking against the religious persecution, they tried to negotiate with the

²⁵⁹ Vasiliță Croitor, *Răscumpărarea memoriei: Cultul Penticostal în perioada comunistă* (Medgidia: Succed Publishing, 2010), 28.

²⁶⁰ National Archives Inventory nr. 3 323 “Ministerul Cultelor s -Artelor 1948-1968.-Inv-3323,” II. <http://arhivelenationale.ro/site/download/inventare/Ministerul-Cultelor-si-Artelor.-1948-1968.-Inv-3323.pdf> Accessed on 3 January 2020.

²⁶¹ Sorin Bocancea, “Dincolo de actualele mituri. Biserica Ortodoxă în primii ani ai regimului comunist din România,” *Sfera Politicii*, no. 160 (2011): 107. www.ceeol.com.(accessed on 13.11.2015)

²⁶² Ramet, 15.

²⁶³ Applebaum, 275.

²⁶⁴ Ramet, 15.

²⁶⁵ Stan and Turcescu, 23.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Gillet, 4.

communists²⁶⁸, but they never openly challenged the Communist Party, and, through their inaction and misinformation, tolerated the regime's anti-religious policy.²⁶⁹

The Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Catholic Church were in a different position given their allegiance to a foreign authority, to Vatican. The Concordat with the Vatican, was annulled by the communists in July 1948, and the Roman Catholic Church, from this moment, only had a tolerated, semi-legal status. The explanation for this tolerated status is the international pressure from the western powers and the nationality of its adherents, mostly Hungarians and Swabians (Germans).²⁷⁰ On the other hand, the suppression of the Greek Orthodox Church in December 1948, a church with Romanian devotees had the purpose of "cutting the links between ethnic Romanians and the Vatican, between Romanian national identity and Catholicism"²⁷¹ a measure designed to distance ethnic Romanians from the religious and cultural values of the west.²⁷²

After the majoritarian Orthodox Church, the following were recognized by the communists from the ranks of the magisterial reform: the Reformed Church, the Augustan Evangelical Church, the Evangelical (Sinodal-Prezbiterian) Church and the Unitarian Church. The list was completed by some of the minority denominations who were persecuted under the regime of Marshall Antonescu. The four neo-protestant²⁷³ denominations that benefited from the official recognition were: the 7th Day Adventist Church, the Christian Baptist Church, The Brethren Church²⁷⁴, and the Apostolic-Pentecostal Church of God.²⁷⁵ This group was closely monitored by the Securitate during all the communist era because of its international connections and

²⁶⁸ See about Justinian's negotiations in George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană* (București: Nemira, 2005), 90.

²⁶⁹ Gillet.

²⁷⁰ Ramet, 10.

²⁷¹ Ramet, 10.

²⁷² Rogoianu, "The Relationship between State and Church during the Petru Groza Government (1945-1947). The Greek-Catholic Church of Romania and Vatican's Attitude," 39.

²⁷³ in Romania in popular terminology classical Protestant churches that appeared in Romania during the 16th century are called Protestant Churches and newer Protestant Churches that appeared during the 19th century, like Baptists, Pentecostals etc. are called Neo-Protestant

²⁷⁴ Bogdan Emanuel Răduț, *Din istoria creștinilor după Evanghelie. Culegere de documente* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2013), 13–15.

²⁷⁵ Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, *Raport final* (București, 2006), 467.

their ethnically diverse adherents, all this seen as a potential anti-communist formula.

The activity of some other religious groups was forbidden during the entirety of the communist period. The following were considered not denominations but sects: the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Nazarenians, the reformist Adventists and the Spirits. Other religious reformist groups, from the Orthodox church (the Army of the Lord, the stylists), from the Reformed Church (bethanists), dissident Pentecostals and awakened Baptists were considered anarchists by the communist regime and were outlawed²⁷⁶ because they impeded the overall communist control.

The communist state chose to entrust the Ministry of Denominations with the task of managing its relationship with the religious establishment. Thus, the churches came under institutional control. Cuza created this structure in 1859 to supervise the relationship between the state and the religious denominations, to regulate the rapport between denominations and to enforce the directives of the state upon religious denominations.²⁷⁷ From the fall of Cuza and the establishment of the foreign dynasty on the throne of Romania until 1921 this governmental structure became the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. This included supervision of the public education in Romania proffered at that time through the network of confessional schools. Later, from 1921 to 1944, this body went through several restructurings. First, it was stripped of the duty of overseeing public education and culture, and later it was endowed with overseeing both again when, in the 1940s, religious affairs, public education, and culture were brought under the same roof of a single ministry.²⁷⁸ The Law of Religious Denominations of 1948 subjected all aspects of religious life to the oversight of this ministry whose orders were carried out diligently by its ever-present inspectors.²⁷⁹ The Ministry of Religious Affairs was restructured in 1957. It was demoted from ministry to a department of

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 468.

²⁷⁷ Stan and Turcescu, 21.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Leustean, 79.

the Council of Ministers, as the Department of Denominations, and it functioned under this name until the end of the communist era.

The communist state in Romania wanted to appear internationally as tolerant toward religions. That is why the communist Constitutions of 1952 (article 84) and 1965 (article 30) continue to try to perpetrate the façade of religious freedom. Both constitutions say that freedom of conscience “is guaranteed to every citizen of the Romanian Socialist Republic”²⁸⁰ and that “freedom of religious manifestation is guaranteed. Religious denominations organize and function freely”.²⁸¹ But, the inbuilt restrictions are clearly stipulated in the two articles, “The organization and functioning of religious denominations is regularized by law”.²⁸² In addition, in the two constitutions it is clearly stated that religious involvement in public education is forbidden: “The school is separated by the church. No denomination, congregation or religious community is allowed to open or maintain other general education institutions, with the exception of special schools for the preparation of the denomination personnel”.²⁸³

The overall policy of the communist state in its relationships with the religious realm from its beginnings to 1965 and during the communist era was to eliminate their influence over the Romanian society by promoting and imposing secularism and atheistic Marxist-Leninism.²⁸⁴ The communist state in its first decades (1944-1965) persecuted all religious groups. This was realised in the beginning by purging the churches of anti-communists and filling communist prisons and concentration camps with clerics, religious militants,²⁸⁵ and laymen who acted or spoke against the communist agenda. During all of this period of time, all denominations and most of the prominent religious figures were under the extensive surveillance of the security police²⁸⁶ because they were seen as possible threats to the communist system.

²⁸⁰ “Constituția României din 1952,” “Constituția României din 1965,” <http://www.constitutia.ro/const1965.htm>. (accessed on 09.11.2015)

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid. (Article 84 from the Constitutions of 1952 and Article 30 from the Constitution of 1965)

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Stan and Turcescu, 25.

²⁸⁵ Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, *Raport final*, 468.

²⁸⁶ Enache and Petcu, 109.

The communists did not seek the total elimination of religion from society because they understood that limited toleration of religious manifestation can yield its own rewards²⁸⁷ in the context of national and international relationships. The objective of the communist party was the creation of a totally obedient church²⁸⁸, a tool in the hands of the totalitarian state.

This gave rise to a forced working relationship between the state and the churches, mostly for the benefit of the state. The majority of the hierarchy of the churches accepted that they had to be loyal to the communist state, or to have a benign attitude toward the totalitarian state. The exceptions to the rule were those clergymen who actively fought the communist system, were defamed in the official press, they, and their families, were harassed and ultimately, they were imprisoned on fabricated charges²⁸⁹ and subjected to the horrors of the communist detention and re-education system.

1.4. THE JEWISH DIMENSION

Traces of Jewish presence in Romanian lands can be found as early as the Roman Dacia of the 2nd century A.D., but there is not enough historical evidence to talk about a continuity of Jewish presence from this period until the creation of the Romanian provinces of Walachia and Moldova in the 13th-14th centuries.²⁹⁰ Starting with the 14th century there is a better documented presence. In this century, the Hungarian king, given his desire to impose Roman Catholicism upon his subjects, banished Jews from his kingdom, and they started to arrive in Walachia in 1367. Here, they were granted economic privileges by the rulers of Walachia because they wanted to encourage trade in their lands.²⁹¹

Another source of Jewish influx was the Sephardic Jews. Romanian provinces in the Ottoman Empire's sphere of influence accepted important communities of

²⁸⁷ Stan and Turcescu, 25.

²⁸⁸ Enache and Petcu, 110.

²⁸⁹ Ramet, *Cross and Commissar*, 7.

²⁹⁰ Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România (1866-1919): De la excludere la emancipare* (București: Hasefer, 2009), 34.

²⁹¹ Iancu, 35.

Sephardic Jews after their exodus from Spain and Portugal in the last decade of the 15th century. The Alhambra Decree, issued in 1492 on March 31, by the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon ordered all the Jews living in their kingdoms to convert to Christianity or leave Spain and Portugal.²⁹² Sultan Beyazid II saw this as a golden opportunity for his empire and facilitated the resettlement of Jewish communities throughout his empire. Sephardic Jews settled in important centres of South East Europe, in Athens, Salonika, Sarajevo, and Belgrade, reaching Romanian lands as well²⁹³ as early as 1496.²⁹⁴

In Romania, the Jewish community in the 20th century was composed of Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities, which coexisted in spite of their differences. These communities are the result of several Jewish migration waves, starting from the Middle Ages. The Sephardic communities, with origins in the 15th century exodus, resided mainly in the southern parts of Romania mostly in cities like Timișoara, Bucharest, Constanța and Galați. The Ashkenazi communities were located predominantly in the northern parts of the country with origins in the 18th century migrations from the Baltic countries, Prussia, Poland and Ukraine.²⁹⁵ The princes, noble lords of the manor, and the boyars brought Jewish colonists to settle their thinly populated lands²⁹⁶ in the Romanian provinces of Walachia and Moldavia. At the beginning of the 19th century, in 1803, the percentage of Jews in the two Romanian provinces was a mere 12.000, one per cent of the total population.²⁹⁷

These Ashkenazi colonists came to Moldova mainly from Galicia and Ukraine in the 1830s and 1840s, driven by persecution, pogroms²⁹⁸ and later also by the Haidamak uprisings and the new status quo in Galicia after the first partition of

²⁹² Jane S. Gerber, "Turning Point, The Spanish Expulsion," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, ed. Alan T. Levenson (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 224.

²⁹³ Andrei Oișteanu, "De ce sunt evreii din România altfel," *România Literară*, no. 25 (2013), http://www.romlit.ro/de_ce_sunt_evreii_din_romnia_altfel. (accessed on 20.03.2015)

²⁹⁴ Iancu, 35.

²⁹⁵ Paul Cernovodeanu and Ecaterina Negruzzi-Munteanu, "Evoluția demografică a Țării Românești și a Moldovei," in *Istoria Românilor*, ed. Paul Cernovodeanu and Nicolae Edroiu, vol. VI (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 2002), 64.

²⁹⁶ Heiko Haumann, *A History of East European Jews* (Central European University Press, 2002), 98.

²⁹⁷ Andrew C. Janos, "Modernization and Decay in Historical Perspective: The Case of Romania," in *Social Change in Romania 1860-1940: A Debate on Development in a European Nation*, ed. Kenneth Jowitt (Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1978), 91.

²⁹⁸ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 102.

Poland. The majority of these Jews settled in Moldavia, in Iași, Botoșani, Dorohoi, Fălticeni and some in Walachia in the area of Bucharest.²⁹⁹ By 1831, the percentage of Jews doubled, and by the time of the unification of the two provinces in 1859, their number grew to 118.922. The Jews from Moldova made up 10.7 per cent of the population many lived according to the traditional *shtetl* model, while the largely Sephardic groups from Walachia, only 2 percent of the Romanian population³⁰⁰, became more integrated into Romanian society.³⁰¹ According to Jewish historian of Romanian origin Leon Volovici, in 1878 the Jewish population was around 218.304 souls; in 1899 reached 269.015.³⁰²

The first Constitution of Romania, the Constitution of 1866, was inspired by the Belgian constitution of 1831.³⁰³ This was selected as a model by the Romanians because it incorporated the majority of the democratic constitutional principles vehiculated at that time in the world. The Constitution of 1866, on one side, brought significant positive changes for the Romanian society, but, on the other side, it erected huge barriers in the path of Jewish political emancipation. Article 7 stipulated that “only aliens of the Christian rite may acquire Romanian citizenship”.³⁰⁴

In October 1879, the controversial Article 7 of the Constitution was modified. At the Congress of Berlin after the 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish war,³⁰⁵ for Romanians a war for independence, representatives of the Great Powers pressured Romania. They conditioned the recognition of the independence of the Romanian Provinces from the Ottoman Empire upon the political emancipation of Romanian Jewry.³⁰⁶ At the Congress of Berlin, the new geopolitics of the Balkans was laid out. Article 44 of the Congress, originally redacted by French Foreign Minister Waddington, stipulated the

²⁹⁹ Haumann, 98.

³⁰⁰ Janos, 91.

³⁰¹ Deletant, 102.

³⁰² Leon Volovici, “Romania,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Romania>. (accessed on 16.03.2015)

³⁰³ Berindei, 560.

³⁰⁴ Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew: Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romanian and Other Central-East European Cultures* (London, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 10.

³⁰⁵ Volovici, “Romania.”

³⁰⁶ Oișteanu. “De ce sunt evreii din România altfel”.

equality of all the people living on Romanian soil, indifferent to their religion.³⁰⁷ In spite of all the international pressure, the modification in 1879 was ultimately a failed attempt. Jews now could attain Romanian citizenship, but only under strict conditions, after a period of 10 years, not as a group but as individuals. Every naturalization case was subjected to the approval of both houses of the Parliament. Under these humiliating and restricting conditions from 1879 until the beginning of the First World War, only 529 Jews obtained Romanian citizenship.³⁰⁸

In the First World War, the number of Jewish soldiers that fought in the ranks of the Romanian Army rose to an impressive number of 23.000. Undeterred by these numbers, the prevailing anti-Semitism of the Romanian society delayed the granting of civil rights to Jews until 1919.³⁰⁹ At the end of the First World War in 1919, at the Peace Treaty of Paris, Romania was compelled to grant civil rights to Jews.³¹⁰ With the birth of Great Romania in 1920, Romania doubled its population and its territories. In this new situation, minorities amounted to more than 30% of the population, among these, Jews represented 4,2% (756.930 people).³¹¹ The civil rights of Jews and other minorities were stipulated in the National Minorities Treaties included in the Peace Treaty of Paris and later were codified in the Constitution of 1923.³¹²

In the interval between the two World Wars, the Jewish community from Romania was the third largest Jewish community in Europe³¹³ and the fourth largest in the world after the Soviet Union, Poland and the United States of America.³¹⁴ Finally, in 1928, the Romanian Parliament formally recognized Judaism as a religion with its “historical” rights, and the Jewish community gained legal status.³¹⁵ The census of

³⁰⁷ Carol Iancu, *Le combat international pour l'émancipation des juifs de Roumanie: Documents et témoignages* (Tel Aviv: Centre Goldstein-Goren pour l'histoire des juifs de Roumanie, Institut de recherche de la diaspora, Université de Tel Aviv, 1994), 14.

³⁰⁸ Oişteanu.

³⁰⁹ Volovici.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Alexandra Laigne-Lavastine, “Cartea Neagra, de Matatias Carp: Un Monument Pour l'histoire,” in *Cartea Neagra: Le Livre Noir de La Destruction Des Juifs de Roumanie (1940-1944)*, by Matatias Carp, trans. Alexandra Laigne-Lavastine (Denoël, 2009), 14.

³¹² Volovici.

³¹³ Laigne-Lavastine, 15.

³¹⁴ Oişteanu.

³¹⁵ Volovici.

1930 reveals that the Jewish community was the third largest group amongst the minorities residing in Romania, after Hungarians and Germans.³¹⁶ By this time the majority of the Jewish population lived concentrated in urban centres, they made up 13.6 % of the urban population of Romania, second only to ethnic Romanians who composed 58.6% of the urban population.³¹⁷

The large percentage of ethnic minorities in Greater Romania and their desire to preserve their identity, acted as an irritant for the Romanian society. The result was a sharp rise in extreme nationalism and anti-Semitism.³¹⁸ The interwar period could be seen as a time when anti-Semitism was widespread among the majority of the population.³¹⁹ Hannah Arendt duly notes that Romania was at that time probably one of the most anti-Semitic countries of Europe.³²⁰ The lower classes, the peasants, were hostile toward the Jews because they disliked their economic activities. For peasants, Jews were alcohol suppliers, moneylenders and intermediaries in the timber trade.³²¹ The upper classes were suspicious of the Jews because of their longstanding alien status. Thus, the anti-Semitic trend intensified in the annexed provinces of Greater Romania. Jews were identified with the image of the hostile stranger and were repeatedly branded either as pro-Hungarian or Bolshevik³²² given the large numbers of Jewish refugees resulting from the Russian Civil War.³²³ Anti-Semitism was flourishing in the Romanian educational system as well. Jewish attendance in public schools varied influenced by either their tolerance or their

³¹⁶ Agrigoroaiei and Scurtu, 56.

³¹⁷ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 195.

³¹⁸ Carol Iancu, *La Shoah en Roumanie* (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de Montpellier / Publications de l'Université de Montpellier, 2000), 13.

³¹⁹ Deletant, 102.

³²⁰ Hannah Arendt arrives to this conclusion after looking back at the historically unfavourable legislation from Romania, legislation that denied to Jews official recognition for so long and also at the pogroms perpetrated by the Romanian State against Jews during the Second World War, see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Ein Bericht von Der Banalität Des Bösen*, trans. Brigitte Granzow (München, Zürich: Piper Verlag, 2013), 296.

³²¹ Deletant, 102.

³²² Volovici.

³²³ Deletant, 103.

exclusion from Romanian society and according to the Jewish traditionalist or assimilationist inclinations.³²⁴

The father of Romanian anti-Semitism was A.C. Cuza. Professor at the University of Jassy, he established in 1923 the League of National-Christian Defense (L.A.N.C.) that was later joined by other extreme right movements. The fundamental doctrine of L.A.N.C. formulated by him stipulated an overall anti-Semitism and its purpose was the ostracism of Jews from Romanian society.³²⁵ Cuza's ideology was transposed into action by his disciple, the political agitator Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. Codreanu, in 1927, created in Jassy the extreme right-nationalistic movement, the Legion of Archangel Michael that later, in 1930, became the Iron Guard.³²⁶

The anti-Semitism in Romania reached its peak in the first six months under the leadership of General Ion Antonescu (14 September 1940-23 August 1944), which he shared with the Iron Guard.³²⁷ The Romanian version of the Shoah, the Romanian Holocaust, brought unspeakable horrors for the Jewish community. It all started with a regime change. King Carol II of Romania proclaimed himself dictator in February 1938. The king was not an anti-Semite, and under his dictatorship, the Jewish community enjoyed a temporary relief from the anti-Semitic harassment. But, under the constant external and internal political pressure, King Carol II leaned in his external politics toward Germany, and his internal politics got him close to the Romanian anti-Semitic front. His regime not only preceded the Romanian Shoah but, in the opinion of some historians, opened the way for it.³²⁸

After two years of economic, social, and political disquiet, on September 5, 1940, he asked General Ion Antonescu to form a German-friendly cabinet. This government was composed of army officers and members of the anti-Semitic Legion

³²⁴ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, 196.

³²⁵ Iancu, 13.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

³²⁸ Bela Vago, *Umbra svasticii: Nașterea fascismului și a antisemitismului în bazinul Dunării (1936-1939)* (București: Curtea Veche, 2003), 81–82.

of Archangel Michael, later the Iron Guard, and Horia Sima, their leader, became deputy prime minister.³²⁹

With King Carol's leaving the country the same year on 6 September, after a few days, on 14 September, Romania became a National-Legionary State. This administration understood itself as essentially Christian, anti-democratic and anti-Jewish.³³⁰ The Gigurtu cabinet issued a decree on 9 August that changed the legal status of the Jews, revoking their previous civil and political rights.³³¹ Thus, under Education, Culture and Arts Minister Traian Brăileanu the official recognition of the "Mosaic Cult" was withdrawn, the disintegration of the majority of Jewish communities, and certain synagogues, was given, and the synagogues were forbidden to function unless they subjected to restrictions imposed by the National-Legionary State.³³²

The nationwide radio broadcast of this anti-Semitic legislation unleashed barbaric passions. Legionnaire mobs raided synagogues, interrupting religious services and closing down synagogues. During the short but extremely turbulent months of the Legion's reign, Jews were regarded as less human and the self-proclaimed Christian Regime could find no place for them in the Romanian society.

The anti-Semitic arrests, property seizures, murders, and massacres orchestrated by the Iron Guard in different areas of the country disrupted its relationship with Antonescu. He realized that the Guard's murderous fanaticism threatened the descent of the country into anarchy³³³ and also threatened its economy.³³⁴ Acting with the consent of Adolf Hitler, Antonescu took a series of actions to limit the influence of the Iron Guard.³³⁵

³²⁹ Jean Ancel, "The 'Christian' Regimes of Romania and the Jews, 1940–1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 20, 1993): 14–29, 14. <http://hgs.oxfordjournals.org/content/7/1/14>. (accessed on 03.04.2015)

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³³¹ Deletant, 103.

³³² Ancel, 15.

³³³ Deletant, 63.

³³⁴ Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 52.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

This led to an open conflict, which climaxed with the rebellion of the Iron Guard largely confined to Bucharest³³⁶ and the pogrom of January 21-23, 1941. During the pogrom, Jewish neighbourhoods were thoroughly pillaged, Jewish shops were robbed and torched, and hundreds were savagely abused. More than 120 Jews were brutally murdered on the streets of Bucharest³³⁷ or transported to the forests around Bucharest and slaughtered.³³⁸ The Legionnaires vandalized and looted six synagogues and torched four synagogues of which two were reduced to ashes.³³⁹ The Bucharest pogrom affected in various degrees the lives of 1360 Jews.³⁴⁰

Antonescu, on 22 and 23 January of 1941, defeated the revolt of the Iron Guard and ended the National Legionary State. On 17 February 1941, he inaugurated his own pro-German military dictatorship. He decried the crimes of the Iron Guard and ordered for investigations for the prosecution of crimes committed by them.³⁴¹ At least at the beginning of his dictatorship he wanted to be seen as the antithesis of Horia Sima the Iron Guard leader.³⁴² But despite Antonescu's hypocritical appeal to Christian values regarding the value of life and property of individuals under his dictatorship anti-Semitic legislation and anti-Semitic measures were enhanced³⁴³ to reinforce his policy of Romanization.

On Antonescu's orders on 7 March 1941, the foreign Ministry ordered that passports given to citizens of Jewish ancestry must bear the imprint 'Jew or Jewess' on the top left corner of the first page.³⁴⁴ Mihai Antonescu (not related to General Ion Antonescu) the interim president of the ministerial Council³⁴⁵ of the Antonescu's military dictatorship, established new anti-Semitic legislation. The Decree-Law 842 of 28 March 1941 ordered the transfer of urban Jewish property to the patrimony of the

³³⁶ Ibid., 66.

³³⁷ Ancel, 16.

³³⁸ Carol Iancu, *Shoah în România. Evreii în timpul regimului Antonescu (1940-1944). Documente diplomatice franceze inedite* (București: Polirom, 2001), 44.

³³⁹ Ioanid, 59.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 60.

³⁴¹ Ancel, 16.

³⁴² Ibid., 17.

³⁴³ Deletant, 106.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew: Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romanian and Other Central-East European Cultures*, 17.

state. This law, which nationalized Jewish inner-city property, continued the former anti-Semitic Legionary legislation, which nationalized Jewish land.³⁴⁶ These measures pleased the general population. Through this type of legislation, Antonescu's dictatorship gained the approval and support of the masses. Law 842 became the entry pass of the anti-Semitic movement led by A. C. Cuza to the meeting of the Anti-Semitic Congress in Frankfurt. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Protection issued measures to block the private practices of Jewish craftsmen and tradesmen.³⁴⁷ After the annexation of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, the same measures were applied to these territories, and the Antonescu regime confiscated all property and assets of the Jews.³⁴⁸

For Antonescu, the Jews were an enemy as strong as the Red Army. In his understanding, the extermination of this alien element from the Romanian society would provide a safe future for the Romanian people.³⁴⁹ After one year of neutrality in June 1941, Romania, under the leadership of Antonescu, joined the war on the side of the Axis powers and participated in Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Soviet Union. Emboldened by the German military presence in Romania and the example of Nazi Germany, who wanted their country to be "Judenrein", free of Jews, Antonescu planned and enacted with German help the operation of "cleaning Romania of Jews"³⁵⁰, the Romanian version of Hitler's "Final Solution". Mihai Antonescu, at the Council of Ministers on 8 May 1941, announced the government's decision to deport all Jews starting with the northern and eastern provinces³⁵¹.

Thus, the Romanian Holocaust began. What followed is hard to imagine: pogroms in Romanian cities like Galați, Dorohoi and Jassy (close to 16.000 deaths). Nearly 60.000 Jews were killed in the provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina by the Romanian Army with German assistance. This, was followed by mass deportations from these provinces to Transnistria which caused the death of at least 75.000 people.

³⁴⁶ Ancel, 18.

³⁴⁷ Deletant, 106.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 107.

³⁴⁹ Jean Ancel, "Surse Arhivistice Despre Holocaustul Din România," 25, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://holocaustteaching.eu/ro/resurse/arhiva/63-surse-arhivistice-despre-holocaustul-din-romania--jean-ancel>.

³⁵⁰ Iancu, 26.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

In Transnistria, at least 130.000 indigenous Jews were murdered.³⁵² In the summer of 1942, Antonescu stopped the massacres and, on 13 October, the Council of Ministers ratified the decision of Marshal Antonescu not to proceed with the deportation of the remaining Jews to Poland as requested by Nazi Germany.³⁵³

At the beginning of World War II, the number of Jews from Romania was close to 800.000. At the end of World War II, less than half, only 375.000 survived.³⁵⁴ From northern Transylvania, under Hungarian authority due to the wartime change of borders, around 150.000 Jews were deported in 1944 to the death camps of the Greater Reich, where 130.000 died before the end of the war. The Antonescu regime bears the historical responsibility for the death of at least 250.000 Jews who died under Romanian jurisdiction.³⁵⁵

Right from the start of the communist period, from 1944 to 1948, when communists were not yet in total control of the state, the old anti-Semitic slogans were taken up by the communists from their predecessors and were fed to the population. In the communist era, Romanian anti-Semitism developed on different levels. On a traditional level the attack on the Jews and the desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries continued. The Jews were marginalized and their bad reputation in society was fed by well-orchestrated lies and rumours.³⁵⁶ The Jews, branded speculators and parasites who refused work, became enemies of the communist economy.³⁵⁷ The state denied restitution of Jewish properties seized by during the Holocaust.³⁵⁸ Leading figures of the Communist regime, like Vasile Luca and Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej in their public speeches, manifested total lack of sympathy, trying to trivialize the sufferings of the Jews during the Holocaust.³⁵⁹

In the beginning, the communists lived with an internal paradox. The regime continued the inherited anti-Semitic policies and, at the same time, had large

³⁵² Ioanid, 289.

³⁵³ Iancu, 32.

³⁵⁴ Ioanid, 289.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Liviu Rotman, *Evreii din România în perioada comunistă: 1944-1965* (București: Polirom, 2004), 161.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 162.

³⁵⁸ Volovici.

³⁵⁹ Rotman, 163.

numbers of Jewish members. Some of these, like Ana Pauker, Iosif Chişinevski, and Leonte Răutu, became top political and administrative figures of the regime.³⁶⁰ The communist regime from the 60s worked hard to diminish the numbers and the influence of Jews from its ranks and important positions in society. Many institutions of the state and many factories fired their Jewish employees or refused to hire citizens of Jewish origin.³⁶¹

The Jewish population impoverished during the Holocaust could not adapt to the challenges brought by the communist regime.³⁶² The answer of the majority of the Jewish population to the communist way of dealing with the “Jewish problem” led to the *alyah* movement, the mass emigration from Romania to Eretz-Israel and other countries all over the world.³⁶³ The regime permitted the emigration of Jews from Romania in an intermittent way. The Jewish emigration became an important source of income for the Communists. When Romania was a Popular Republic, the emigrating Jews had to pay an “exit fee” of 1.000 lei for every person. This fee was on top of the sum that Israel was paying for every Jewish emigrant leaving Romania.³⁶⁴ By 1965, the Jewish population was reduced to 100.000.³⁶⁵

In the Ceauşescu era, the living conditions of the Jews did not improve, the emigration supervised by the communist regime continued, and the costs of emigration grew all the time.³⁶⁶ On an institutional level, the communists tried to cover the existence of the whole Jewish population with a veil of silence, forcing them to become a forgotten race.³⁶⁷ This process led to the reinterpretation and then the denial of the Romanian responsibility for the Romanian Shoah.³⁶⁸

In the Ceauşescu era at the end of the 70s the Jews became a people without a name; in the official statistics, they were listed under the name “other cohabitant

³⁶⁰ Volovici.

³⁶¹ Rotman, 168.

³⁶² Radu Ioanid, *Răscumpărarea evreilor: Istoria acordurilor secrete dintre România și Israel* (Bucureşti: Polirom, 2005), 21.

³⁶³ Rotman, 172.

³⁶⁴ Ioanid, 23.

³⁶⁵ Volovici.

³⁶⁶ Ioanid, 30.

³⁶⁷ Rotman, 161.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

nationalities".³⁶⁹ Toward the end of the Communist era, by 1989, as the result of the intermittent but massive Jewish emigration the number of Jews in Romania declined to 19.000.³⁷⁰ The poor job the Romanian state did in meeting the needs of its Jewish inhabitants continued to alienate one from another and resulted in further emigrations of Jews from Romania to countries all over the world.

1.5. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this first chapter was to provide an answer to the question of how the relationship between the Church and the State evolved in Wurmbrand's Romania. Consequently, this chapter dealt with the forces that shaped the historical, political, economic and religious context before Wurmbrand was born and which forces shaped the context during his life.

The relationship between Church and State in Romania in Wurmbrand's Romania was mainly the story of the oppressive communist regime and its suffocating interaction with the religious sphere. But one must not discount the fact that the groundwork for this toxic relationship was laid down by the governments that preceded the communist regime. Since the time of Cuza, through times of constitutional monarchy and various dictatorships, the state sought to covertly or openly subject and manipulate, first and foremost, the majoritarian Orthodox Church, as well as the other religious denominations. This endeavour found support in the way the Orthodox Church understood its relationship with the state fashioned by the old Byzantine symphony principle i.e., the principle of harmony between the state and the church.

The communist regime started with this inherited theological framework and built onto it its secular Marxist bulwark. The policy of the communist state in its relationships with the religious realm was first to limit, and then eliminate the influence of religious denominations from the public sphere of the Romanian society by promoting and imposing secularism steeped in atheistic Marxist-Leninism. The

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 169.

³⁷⁰ Volovici.

communist state, in its first two decades (1944-1965), persecuted all religious groups. This was realized in the beginning by purging the churches of anti-communists and filling communist prisons and concentration camps with clerics, religious militants and laymen who acted or spoke against the communist religious agenda. During this period, all of the denominations, and most of the prominent religious figures, were under the extensive surveillance of the "Securitate", the secret police, because they were labelled as possible threats to the communist system.

The communists in Romania did not seek the total elimination of religion from the life of the society because they understood that toleration in certain limits of religious manifestation could yield its own rewards in the context of national and international relationships. The objective of the communist party was the creation of a totally obedient church, a handy tool in the hands of the totalitarian state.

This policy produced a somewhat forced working relationship between the state and the churches, mostly for the benefit of the state. The majority of the church hierarchy accepted to be loyal to the communist state or at least to have a benign attitude toward the totalitarian state. The exceptions from the rule, those clergymen who actively fought the communist system were defamed in the official press, they and their families were harassed, and ultimately, they were imprisoned on fabricated charges and subjected to the horrors of the communist detention system.

The narrative of the rapport of the Romanian state with its inhabitants of Jewish origin is an integral part of the larger Romanian Church and State story. Still, from the 19th century to the end of the communist era, in 1989, is primarily a sad story. In the beginning, it was a struggle for official recognition, finally attained in 1928 when, for the first time in Romanian history, the Jewish religion was officially recognized, and the Jews received legal citizen status in the Romanian kingdom.

This short period of normality and prosperity was followed by the rise of anti-Semitism in Romania in the interwar period. Its infamous peak was reached under the National Legionary State (run by General Antonescu and the Iron Guard) and later under the military dictatorship of Marshall Antonescu. The popular anti-Semitic sentiment that legitimated the Romanian legionary movement in the country, along

with Hitler's pressure upon his Romanian allies to exterminate the Jews, brought the withdrawal of the official recognition of Judaism and the Jewish citizens in 1940.

What followed was the Romanian Shoah (Romanian Holocaust), which left an eternal stain on Romania's image and brought unspeakable horrors for the Jewish population from Romania: pogroms, mass executions, deportations, and loss of human dignity and property. All this resulted, at the end of the Second World War, in the decline of the Jewish population from around 800.000 (before WWII) to around 375.000.

Under communism, the decline of the Jewish population in Romania continued. The impoverishment of Jews following the Shoah from Romania, the marginalization of Jews by the communists and their branding as enemies of the communist economy led to a massive emigration movement of the Jews to Israel and other Western countries. By the end of the communist era in 1989, the Jewish population from Romania shrunk to 19.000.

As we said before the story of the Romanian and Jewish relationships from the 19th century to the end of the communist era in 1989 is mostly an unhappy story. The Romanian state did a poor job, in dealing with Jews and thus to its disadvantage managed to alienate an ethnic group that could have helped in its post-communist development.

2. RICHARD WURMBRAND – A BIOGRAPHY

The purpose of the second chapter is to offer an answer to the relevant sub-question: How did the life of Richard Wurmbbrand unfold in the political and religious context of his time? Therefore, this chapter aims to be a biography of Wurmbbrand in the historical, political, economic and religious context that marked his time.

He lived a complicated life fashioned by great events that unfolded around him, leaving profound marks on his life and the life of his family. The endeavour to unravel the many threads that composed his life, with the purpose of a better understanding, was prophetically viewed by him with scepticism. Any attempt to do justice to a person by a future biographer, i.e., any attempt to create an adequate biography, is doomed in his understanding to failure. Accordingly, Wurmbbrand rejects all types of biographies:

Never believe biographies. If they are written by adversaries, they tell not what the man truly was but what enmity, rancor, or jealousy saw in him. If they are written by admirers, they will reveal the noble heart of the biographer, who ornaments the subject of his book with his own virtues. As for "objective" biographies that tell the story with pedantic exactitude and thrifty dosages of praise or criticism, don't waste your time reading them. They are boring, worth nothing.³⁷¹

Wurmbbrand's anxiety about a future biography stemmed from the complexity of his life. He feared that history would judge his words and actions harsher than was the case because of the adversity that his life attracted, due to "sins" he acknowledges or due to "sins" fabricated by his detractors:

Soon I will pass away. It is probable that I will be completely forgotten. If not, some future author will give my sins as an example in his book to encourage those who have fallen, to show them that even a man who suffered much and preached in many countries, as a certain Richard Wurmbbrand did, had great blots upon his character. I have been accused by adversaries of the gospel, but also by some Christian leaders, of very great sins and also of grave errors in doctrine (...)³⁷²

³⁷¹ Richard Wurmbbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 80.

³⁷² Richard Wurmbbrand, *Victorious Faith*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2006). Location 1191-1194. (from this point on will be referred to as loc.)

I too had men very near to me pointing their finger at me. Some future biographer may sort these things out and find that the one or the other accusation has been factual, or he may find that my sins are in quite another sphere. To a few really bad features in my life, some will be added by adversaries. With a little ingenuity, you can make any criminal look like a saint, and vice versa. Even in the best of lives, there is much that can be read amiss deliberately. But there is residual evil that is always present in the life of every man. When you read about evil in me and are certain of it, do not wonder. Accept sin as a fact in my life too, and praise God who had pity on such a sinner.³⁷³

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to be an “objective” biography, even if it has the potential risk of becoming, for some, a “boring” biography. It endeavours to study the life of Wurmbrand in its general historical context based on the methods of historical scholarship with the purpose of explaining how the events that moulded his life shaped his thinking and his worldview, as well. In a limited sense, it is a microhistory because it brings attention to the tribulations of a marginal individual who until now was given little attention by historians.³⁷⁴ This endeavour has its limitations because a large per cent of this work is based on autobiographical and memorialist material which bring to the table a lot of subjectivity, duly recognized as problematic by postmodern critique³⁷⁵, material which at times cannot be verified by using documentary evidence.

One has to admit that this “objectivity” is nuanced by a certain dose of sympathy toward the subject because it is written by someone who comes from a Romanian conservative evangelical background close to Wurmbrand’s religious background and has experienced firsthand some of the Christian church’ plights under communism. Wurmbrand’s life is full of complexity. His life is tragic, filled with anxiety since childhood, physical and spiritual torment on one side in his youth and adulthood and filled with self-sacrifice, hope and love on the other side when we look at his life’s mission of helping others spiritually and materially. All this complexity and conflict ironically lessen the possibility of a “boring” biography.

³⁷³ Ibid., Loc.1196-1200.

³⁷⁴ Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden: BRILL, 2014), 5.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 120-122.

2.1. FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD (1909-1924)

The roots of the Wurmbrand family presumably³⁷⁶ go back to the *Magid (Preacher)* of Mezritsh. Rabbi Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezritsh (1704-1772) was the disciple of Rabbi Ba'al Shem Tov³⁷⁷, the founder of Hasidism. From this great lineage, Richard Wurmbrand was born in Bucharest, Ilfov County, into a Jewish family, the family of Heinrich and Amalia.³⁷⁸ The father, Heinrich, was a dentist, and the mother, Amalia, was a housewife. Richard was born on 24 March 1909³⁷⁹, the fourth boy of the Wurmbrand family, after Max, Teodor and Lazăr.

Material necessities drove the family to relocate to Istanbul in 1911, a city with a sizable Jewish community, when Richard was only two years old.³⁸⁰ Here, the Wurmbrand family, despite the father's struggle, was afflicted by poverty in the hard days of the First World War.³⁸¹ Their already precarious state suffered a tremendous blow in 1918 with Heinrich's death. This event sunk an already poor³⁸² family deeper into destitution, with the widow Amalia, being left to care alone for her four underage boys. Thus, Richard had a bitter childhood of poverty, lacking "childish pleasures as toys and chocolate".³⁸³

After ten years of living in Istanbul, Amalia, unable to financially support her family, decided to move back to Bucharest. At this time, Richard had eight years of schooling, four years of primary school and four years of high school.³⁸⁴ A major contribution to his education was also the books owned by the family. His personal experience of poverty and misery, coupled with the influence of his readings, chief amongst them Voltaire, instilled in him a good measure of scepticism, leading him

³⁷⁶ Wurmbrand mentions this association with certain pride in, Richard Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1994), 98.

³⁷⁷ Arthur Green, "Dov Ber of Mezritsh"
http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Dov_Ber_of_Mezritsh, accessed on November 14, 2018.

³⁷⁸ Richard Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi* (București: Stephanus, 1995), 82.

³⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus*, 33.

³⁸⁰ Archive of The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, (from this point on will be referred to as ANCSSA), Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.5, pp.24-30 (holograph).

³⁸¹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 11.

³⁸² Wurmbrand describes the poverty of his parents before the death of his father, they could not afford to pay for music lessons in, Richard Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2002). Loc. 70-71.

³⁸³ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 132.

³⁸⁴ ANCSSA, vol.5, 24. Wurmbrand's report of 8 years of school in Istanbul begs the question of the possibility of starting school in Istanbul at a very early age.

away from belief “in an all-powerful Being who left so many people to starve and suffer”.³⁸⁵ He could not believe in the existence of a God who could allow so much material deprivation and such a bleak childhood.³⁸⁶ The teenager years for Richard, back in Bucharest, were years of exploration coupled with rebellion but also hope. The knowledge of several languages helped him to be employed as a correspondent at the Fehér, Nagy and Kóváry Company from Bucharest with the office on Gabroveni Street.³⁸⁷

2.2. COMMUNIST ACTIVIST AND SIGURANȚA ASSET (1924-1937)

Until 1924, Richard lived his life “in the wind” with no clearly defined ideology.³⁸⁸ The poverty he experienced through childhood and the atheistic books he read sowed seeds of bitter resentment that lead him away from religion and faith in God. His rebellious nature and the endured hardships prepared his mind to be a fertile soil for the seeds of the communist ideals.

The year 1924 marked the teenager Richard’s first contact with the political realm. A placard on the street advertising the newly opened headquarter of the Social Democrat party on the Ion Brezoianu Street introduced him into this new world. The only 15 years old youth at the meetings of the social democrats was impressed by the strong convictions of these people, still, given his age, was unable to discern if these convictions were correct or not.³⁸⁹ In 1924, the Social Democrat Party was not yet declared illegal, and its meetings attracted all kind of elements from the leftist spectrum. At these meetings Richard met with communist youth³⁹⁰ who frequented the social democrat meetings.

Richard was attracted to the communists because things appeared more romantic to him in the communist camp than in the social democrat circles. There, he saw decisiveness and a firm determination to fight to achieve their ideals. At first he went

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 133.

³⁸⁷ ANCSSA, vol.5, 24.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 24.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., Richard gives the names of some of the young communists he met: Lenuța Filipovici, Matei Pascu, Bunescu, Filipescu, Rottenberg.

to the meetings of the Unitary Syndicates, which was a front organization for the illegal Communist party, he then became a member in the illegal communist youth organization, the Union of the Communist Youth.³⁹¹ The communist activity undertaken by him followed the designated path for communist youth. In the beginning he gave out manifestos and attended meetings. Later, following the visit of renowned French communist writer Henri Barbusse to Romania, Richard started to spread communist propaganda in small circles.³⁹²

His enthusiasm and youthful ignorance in spreading the illegal communist propaganda through sharing manifestos and communist discourses in small circles brought him to the attention of the police. Richard consequently suffered a series of abuses and arrests from the police and had to appear in front of the War Council while he was only 15 and 16 years old, and slowly became a dangerous anarchic element.³⁹³ In 1926, while still a clerk, he became a member of the Federation of Private Functionaries Syndicates.³⁹⁴

The year 1927 brought an advancement for Richard in the communist circles. The 18-year-old youth was invited by a relative to Paris. Konrad Berkovici, a relative of Richard, was a writer who had ties with the French communists and the Soviet Embassy from Paris. Berkovici introduced the young Richard to Dr. Christian Rakovsky, the Soviet Ambassador. Rakovsky, impressed by the young man's dedication to the communist cause, decided to send him to Moscow for further instruction at a communist university.³⁹⁵

Richard went to Moscow in 1927, recommended by the Soviet ambassador Christian Rakovsky to study at the *Kommunistichesky Universitet Natsionalnykh Menshinstv Zapada* (KUNMZ). The Communist University for National Minorities of the West usually taught a three years program that trained communist political

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 64.

³⁹⁴ Maria Hulber, "*În sfera tăcerii*": *Richard Wurmbrand în dosarele Securității* (Oradea: Ratio et Revelatio, 2018), 12.

³⁹⁵ ANCSSA, vol.5, 25.

workers from different Western nations.³⁹⁶ Here, Richard grabbed the opportunity to enlarge his horizons by studying and reading extensively. He studied Marxist-Leninist ideology, political economy, sociology, Russian language and other subjects deemed useful for the equipping of communist activists.³⁹⁷

At the end of 1928, after only two years of attending university lectures, his studies were interrupted when he was recalled by the Romanian Communist Party to Romania to continue his work in the Union of the Communist Youth. With a fake Austrian passport and with the aid of the border connections of the Romanian Communist Party travelling illegally through Vienna and Czechoslovakia, he went back to Romania.³⁹⁸ Here, under the rule of the first government of the National Peasant's Party (1928-1931), in a period of relative freedom for the workers movement, Richard undertook a fervent communist propaganda activity at workers meetings. His main task in Romania was to be the editor of a legal paper of the Union of the Communist Youth, called the "Young Fighter".³⁹⁹

All this communist agitating activity brought in April 1929 the arrest of Richard and his close collaborators. Later, Ion Popescu Puțuri, the man in charge of the newspaper, was also arrested, and all were charged with writing agitating articles⁴⁰⁰ against the authorities. The case judged by the Court of Juries resulted in a guilty verdict and condemnation to four sentences for Richard for communist activity and contempt of the Court's magistrates. The main sentence was three years of correctional imprisonment followed by three smaller prison sentences, three months, six months and one year.⁴⁰¹ The sentences, at the request of Wurmbrand, were merged⁴⁰² into one single sentence of three years of prison, which was carried out in

³⁹⁶ The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition. S.v. "Communist University for National Minorities of the West." <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Communist+University+for+National+Minorities+of+the+West> accessed on November 22 2018.

³⁹⁷ ANCSSA, vol.5, 5.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Hulber, 13.

two prisons, Văcărești and Doftana, where he continued the spreading of communist propaganda amongst the inmates.⁴⁰³

Violent worker's uprisings marked the years 1932 and 1933. Workers in the railway industry, oil, metal, and textile industries had initiated strikes as the result of governmental austerity measures.⁴⁰⁴ In this turbulent context, after serving the three years prison sentence in 1932, he was released on the 11th of April. The time spent in prison did nothing to temper his communist zeal. On release, he continued his militant communist endeavours⁴⁰⁵, the propaganda work at the illegal communist newspaper *Scântea*, and he also edited the *Frontul* paper with Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, later head of the Justice Ministry⁴⁰⁶ in the government of General Sănătescu⁴⁰⁷ in 1944. Richard had been acquainted with Pătrășcanu since 1927, when the latter came back to Romania from Germany after finishing his doctoral studies in political economy⁴⁰⁸ at Leipzig University. Richard's activity extended also to the International Workers Aid, a communist relief organization with the mission of aiding impoverished worker families and imprisoned workers. In this period, he served as secretary of this communist organization.⁴⁰⁹ Right at the end of 1932, on 31 December, he was arrested again for the printing and distribution of *Unirea* communist newspaper and the gathering of funds for the *Red Aid*. The *Red Aid* was a communist structure created by Moscow with the purpose of aiding imprisoned communists in countries where the existence of the Communist party was officially forbidden and thus functioned illegally.⁴¹⁰

The volatile political and social context of Romania was further inflamed when the Alexandru Vaida Voievod government, on 17 January 1933, introduced wage cuts amounting from 10% to 12,5%.⁴¹¹ In response, in January and February, workers from

⁴⁰³ ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

⁴⁰⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate: O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (București: Polirom, 2005), 104.

⁴⁰⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 63.

⁴⁰⁶ Tismăneanu, 108.

⁴⁰⁷ Deletant, *Romania Under Communist Rule*, 53.

⁴⁰⁸ Lavinia Betea, Lucretiu Pătrășcanu. *Moartea unui lider communist* (Bucuresti: Curtea Veche, 2018), 17.

⁴⁰⁹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

⁴¹⁰ Hulber, 13.

⁴¹¹ Tismăneanu, 104.

the oil industry of Prahova Valley and the Grivița Railway workshops from Bucharest organized violent protests.⁴¹² On the 15th of February the workers of the Grivița Railway workshops started a strike asking for the release of workers arrested at an earlier strike and had further financial demands. On the same day, Wurmbrand was taken into police custody from his residence along with several other communists.⁴¹³ He was taken directly to the Jilava prison.⁴¹⁴ The next day, the authorities decided to occupy the workshops by force. The assault of the army resulted in three deaths and sixteen severely wounded amongst the workers.⁴¹⁵

Richard was not directly connected to the Grivița strike, but still, he was accused of being among its organizers. During the trial of the communists involved in the Grivița strikes, Richard was released and tried at liberty.⁴¹⁶ His background and his vocal pro-communist attitude during the trial⁴¹⁷ made his conviction a certainty. In the face of the overwhelming odds, the Communist Party decided for Wurmbrand to go underground and communicated this decision to him through the lawyer Schreier.⁴¹⁸ With four days before the end of the trial, Richard, on 15 August 1933, disappeared from the trial. Tried in absence on 19 August 1933, he received a hard sentence of ten years of prison⁴¹⁹ for “rebellion with homicide”.⁴²⁰

At only twenty-four years, Richard became a condemned fugitive wanted by the authorities. The months after the trial, from August to December 1933, were spent in hiding in Bucharest in different communist safe houses, time he spent writing communist articles.⁴²¹ On 15 December, the Communist Party sent him to the city of Timișoara to work for the Banat Regional Committee, the Party branch of the Banat region.⁴²²

⁴¹² Ibid., 104.

⁴¹³ ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

⁴¹⁴ Hulber, 13.

⁴¹⁵ Tismăneanu, 105.

⁴¹⁶ ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

⁴¹⁷ ANCSSA, vol.2, 28-32.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 68-70.

⁴¹⁹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 154.

⁴²⁰ ANCSSA, vol.2, 68-70.

⁴²¹ Hulber, 14.

⁴²² ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

Timișoara was notorious because of the savage way communists were hunted, jailed, tortured, and often killed by the secret police called Direcțiunea Generală a Siguranței Statului, shortly called *Siguranța*.⁴²³ Commissars Rîmneamțu Marius and Ovidiu Gritta's⁴²⁴ anti-communist zeal was well-known. Just a month prior to his arrival in Timișoara the Siguranța interrogated, tortured and killed Encel, a communist party member.⁴²⁵ Richard arrived in Timișoara with fake identification papers, impersonating a journalist under the alias Mihăilescu Gheorghe.⁴²⁶ Communist leadership sent him to Timișoara to bolster the weakened illegal communist organization from Banat and Crișana region. He had to help the organization whose focus was the editing of illegal newspapers, the spreading of communist propaganda materials⁴²⁷ and the fomentation of unrest in worker circles in factories from the area.⁴²⁸ The young Richard landed from the start into a nest of vipers, this communist branch being already infiltrated by Siguranța agents.

Richard, in his underground communist activity in Timișoara, had to work under the authority of Dudaș, a Hungarian communist, the Secretary of the local organization.⁴²⁹ The relationship between the two was tense from the start, with Dudaș fearing that Richard, given his skills, will take his place. Consequently, Dudaș leaked to the Siguranța his itinerary and, with the help of another former communist, Serghei Urbaciov, turned Siguranța informant, Richard was arrested on the streets of Timișoara on 22 January 1934.⁴³⁰

The betrayal of Dudaș, his party superior and of Urbaciov, a former communist prison colleague,⁴³¹ coupled with imprisonment by the brutal Siguranța police agents, rattled Richard to the core. Under the torture administered at the police interrogatory, consisting of beatings on the soles of his feet, and beatings on his

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Hulber, 14.

⁴²⁵ ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

⁴²⁶ ANCSSA, vol.2, 69.

⁴²⁷ ANCSSA, vol.2, 37.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁴²⁹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 26.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Urbaciov's declaration, see ANCSSA, vol.1, 113.

intimate parts⁴³², his resistance broke down.⁴³³ Richard gave up Stefan Dudaş, the Secretary General of the Communist Party's Banat Regional Committee, Victor Adler, financial administrator of the organization and Czöveg, the host of the party's technical entity.⁴³⁴ This information coupled with the location of two or three communist conspiratorial houses⁴³⁵ led to a cascade of arrests and finally to the arrest of the entire Communist Regional Committee.⁴³⁶ The staggering outcome of his forced confession filled Richard with terrible regrets. He tried to commit suicide, but, after being kept under observation, his attempt was stopped.⁴³⁷

Sent by the Siguranța from Timișoara to Bucharest, his case was taken over by inspector Vintilă Ionescu and later by chief commissar Nicolae Turcu. He started to collaborate with the Siguranța, hoping to receive a reduction to his 10-year prison sentence. He limited his briefings to general information about the Communist Party ideology and organizational structure. In this way, he earned the goodwill of the Siguranța because, at that time, little was known about the ideology or the organization of the Romanian Communist Party.⁴³⁸

Sent to Văcărești prison in April 1934, Richard acted as a Siguranța informant. He gave communist political speeches to communist inmates and harshly critiqued the Central Committee of the Communist leadership.⁴³⁹ Shortly after his imprisonment, communist leaders from Bucharest started to spread in communist circles⁴⁴⁰ accusations of collaboration with the Siguranța. Consequently, he asked to be transferred from the communist prison section to the general population section.⁴⁴¹ In June, he was moved to Timișoara to the military prison of the First Division of Infantry. Here, Richard engaged in anti-communist activity, writing on the prison

⁴³² ANCSSA, vol.1, 4.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 94.

⁴³⁵ ANCSSA, vol.5, 27. Wurmbrand at the interrogations gave up only 2 or 3 addresses, but the police report talks about ample confessions, see ANCSSA, vol.2, 68-70.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ ANCSSA, vol.5, 27.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ ANCSSA, vol.1, 95.

⁴⁴⁰ ANCSSA, vol.2, 71.

⁴⁴¹ ANCSSA, vol.1, 95.

walls anti-communist messages to counteract the communist propaganda undertaken by the imprisoned communists.⁴⁴²

From here, things take a dangerous path for Richard. On 7 June, he was publicly denounced as an agent provocateur, an ideological weapon of the Siguranța, in the Nr. 35 of the Swiss communist news bulletin *Rundschau* which appeared in Basel.⁴⁴³ Feeling threatened by imprisoned communists, he wrote a letter on 11 June to the Royal Commissar of the War Council in which he shared his concerns that they might make an assassination attempt on his life.⁴⁴⁴

The trial of the communists from the Court Marshall in Timișoara started on 9 July 1934, and Richard fully cooperated with the authorities.⁴⁴⁵ He appeared in this trial as an accused but also as a defence witness and a Siguranța agent. Richard's requests to the Royal Commissar of the War Council was granted for him to study his court file in order to prepare his defence and also to be an effective witness.⁴⁴⁶ Given his testimony against his former communist colleagues, six or seven communists were found guilty, but Richard was acquitted.⁴⁴⁷

Following the trial in Timișoara, Richard was brought back to the Văcărești prison. He still had to serve his ten years prison sentence from the Grivița Railway worker's trial. He appealed the sentence given in his absence. With the help of an impressive sum of money from his family and with the aid of Chief Commissar Turcu⁴⁴⁸, who testified in his favour, his appeal was heard, and he was acquitted.⁴⁴⁹

Released from prison in 1934, at the age of twenty-five, he regretted profoundly⁴⁵⁰ the betrayal of his communist colleagues, but there was no turning back to the Romanian Communist Party. All his communist friends and acquaintances avoided him since his disloyalty became common knowledge in communist circles. Thus ended the communist chapter of Richard's life.

⁴⁴² According to Wurmbrand's declaration from the Timisoara Military Prison, see ANCSSA, vol.2, 55.

⁴⁴³ ANCSSA, vol.2, 58-59.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁴⁵ Hulber, 14.

⁴⁴⁶ ANCSSA, vol.5, 85.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁴⁸ Hulber, 15.

⁴⁴⁹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 28.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Stripped of his youthful ideals and in need of earning money for a living, Richard relied on his language skills. From 1934 to 1939, he worked as a foreign language correspondent at the Fides S.A. Company from Doamnei Street nr.12 in Bucharest.⁴⁵¹ This job, being well paid, offered an entry into the business world of Bucharest. To forget his sorrow, he pursued a life of parties, gambling and debauchery.⁴⁵²

The young Richard's life also had a lesser-known dimension. The betrayal of his colleagues and the need to escape hard years of imprisonment made him a reluctant informant, but an asset nonetheless. From 1934 to 1937, besides his job, he also worked for the Siguranța carrying a covert agent id. Having severed relationships with the communists, he was only able to offer general information about the Communist Party. In this period, he kept in touch with Commissar Turcu, who gave him foreign communist newspapers like *Imprekor*, *Federation Balcanique*⁴⁵³, *Rundschau*, *La Nouvelle Monde*,⁴⁵⁴ and others. Richard translated foreign news articles and wrote reviews⁴⁵⁵ of the Romanian and international Communist newspapers for the Siguranța. The Siguranța used his reviews to gauge the status of the worker's movement in other countries and to prepare for the possible effects international events could have upon Romania⁴⁵⁶, because the Romanian Communist Party had direct ties to the international worker's movements.⁴⁵⁷ The Siguranța to ensure his further cooperation on one side threatened with further prosecution and on the other side offered money. In this period, Richard was paid a monthly wage of 4000 lei by the Siguranța⁴⁵⁸ for his services.

The year 1936 brought marriage into the life of the twenty-seven years old man. Richard met Sabina Oster, also nicknamed by friends Bintzea, a Jewish girl who studied chemistry at the Sorbonne University in Paris and who, for a while, was

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁵² ANCSSA, vol.5, 28.

⁴⁵³ ANCSSA, vol.1, 96.

⁴⁵⁴ Declaration of Ion Taflaru who along with Commissar Turcu was one of Wurmbrand's handler see, Ibid., 101.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁵⁷ Declaration of Commissar Turcu about the collaboration with Wurmbrand, Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ It is possible that this might not be true, it could serve the communist secret police to blacken the image of Richard, see Ibid., 86v.

visiting her relatives in Bucharest. Sabina was born in the city of Czernowitz on the 16th of July 1913, she was the daughter of Elias and Rebeca Oster⁴⁵⁹, one of the seven children of the Oster family.⁴⁶⁰

Sabina and Richard found that they liked each other and had many things in common. Both were Jewish, coming from poor backgrounds, both were not religious,⁴⁶¹ and both loved the pleasures of life. Sabina did not go back to her school in Paris; instead, she found a job in Bucharest and married Richard.⁴⁶² The wedding took place on the 23rd of October⁴⁶³ in a synagogue, only to keep up appearances for the sake of the extended family. The wedding was officiated by Rabbi Zvi (Hersh⁴⁶⁴) Guttman, the rabbi of the Jewish Community from Bucharest and president of the Rabbinic Tribunal.

2.3. JEWISH CHRISTIAN CONVERT (1937-1941)

Richard's job in the business world was well-paid. In this carefree period of their lives, Richard and Sabina enjoyed spending their income together in nightclubs and theatres, caring little about others or God.⁴⁶⁵ This period, less than a year, was rudely interrupted by Richard's illness. What started just as an annoying cough was diagnosed by the doctors as tuberculosis, meaning a potential death sentence at that time. The life of poverty, privations, and incarceration had caught up with him.⁴⁶⁶

Richard, following his doctor's advice, went to a sanatorium in the mountains for treatment. In the second half of the year 1937, he went first to Predeal.⁴⁶⁷ In the stillness of the mountains, the disillusionment with communism and the poor state of his health drove him to meditate on the path taken by his life, searching his soul afraid that his life was coming to a sudden end.⁴⁶⁸ Filled with remorse about past

⁴⁵⁹ ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001814, 1v.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶¹ Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc.1894-1897.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., loc.1471-1473.

⁴⁶⁴ Richard Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road* (Middlebury, IN: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1975), 20.

⁴⁶⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc. 176-185.

⁴⁶⁶ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 134-136.

⁴⁶⁷ ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.5, 29.

⁴⁶⁸ Richard Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2004), loc.136-138.

errors, dissatisfied with his materialistic philosophy that could offer no acceptable answers for his spiritual anxiety, Richard started to think about and pray with the reluctance of a longtime atheist to a God he still was not convinced existed.⁴⁶⁹

A female patient from the sanatorium heard about him and gave him a book to read about the brothers Ratisbonne, Theodore and Alphonse. The story of the Jewish brothers from the 19th century who converted to Christianity and founded a catholic religious order, the *Congrégation de Notre-Dame de Sion*, dedicated to the conversion of Jews struck a sensitive chord in the heart of Richard.⁴⁷⁰ The commitment of the Ratisbonne brothers to the conversion of the Jews filled him with remorse and humility. Richard shared this and his thoughts about Jesus Christ with his perplexed wife, who visited him often.⁴⁷¹

Feeling a little better, still in 1937⁴⁷², he moved from Predeal to the mountain village Noua⁴⁷³ for further recuperation. His spiritual searches continued, and here he had a providential encounter with an old German carpenter named Christian Wölfkes. Wölfkes converted to Evangelical Lutheran Christianity after a revivalist campaign conducted by Pastor Sherg and later joined a Brethren congregation.⁴⁷⁴ Once, during a serious bout of illness, he was cared for by a Jewish Christian. In order to show his gratitude and to fulfil his Christian calling of being a light in the world a strong desire to bring Jews to Christ took root in his heart. His prayer for God to bring a Jew to his village was answered when Richard appeared.⁴⁷⁵ He befriended Richard and offered him a Bible.⁴⁷⁶ Richard started to read the New Testament and after reading and meditating on the life of Jesus Christ he was filled with remorse when he compared his selfish life with the selfless life of love and

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ It is possible that especially the dramatic conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne as seen in, Marie-Théodore de Bussierre, *Relation authentique de la conversion de M. A.-M. Ratisbonne: suivie de deux lettres sur les derniers momens... de M. le Comte de Laferronnays...* (Paris: Bureaux de l'Union catholique, 1842). found resonance in the troubled soul of Richard.

⁴⁷¹ Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife.*, loc 1917-1923.

⁴⁷² Merv Knight, *Richard Wurmbrand: The Man and His Work* (Lawson: Voice of the Martyrs, 2009), 20.

⁴⁷³ ANCSSA, vol.5, 29.

⁴⁷⁴ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 16.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 12.

servitude of Jesus:⁴⁷⁷ “The Bible he gave me was written not so much in words, but in flames of love fired by his prayers. I could scarcely read it I could only weep over it, comparing my bad life with the life of Jesus; my impurity; my hatred with His love; and He accepted me to be one of His own”.⁴⁷⁸ Wölfkes and his wife prayed for many hours for the conversion of Richard and Sabina and guided Richard to understand from the Bible that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Jewish messianic hopes and spoke about his love for his people the Jews whom he still called to himself.⁴⁷⁹ Wölfkes provided the first impetus for the conversion of Richard and his wife and the first connections of the Wurmbrand family to other Jewish Christians.⁴⁸⁰

Returning to Bucharest, Richard continued to read his Bible and pursue his spiritual searches. Urged by Sabina⁴⁸¹, who was thoroughly distressed by the inner changes that were seemingly driving him away from their Jewish identity, Richard attended services in different Jewish synagogues for a while. In his search for the truth, he had several talks with some notable rabbis from Romania about the person of Jesus. Richard talked to Rabbis like Zvi (Hersh⁴⁸²) Guttman, the rabbi of the Jewish Community from Bucharest and president of the Rabbinic Tribunal, Rabbi R.⁴⁸³ from Satu Mare and Rabbi G. from a long line of miracle working rabbis.⁴⁸⁴ They failed to refute his Christian arguments. Instead of smothering his incipient Christian faith, their failure removed his doubts and strengthened his conviction that Jesus Christ was the Messiah promised to the Jewish people by God through the Old Testament prophets.⁴⁸⁵ Thus, Richard believed that conversion to Christianity was the only way open before him; still he was conscious that it would be a way fraught with suffering and conflict.⁴⁸⁶ The existing historical Christian Churches did not help to relieve

⁴⁷⁷ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 17.

⁴⁷⁸ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 13.

⁴⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 18.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁸¹ Sabina speaks about a deep aversion for Christianity in her inner being as the result of the anti-Semitism she experienced from her early life, in Sabina Wurmbrand, loc. 1946.

⁴⁸² Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 20.

⁴⁸³ It is possible that Rabbi R. as mentioned by Wurmbrand to be Rabbi Meir Rosenbaum from Satu Mare, see <https://www.jewishcommunity.ro/index.php?page=content&p=1&id=11>, visited on 01.02.2019.

⁴⁸⁴ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 19–21.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

Richard's anxiety; he had disappointing experiences with various denominations: "Very soon I realized that in this world there was no house of the Father to which Israel, the Prodigal Son, could return".⁴⁸⁷

Instrumental in the conversion of Richard was also Isaac Feinstein. Feinstein was a Romanian Jew from Dorohoi, who converted to Christianity. Five years older than Richard, since 1932 he was a fulltime missionary of *Den Norske Israelmisjon*⁴⁸⁸ in Galați. At the time of Richard's spiritual search and uncertainties, Wölfkes made the introductions between Feinstein and Richard.⁴⁸⁹

Feinstein visited him in Bucharest and offered spiritual advice.⁴⁹⁰ Through Feinstein, Richard met a small group of Christians who in the Jewish Quarter in Bucharest had a regular meeting in the hall of the Anglican Mission to the Jews.⁴⁹¹ There at the evening prayer meeting on the eve of Yom Kippur in 1937⁴⁹² he had a deep spiritual experience that he considered from that moment on to be the event of his spiritual rebirth:

I consider the eve of Yom-Kippur 1937 as the day of my rebirth, because—this is obvious—the teaching of Jesus cannot be written clearly on a page which already bears some other writing. What is required is a complete break with the past, and a completely new beginning (...) The person who was most astonished at this change, a man who had once been a militant atheist and an active participant in the worst anarchic disturbances, was myself. My will was not free when this change occurred. My hand was forced. Everything is of the grace of God.⁴⁹³

The path that lay ahead was not an easy one because he saw that Christianity was split to many denominations. Disagreements built up for centuries between Christian denominations, religious persecutions, the periodic anti-Semitism amongst

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁸⁸ *Den Norske Israelmisjon* was a Christian organization founded by the Lutheran Church in Stavanger, Norway, in 1844 with the purpose of evangelizing the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. This organization had a strong missionary activity in Eastern Europe until the end of WWII when its missionaries were expelled by the communists, see Gheorghe Samoilă, "Eu știu că ei mă vor ucide ...": *Isaac Feinstein (1904-1941), un evreu român, martir al lui Hristos : (biografia în documente, texte și fotografii)* (Iași: PIM, 2013), 28.

⁴⁸⁹ Alice Panaiodor, *Traversarea Focului* (București: Liga Bibliei, 2009), 46.

⁴⁹⁰ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 33.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁹² Erev Yom Kippur, the Eve of Yom Kippur in 1937 was on the 14th of September, Yom Kippur was on the 15th of September, see <https://www.hebcal.com/hebcal/?year=1937&v=1&month=x&yt=G&nh=on&nx=on&vis=on&c=off#cal-1937-09>, visited on 04.02.2019.

⁴⁹³ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 37. Richard describes the experience of praying in Yiddish, the language of his people, a language that normally was unknown for him.

Christians laid stumbling blocks on his path. After a time of religious searching, Richard arrived to the conclusion that, “the great confessions are not the historical successors of the first Church”.⁴⁹⁴ This drove him from the pietistic circles of the large Christian denominations and to the smaller denominations called “sects” by the majoritarian, where he finally found solace.⁴⁹⁵

In Romania, at the time of Richard’s conversion in 1937, there were small groups of Jewish Christians in Bucharest, Galați, Iași (see black stars on the Interwar map of Romania) and other towns as the result of Lutheran and Anglican foreign missions that opened missionary outposts in Romania for the conversion of Jews to Christianity.⁴⁹⁶



Richard, given his close connection with Feinstein, was baptized⁴⁹⁷ in Galați in the chapel of the Lutheran Norwegian Israel Mission. The head of the mission at that time was Feinstein, who was present at the event⁴⁹⁸ and baptism, was officiated by Reverend Allison, a former Anglican priest, who conducted services in the Anglican

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁹⁷ in his written confession in ANCSSA, vol.5, 29. Richard writes that his baptism took place in March 1937. This is not possible if we take into account that he ties the date of his conversion to the Eve of Yom Kippur 1937 (September 14, 1937). It would make more sense to put his baptism to March 1938.

⁴⁹⁸ Richard Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2000), loc.73-75.

Mission from Bucharest.⁴⁹⁹ After baptism, Richard adhered to the small group of Jewish Christians who gathered in Bucharest at the Anglican Mission.

Sabina was, at first, distressed by the changes in the soul of her husband. She was a beautiful young woman and wanted Richard to be her partner in pleasure.⁵⁰⁰ After countless discussions with Richard about Christianity, she started to attend the meetings at the Anglican Mission. After a time of inner struggle, Sabina decided to convert to Christianity, following the path chosen by her husband.⁵⁰¹ Sabina was baptized by Reverend Allison⁵⁰² at the Anglican Mission, led by Reverend Adeney and Reverend Allison.⁵⁰³

The congregation at the Anglican Mission based in the building from Olteni Street Nr.45 had a distinct interdenominational character. Worshipers from all kind or religious backgrounds attended services, “Orthodox, Baptist, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, Adventists-felt at home in this nest”.⁵⁰⁴ The meetings took place in the gym⁵⁰⁵ of the Mission’s school on Olteni Street. The main preacher was Reverend Allison, who was also of Jewish origin.⁵⁰⁶ The year 1939 also brought the growing of the Wurmbrand family. Sabina gave birth to a son, Mihai (Michael),⁵⁰⁷ on January 6th.

In this period, the old pastor Adeney retired and left Romania. Reverend George Stevens became the new head of the Church of England Mission in Bucharest.⁵⁰⁸ Feinstein introduced Richard to Stevens who at that time took care of the two Anglican churches from Bucharest, the Church of the Resurrection from the Garden of the Icon and the mission church.⁵⁰⁹ On 1 April⁵¹⁰, Stevens being preoccupied more with the first church⁵¹¹ and recognizing Richard’s intellectual capacities and his

⁴⁹⁹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 52.

⁵⁰⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.169-171.

⁵⁰¹ Based on the timetable of Richard Wurmbrand’s conversion (15th September 1937) and baptism (probably March 1938), and the birth of Mihai Wurmbrand (6th January, 1939) we can infer that Sabina’s conversion and baptism took place somewhere during 1938.

⁵⁰² Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 53.

⁵⁰³ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.2009.

⁵⁰⁴ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 45.

⁵⁰⁵ Anutza Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 38.

⁵⁰⁶ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 45.

⁵⁰⁷ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.2130-2135.

⁵⁰⁸ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 119.

⁵⁰⁹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 32.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol.5, 29.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol.5, 32.

Christian passion, asked him to become the Mission's secretary.⁵¹² He was allowed from time to time to preach to the congregation because Allison, the main preacher, did not speak Romanian.⁵¹³ Richard was given by the Ministry of Denominations and Arts a license to do evangelism and to preach to the Jews in accordance with the purpose of the Mission.⁵¹⁴

In 1940, history took a sudden turn for Romania. On September 14th, Romania became a National-Legionary State.⁵¹⁵ Romania, in the fall of 1940, after a year of neutrality in the Second World War, became an ally of Germany under the leadership of Antonescu. This period, when, at first, the Iron Guard was Antonescu's partner in governing Romania, was marked by unrest and persecution for the Romanian Jewish community in general and also for the small Jewish Christian community from Bucharest. Iron Guard members attended and disrupted meetings from the Anglican Mission.⁵¹⁶ Stevens left the country for a vacation and was not allowed to come back to Romania.⁵¹⁷

Reverend Allison, a man of great humility⁵¹⁸, took over the leadership of the Mission. Under his able leadership, the community increased greatly. Still, the Jewish Christian community lived under constant terror; the Mission was accused of treason⁵¹⁹ and the life of Richard was threatened by Iron Guard members. Likewise, Allison was arrested on one occasion for failing to offer details about the whereabouts of Richard.⁵²⁰ Still in a marvellous way, in the time of the Legionary government with the help of an orthodox priest Richard and Allison managed to receive a document that recognized their small community and authorized its religious meetings.⁵²¹

⁵¹² Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc 187-188., see also the police report of the Body of Detectives from this period ANCSSA, vol.2, 62-63.

⁵¹³ Moise, 40.

⁵¹⁴ ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 157078, vol.3, 215.

⁵¹⁵ Sorin Liviu Damean et al., *Evoluția instituțiilor politice ale statului român din 1859 până astăzi* (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), 100.

⁵¹⁶ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 120.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 208.

⁵²⁰ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 41.

⁵²¹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 123.

The political marriage of Antonescu and the Iron Guard was a short-lived affair. It ended in January 1941 after Antonescu defeated the revolt led by the Iron Guard, launched with the sole purpose of toppling Antonescu and seizing power. The days of the Iron Guard rebellion (21-23 January 1941) were a terrible time for the Jewish community from Bucharest because a great number of Jews were killed by the Iron Guard legionaries.⁵²²

2.4. UNDERGROUND CHRISTIAN PASTOR (1941-1948)

The pro-German Antonescu government brought more suffering and persecution to the Wurmbrands and the Jewish community from the Anglican Mission. Being Jewish and non-Orthodox Christians meant that the authorities had two reasons to persecute them. Given its extreme nationalistic orthodox orientation, the government persecuted Jews and Protestants alike⁵²³. A good Romanian in those days was supposed to be an Orthodox Christian and an ethnic Romanian.

Under the pro-German military dictatorship of Antonescu that started in February 1941, Romania severed relationships with Great Britain. This change forced the English clergy from the Anglican Mission in Bucharest to leave the country. The English missionaries and teachers were expelled from the country. Allison left Romania before the country entered the war in June 1941. Romania's entry into World War II brought more troubles for the Jewish Christian group. The building was seized by the government and transformed into a hospital.⁵²⁴ The Jewish Christian church, with around one hundred members at this time, was dissolved and the Wurmbrands were ejected from the flat they were living in at the Anglican Mission.⁵²⁵ Furthermore, all public meetings of the church were forbidden.⁵²⁶

As a consequence, Richard was left to carry on the church work of the Mission "since there was no one else".⁵²⁷ Richard was already involved with work at the

⁵²² Ibid., 75.

⁵²³ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 13.

⁵²⁴ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 43.

⁵²⁵ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 125.

⁵²⁶ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 43.

⁵²⁷ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 191-192.

Mission by this time. Given his Christian zeal, he had already given up his well-paid job and chosen to work full time for the mission, doing youth work and organizing open-air meetings.⁵²⁸ Because of the spiritual needs of the Jewish Christian congregation, Richard started on his own to study to become a pastor. Even before his formal recognition, he emerged as the leader of this group.⁵²⁹

In this period, the small community of Jewish Christians met illegally in the small flat of the Wurmbrands.⁵³⁰ The religious landscape was bleak, offering almost no option for the community who struggled to find its own identity. The Orthodox Church was mostly anti-Semitic, and the Christian religious minorities, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Adventists were persecuted.⁵³¹ In the end, the much-needed help for them came from the Lutheran Swedish and Norwegian Missions to Israel who adopted this group, thus, this community became Lutheran.

In 1941, the mostly self-taught Richard was formally ordained as a Lutheran Pastor.⁵³² He felt that he had a temperamental and spiritual affinity with the great reformer Martin Luther, who, like him, “was a choleric, quarrelsome man, but he also loved Jesus so deeply that he came to think man is saved not by his deeds but by his faith”.⁵³³ Given his intense religious activity under the military dictatorship of Marshall Antonescu he was persecuted, beaten and arrested on multiple occasions. Once, on 29 July 1941, while preaching close to Bucharest in the Marele Voievod Mihai village at the Baptist church, he was arrested.⁵³⁴ He was court-martialled with a group of seven other Christian Jews on the charge of “sectarian propaganda”⁵³⁵ and of holding “illegal religious meetings”⁵³⁶ because the previous authorization of the Jewish Christian group was revoked. At the trial, after the intervention of Priest Chiricuta,⁵³⁷ an influential Orthodox priest known to Marshall Antonescu and Pastor

⁵²⁸ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 43.

⁵²⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 13.

⁵³⁰ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 43.

⁵³¹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 126.

⁵³² ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.5, 29.

⁵³³ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.196-198.

⁵³⁴ ANCSSA, vol.5, 158-158v.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc. 185-187.

⁵³⁷ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 85.

Fleisher, a German Baptist pastor, who both testified in favour of Richard and the arrested group, the charges against them were dismissed, and they were acquitted.⁵³⁸

Richard also benefited from the protection of Count Patrick von Reuterswärde⁵³⁹, the Swedish ambassador to Romania. He was introduced to the ambassador, who was a deeply religious man⁵⁴⁰ with an inclination to charitable work⁵⁴¹, by Pastor Magne Solheim, who was leading in Galați the Lutheran Norwegian Israel Mission. Norway was overrun by Germany; the Swedish ambassador took over in Bucharest the Norwegian interests. Solheim and Richard appealed to the ambassador for help with the mission. With the help of Ambassador Reuterswärde, Richard was appointed representative of the Swedish-Israel Mission in Romania.⁵⁴² The ambassador was able to intervene because, supposedly, through the backchannel of his neutral embassy Marshall Antonescu, during the war was, able to communicate with Moscow⁵⁴³ behind Hitler's back. Thus, whenever Richard was in trouble in the time of Antonescu, Solheim, his wife Cilgia, and the Swedish ambassador interceded for him. Their repeated interventions spared Richard from long time imprisonment.⁵⁴⁴

Romania's entry into World War II unleashed unspeakable horrors on the Romanian Jews. The Wurmbrands were not spared the effects of the anti-Semitic atrocities that were inflicted on the Romanian Jewish community. Richard's friend Feinstein, the missionary of *Den Norske Israelmisjon*⁵⁴⁵, was also caught up in Antonescu's ethnic cleansing program. In the Jassy pogrom, on 27-29 June 1941, close to 16.000 Jews were exterminated in only three days. Feinstein was arrested in the days of the pogrom and died, suffocated in one of the trains of death.⁵⁴⁶

⁵³⁸ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.192.

⁵³⁹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 131.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁴¹ ANCSSA, vol.5, 32.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁴³ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc. 198.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ Samoilă, "Eu știu că ei mă vor ucide ...": *Isaac Feinstein (1904-1941), un evreu român, martir al lui Hristos*, 28.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

Sabina's family, who lived close to the frontier town of Czernowitz, was caught up in the death marches following the mass deportations. Sabina's parents, infant brother, three sisters, and many friends and relatives⁵⁴⁷ perished in these appalling atrocities.

Through the war, Richard continued to pastor the Jewish Christian community. He continued to appeal to the authorities for a permit⁵⁴⁸ that would allow him to hold legal church meetings. His efforts were mainly met by antagonism.⁵⁴⁹ Despite the overall situation, a cabinet Minister, head of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, issued for a short period a permit that was revoked when the Minister was replaced from office.⁵⁵⁰

The lack of a permit could not stop Richard from continuing his spiritual, pastoral, and aid work. Amid the air raids⁵⁵¹, persecution, beatings, and arrests, he continued to care for his flock and to preach against the evils of the war.⁵⁵² The meetings of the Jewish Christian community continued in the "underground" fashion. Using Richard's prior experience of illegal communist activity, they met illegally in different homes, working to perfect a technique of secret Christian work.⁵⁵³ Richard conducted an intensive aid ministry in favour of different persecuted groups by the Antonescu dictatorship. He organized, with the help of other Jewish Christians, the smuggling⁵⁵⁴ of food and clothing packages to imprisoned Baptist, Pentecostal, and Adventist believers⁵⁵⁵ and also tried to help the Mosaic Jews deported to Transnistria. With the help of Romanian brothers, they sometimes succeeded in abducting some of the Jewish children from the ghettos, and restoring them to their parents.⁵⁵⁶ Richard and Sabina, furthermore helped to rescue small numbers of Jews who escaped the massacres and helped in bringing them to Bucharest to relative

⁵⁴⁷ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc 211-215.

⁵⁴⁸ Wurmbrand's request for authorization forwarded to the Ministry of Cults and Arts, see ANCSSA, vol.2, 77.

⁵⁴⁹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 128.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.251.

⁵⁵² ANCSSA, vol.5, 29.

⁵⁵³ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 13.

⁵⁵⁴ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 54.

⁵⁵⁵ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 130.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 136., see also Richard's friendship with Ion Cazacu a man who stole Jewish Children from concentration camps, in Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book, 1988), 177.

safety.⁵⁵⁷ Richard during the war was helped by a small sum of money, a small monthly allowance⁵⁵⁸, which was offered to him by his former employer from the financial world and by others.

Antonescu's regime was toppled by the *coup d'état* on 23 August 1944, led by the young King Mihai I.⁵⁵⁹ Romania exchanged loyalties, and the army turned against the German forces, fighting along with the Red Army to drive the German forces out of Romania. After the war ended, Solheim of *Den Norske Israelmisjon* came to Bucharest, established a mission station and took over the leadership of the Jewish Christian group.⁵⁶⁰ The old Anglican Mission came officially under the care of the Norwegian Mission to the Jews.⁵⁶¹ This happened because close to the end of the war all the Missions for the Jews met at an international conference in Basel and decided that they should not engage in competition. Instead, in every country, only one Mission should work. Given Solheim's missionary history in Romania, *Den Norske Israelmisjon* took over the Romanian Mission⁵⁶² and the old building of the Anglican Mission. The building was dedicated as a church, and Solheim and Richard started to preach again in it.⁵⁶³ The Mission in this period had three branches. In Bucharest the Mission was led by Solheim and Richard, the Galati branch and its subbranch Brăila was led by pastor Milan Haimovici with the help of Norwegian deaconess Antonia Aniksdal and the Iași branch was led by deacon Iancu Moscovici with the help of Norwegian deaconess Olga Olaussen.⁵⁶⁴ Richard was supported financially in this period by the Norwegian mission.⁵⁶⁵ The community from the Olteni Street Mission grew beyond only Jewish converts, gaining attendees from other denominations, from Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals and from The Army of the Lord, an Evangelical movement from within the Romanian Orthodox Church.⁵⁶⁶ Richard and

⁵⁵⁷ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc. 200.

⁵⁵⁸ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 117.

⁵⁵⁹ Pop and Bolovan, 609.

⁵⁶⁰ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 163.

⁵⁶¹ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 64.

⁵⁶² ANCSSA, vol.1, 60v.

⁵⁶³ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 163.

⁵⁶⁴ ANCSSA, vol.5, 38.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁶⁶ Moise, *A Ransom for Wurmbrand*, 64.

Solheim shared in the duty of preaching, Solheim nourishing those who already converted and Richard addressing those who were still not converts.⁵⁶⁷ Sabina used to teach at the women's meeting.⁵⁶⁸

In this period of relative freedom from 1944 to 1948, Richard operated on two fronts, becoming a known preacher and author.⁵⁶⁹ On one front, unofficially, he conducted a secret missionary ministry to the Red Army. On the second front, he conducted an extensive official ministry, along with Solheim, he represented the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and in 1948 the World Council of Churches, an international organization doing relief work in Romania.⁵⁷⁰

First, he channelled his evangelistic energy towards the large numbers⁵⁷¹ of "The Glorious Red Army"⁵⁷² soldiers who invaded Romania. People at the Mission, led by Richard, who spoke Russian amongst other languages⁵⁷³, started to print Christian magazines and gospels in Russian and the Russian speakers were sent to the streets of Bucharest to hand out these printed materials. Richard invited Russian soldiers to his house⁵⁷⁴ and shared with them the Gospel, seeing in them a religious hunger.⁵⁷⁵ At other times, he risked visiting the Red Army barracks from Bucharest illegally, speaking with the soldiers about faith in God.⁵⁷⁶

Secondly, Romania, in the years that followed World War II (1945-1946), was marked by food shortages, drought and large-scale famine. Richard and Solheim appealed to international relief organizations, like the Swedish Redda Barna, the International Red Cross, the World Council of Churches, the Hebrew Christian Alliance, the Missions to the Jews from Sweden and Norway and the Swedish and Norwegian Red Cross.⁵⁷⁷ The answer was overwhelmingly positive, and the Swedish

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., also the communists later recognized that she is an influential teacher see ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001814, 3v.

⁵⁶⁹ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.176-185.

⁵⁷⁰ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 17.

⁵⁷¹ Wurmbrand speaks about 1 million Soviet soldiers in, Ibid., 14.

⁵⁷² Jack Cole, *Richard and Sabina: A Biography of the Rev. Richard Wurmbrand and His Wife Sabina* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2000), 17.

⁵⁷³ Knight, 23.

⁵⁷⁴ Michael Wurmbrand, *Christ or the Red Flag* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 11.

⁵⁷⁵ Cole, 17.

⁵⁷⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.349.

⁵⁷⁷ ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.5, 55-57.

embassy in Bucharest acted as a guarantor that all the received international aid would be fairly distributed.⁵⁷⁸

Richard organized in Bucharest a large shelter where more than 100 Jews, survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camps were cared for.⁵⁷⁹ Food and money were sent to the Jews deported to Transnistria and to those who survived the Transnistrian holocaust and were in Moldovan ghettos.⁵⁸⁰ In the time of famine Richard helped distribute through Romanian institutions food, clothes, medicine⁵⁸¹ and money⁵⁸² donated from foreign missions. For example, in 1948, in a single month from foreign donations, Richard directed toward the Romanian Red Cross 12 train wagons of food and fish oil valued at that time at 50 million Romanian lei.⁵⁸³

The Wurmbrands continued to help Jewish survivors from the German or Romanian concentration camps. Richard and Sabina took into their house a group of six orphaned Jewish children. They cared for them until, as part of the efforts of the Zionist Leadership from Palestine, they were sent to Palestine.⁵⁸⁴ Also, women from the Mission who gained access to women's prisons were taking food, medicine, Bibles and Christian literature to the prisoners.⁵⁸⁵ Given all this relief work Richard became a known person in religious and official circles and, as a result, in June 1946 he was invited by King Mihai I to Sinaia to a meeting at the Royal Palace.⁵⁸⁶ Richard also administrated a retreat centre in Predeal, a facility meant to help with the rest and recovery of sick priests and pastors, operated with funding from the World Council of Churches. This international organization founded several similar establishments in countries that suffered from the effects of the war. The retreat

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁸¹ The authorities in the process of investigating the exchange of foreign currency recognize the impressive amount of aid provided by foreign protestant churches through the mediation of Solheim and Wurmbrand, see Ibid., 1v.

⁵⁸² Ibid., 30.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ The Bul Bul liner ship who took the children to Palestine was struck by disaster, it sunk in the Mediterranean Sea grieving the Wurmbrand's, see Moise, 63.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁸⁶ ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 157078, vol.3, 221.

centre offered hundreds of priests and pastors from all denominations an opportunity for rest, recuperation, spiritual meditation, and prayer.⁵⁸⁷

During the post-war period (1945-1947), Richard witnessed how Communists took over the political power in Romania, backed by the Red Army and how they eliminated their political opponents from the historical Romanian parties, aiming for total control over the society.⁵⁸⁸ Given their atheistic worldview, they planned the subjugation of the religious realm as well. Still, at first, the communists sought to establish their control in a less straightforward manner, trying to win religious support and ease the fears of the international community.

A good example of a communist orchestrated religious show for the benefit of the international community was the General Religious Congress held on 16-17 October 1945 in Bucharest by the first Communist government, the Groza administration. Delegates of all religious confessions were invited to this Congress, together with representatives of foreign Bulgarian, Serbian and Russians Orthodox churches. This religious show was directly conducted by Minister Constantin Burducea, the Minister of Religious Confessions,⁵⁸⁹ who, given his sinuous political history, was subservient to the Communist party.⁵⁹⁰

The Norwegian Mission to the Jews was also invited. The Mission sent a delegation made of Solheim, Richard and Sabina.⁵⁹¹ The Communist Prime Minister Petru Groza used a honeyed approach in his speech, promising freedom to all religions and increased salaries paid by the government for the clergy. The present clergymen responded in a conciliatory tone, that the "State could count on the Church if the Church could count on the State".⁵⁹² Bishops and pastors declared loyalty to the communist, affirming in their speeches that communism and Christianity could coexist, having many things in common.

⁵⁸⁷ ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.5, 55-57.

⁵⁸⁸ Tismăneanu, 113.

⁵⁸⁹ Stan and Turcescu, 22.

⁵⁹⁰ Dudu Velicu and Alina Tudor-Pavelescu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României, Însemnări zilnice*, vol. I, 1945-47, 16. Also about Burducea's complicity with the communists see Daniela Kalkandjieva, *The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917-1948: From Decline to Resurrection* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015), 267.

⁵⁹¹ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc. 540.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, loc. 555.

All the speeches were radio broadcasted live throughout the country. Urged by Sabina to confront and denounce this fiasco, Richard asked and was granted permission to speak.⁵⁹³ In his speech, he urged those present to recognize that their loyalty was first due to Christ and God⁵⁹⁴ and not to the Communist government, their duty being to glorify God the Creator and Christ the Savior not earthly powers.⁵⁹⁵ Richard underlined the fundamental incompatibility between the church of Christ and the atheistic government.⁵⁹⁶ In spite of Burducea's attempts to interrupt him, Richard continued his speech causing shouting and applause until the wires of the microphone were severed, and he stepped down⁵⁹⁷ from the rostra.

At first, after Richard's incendiary anti-communist speech from the General Religious Congress of 1945, the Wurmbrands were officially left alone to continue their activity. Sometimes, young communist hecklers⁵⁹⁸ were sent to the Mission's worship meetings to disrupt the services, but this was only a minor impediment.⁵⁹⁹ Still, the communists were not going to forget someone who openly defied them. The Wurmbrand family was still under the protection of the Swedish embassy and the English Military Mission to Romania.⁶⁰⁰ In 1947, the Wurmbrand family started to receive the first warnings of the terror that would soon encompass the whole society. The communists systematically eliminated their potential opponents⁶⁰¹ from society: political leaders, civil servants, religious leaders, clergy members, monks and nuns, and tens of thousands of people who represented an inconvenience for the new communist order.

⁵⁹³ Richard confronted in public Alexandru Safran the Chief Rabbi of Romania, who at the Congress requested that Christian denominations stop blaming Jews for the death of Jesus, see monahul Moise, *Valeriu Gafencu - Sfântul Închisorilor, Mărturii Despre Valeriu Gafencu, Adunate Și Anotate de Monahul Moise* (Alba Iulia: Ed. Reîntregirea, 2007), 147., Richard urged the present rabbis to repent and acknowledge Jesus as Messiah earning applauses from Christian pastors and priests and causing the furious departure from the Congress of the rabbis, see Mihai Urzică, *Biserica și viermii cei neadormiți, sau, Cum lucrează în lume "taina fărâdelegii"* (București: Anastasia, 1998), 295.

⁵⁹⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 16.

⁵⁹⁵ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.570.

⁵⁹⁶ Ion Ioanid, *Închisoarea noastră cea de toate zilele, vol. II 1954-1957* (București: Humanitas, 2013), 92.

⁵⁹⁷ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.581.

⁵⁹⁸ Judy Wurmbrand, *Escape from the Grip* (Glendale, CA: Diane Books, 1979), 93.

⁵⁹⁹ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.593.

⁶⁰⁰ Wurmbrand was protected by the English Consul Colonel Kendall, because before WWII he was employed by the Anglican Mission, see ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 157078, vol.3, 220.

⁶⁰¹ Anne Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (New York: Anchor Books, 2013), 249.

The Wurmbrands were warned by a corrupt secret police officer, Riosanu, that the communists started to build a case against Richard. The latter was soon taken into police custody and, after three weeks, released because of the influence of friends in high places, like the orthodox Patriarch Justinian.⁶⁰² But they knew that this was only the beginning because many of their friends and helpers were arrested.⁶⁰³ Faced with this new reality the Wurmbrand family wrestled for a while with the possibility of illegally leaving the country.⁶⁰⁴ Richard after his three-week imprisonment was aware that “the earth is burning”⁶⁰⁵ under his feet. Jewish Christian friends of the Wurmbrands left the country before the communists closed the borders. Anutza Moise, their close friend, right before she left Romania, urged them for a last time to flee from the country.⁶⁰⁶ In September 1947, on the 27th, Solheim, Richard, and Saiovici Siegfried, another member of the Jewish Christian community, were arrested for three days and, after that, released.⁶⁰⁷ Richard felt that a good shepherd could not abandon the “flock” that was placed in his care. So, in spite of all the warnings and pleas from friends, Sabina and Richard decided not to leave the country.⁶⁰⁸

2.5. PRISONER: FIRST TERM (1948-1956)

2.5.1. *Calea Rahovei Detention*

The communist's arrests of undesirable elements from the Romanian society continued. On a Sunday, 29 February 1948, it was Richard's turn, at almost 39 years of age, to be arrested. Walking alone to church,⁶⁰⁹ he was kidnapped from the street by secret police agents and transported to the headquarters of the Communist Secret Police on Calea Rahova Street.⁶¹⁰ His wife and his colleague Solheim waited in vain for him to show up at church.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰² Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 337.

⁶⁰³ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.669.

⁶⁰⁴ Wurmbrand, loc.744.

⁶⁰⁵ Moise, 75.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 625.

⁶⁰⁷ Hulber, 19.

⁶⁰⁸ Sabina Wurmbrand, loc.758.

⁶⁰⁹ Richard remembers a Sunday evening, see Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.105 and Sabina talks about a Sunday morning, see Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc.773.

⁶¹⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.105.

⁶¹¹ Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc.773.

Upon entry into the Romanian communist detention system, Richard was stripped of his papers, belongings, tie, and shoelaces, as well as his name, which was replaced by a pseudonym, Vasile Georgescu⁶¹², a common Romanian name. This way, the guards would have no idea who their prisoner was, the authorities could deny his imprisonment in front of foreign entities who would inquire about Richard's whereabouts, and his family, together with friends,⁶¹³ would lose his trace.⁶¹⁴

Richard's disappearance in the prison system started, for Sabina and their friends, a series of searches. The Swedish ambassador in Bucharest, at the request of Sabina and Solheim, asked the Romanian Foreign Minister, Ana Pauker, about the whereabouts of Richard. Her answer was, "our information is that Pastor Wurmbrand has absconded from the country with a suitcase full of dollars entrusted to him for famine relief work. They say he is in Denmark".⁶¹⁵ The ambassador appealed to Petru Groza, the Romanian Prime Minister and his answer was in the same style, "So Wurmbrand's supposed to be in our jails? If you can prove that, I'll release him!".⁶¹⁶ In prison, with a promise of money from his family, Richard managed to convince a guard to send first an oral and later a written message to his family. The Swedish ambassador called the Prime Minister's bluff, passing the note with Richard's handwriting on it to him. Petru Groza passed the note to Ana Pauker who, outraged about being found out as a liar, reprimanded the ambassador for meddling in Romania's internal affairs and declared him *persona non grata*, allegedly forcing his recall to Sweden and retirement from diplomatic service.⁶¹⁷

The Calea Rahovei prison beneath the headquarters of the Penal Directorate of the Secret Police was the entry point for Richard into the Romanian Gulag archipelago. In the first days, he received an unexpected cellmate, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, an acquaintance from his communist days⁶¹⁸ and former Minister of Justice.⁶¹⁹ Minister

⁶¹² Wurmbrand, *Alone With God*, 136.

⁶¹³ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 46.

⁶¹⁴ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 108.

⁶¹⁵ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc. 812.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, loc.890.

⁶¹⁸ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu defended Richard in his trials from 1932, and in 1932 he was incarcerated with him in the Jilava prison, see ANCSSA, vol.5, 70.

⁶¹⁹ Tismăneanu, 108.

of Internal Affairs Teohari Georgescu, Minister of External Affairs Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca, Minister of Finance fearing his popularity plotted his downfall and denounced him at a Party Conference as “a bourgeois traitor in the class war”.⁶²⁰ Pătrășcanu was imprisoned, interrogated, inhumanely tortured⁶²¹ and after a six years long Stalinist show trial executed in 1954.

For Richard, a series of interrogatories by secret police officers followed. After endless questions and many written declarations about his life, work, and circles of known associates, the questioning by Colonel Dulgheru, the communist chief inquisitor, started to concentrate on Richard’s evangelistic activity amongst the Red Army soldiers. Richard, knowing that the interrogations would sooner or later transform into torture, decided to commit suicide to avoid the betrayal and arrest of other Christians, but the means of suicide providentially were denied to him.⁶²² Dulgheru and his aid Major Brînzaru wanting to know more about Richard’s connections with foreign organizations used enhanced interrogation techniques.⁶²³

These interrogations, accompanied by sleep deprivation, descended into torture, into endless hours of standing, hours of being forced into impossible postures and days of forced walking in circles in the cell with little water and food, until the walking because of swollen feet, and extreme fatigue ended in crawling on all fours.⁶²⁴ This was followed by whippings, cuttings with knives, and branding with hot iron. In the end, Richard confessed and signed everything the torturers wanted,⁶²⁵ but managed to avoid the betrayal of other Christians.

2.5.2. Ministry of Interior Prison

Seven months later, in October 1948, from the Calea Rahovei prison, Richard was taken to the “admiral ship”⁶²⁶ of the Romanian gulag, to the dungeons underneath

⁶²⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc 368-370.

⁶²¹ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 58.

⁶²² Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.527.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, loc.566-568.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, loc.590.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, loc.616-617.

⁶²⁶ Romulus Rusan, “București, Topografia Terorii,” *Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței*, 2011, <http://www.memorialsighet.ro/bucuresti-topografia-terorii-2/>.visited on 15.03.2019.

the Ministry of Interior in Bucharest.⁶²⁷ For him, this was an experience that would forever leave its mark on his psyche. For nearly three years, he was placed into solitary confinement in a small underground cell, cut off from any contact with the exterior world. His only contact with other humans was with his guards and interrogators, who beat and tortured him.⁶²⁸ Here he lost almost all notion of time.⁶²⁹

In this mind-altering environment, in the utter silence enforced by his jailors, in order to maintain his sanity, he worked out a daily routine. At the 10 PM bell that signalled the bedtime for prisoners, Richard began his daily, or better said nightly, program. His routine started with prayer and continued with a sermon that he preached as he would preach in church.⁶³⁰ The absolute silence, the lack of any distraction was a rich breeding ground for deep thought and meditation.⁶³¹

In the time spent in solitary confinement, Richard composed 350 or 356⁶³² sermons and, after his release, he published 348 of these sermons.⁶³³ These are not sermons in the strict sense; instead, they describe the psychological torment and the spiritual battles experienced by him.⁶³⁴ Every night he directed his thoughts toward his wife and son, he spoke to them and beyond all human understanding sometimes his words and thoughts reached them.⁶³⁵

His routine was also punctuated by times spent in the carcer⁶³⁶ in utter despair and sometimes going through psychological experiences on the brink of madness.⁶³⁷ At other times he was assailed by doubt concerning his faith.⁶³⁸ The long period spent in solitary confinement, the lack of sun, food and fresh air had brought back his tuberculosis, bringing him close to death.⁶³⁹ Even in this frail condition the interrogations continued. The communist lieutenant Grecu wanted to find out if the

⁶²⁷ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.645.

⁶²⁸ Richard Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 7.

⁶²⁹ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.434-435.

⁶³⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.684.

⁶³¹ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.79-83.

⁶³² Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 1.

⁶³³ Wurmbrand, *Alone With God*, 8.

⁶³⁴ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 10.

⁶³⁵ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground.*, loc.688.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, loc.793.

⁶³⁷ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 11.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶³⁹ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground.*, loc.794.

relief funds received by Richard and Solheim were used for spying for the Western imperialistic powers⁶⁴⁰ and about the distribution of Gospels in Russian to Red Army soldiers.⁶⁴¹ Following interrogations and long talks with lieutenant Grecu on the subject of Christianity and Marxism, the latter converted to Christianity.

Because interrogations alone did not provide the desired results, the communists tried a new method on Richard, tested on many political prisoners of the time, the administration of brainwashing, mind-altering drugs. Under the pretext of treatment for his worsening tuberculosis, the jailors administered to him a drug that was supposed to weaken his will and loosen his tongue to reveal the suspected spy network within Romania in the pay of the World Council of Churches.⁶⁴² The drug altered Richard's perception of reality; it enhanced his fantasizing⁶⁴³ and induced all kind of images⁶⁴⁴ in his mind, otherworldly visions, amongst them visions with saints.⁶⁴⁵

During this terrible situation, Richard's recurring dream was of one day being free in the West, of unmasking the true nature of the communists before the Western world and of organizing help for the persecuted believers.⁶⁴⁶ The heavy doping⁶⁴⁷ further weakened Richard, but it did not produce the result the jailors wanted. After almost three years of inhumane solitary confinement, being close to death, the order was given to be transferred to a prison hospital.⁶⁴⁸

2.5.3. Văcărești Prison

At the age of 41, after nearly three years of solitary confinement, on 19 July 1950, Richard was taken from the undergrounds of the Ministry of Interior to the Văcărești monastery⁶⁴⁹ on the outskirts of Bucharest, which had been transformed into a prison. He had been imprisoned since 1948, but he was tried only in June 1950. His

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., loc.838-839.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., loc. 841.

⁶⁴² Ibid., loc. 899.

⁶⁴³ Richard Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers* (Basingstoke: Marshalls, 1985), 28.

⁶⁴⁴ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.71-73.

⁶⁴⁵ Wurmbrand, *Alone with God*, 63.

⁶⁴⁶ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 30.

⁶⁴⁷ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 7.

⁶⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground.*, loc.946.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., loc. 949.

Penal dossier, Dossier nr.1954, was examined by the Third Penal section of the Court of Law in Bucharest, Ioanesi Nicanor⁶⁵⁰ being the attorney appointed by the Court to defend his case.

At last, he was tried under his real name, not under the pseudonym Vasile Georgescu. Richard was accused of “crimes against humanity”⁶⁵¹ meaning that during the reign of King Carol II, he gave information to the Siguranța, the king’s secret police, about his communist colleagues.⁶⁵² The answer from the Văcărești prison was that Richard cannot be transported from interrogation to appear in front of the Bucharest Penal section, and the Court was asked to interrogate Richard in the hospital of the Văcărești prison.⁶⁵³ Consequently, the Court decided that the trial would take place at the prison and the members of the Penal Court, the defence attorney and the witnesses would travel to that location.⁶⁵⁴

On 3 July 1950, the day of the trial Richard was very sick and strengthening injections were administered to him to keep him conscious during the proceedings. The list of accusations listed by the prosecutor contained:

He was saying that I stood for the same criminal ideology in Romania as Josef Broz Tito did in Yugoslavia. I thought I must be delirious. At the time of my arrest Marshal Tito was held up as a model Communist—I did not know that he had since been revealed as a deviationist and traitor. He continued his interminable speech about my guilt: spy work through the Scandinavian church missions and the World Council of Churches, spreading imperialist ideology under cover of religion, infiltrating the Party under the same pretense, with the real purpose of destroying it, and so on.⁶⁵⁵

In essence, like the majority of communist trials of the day, his trial was not a real trial but only the recital of the accusations and the delivery of a verdict. In the given circumstances, his defence lawyer could not do much. The witnesses cited by the defence, Solheim⁶⁵⁶, Dr. Edvica Gherasim and Angela Cazacu could not appear to testify in favour of Richard because, suspiciously, they were not found at their listed

⁶⁵⁰ Hulber, 20.

⁶⁵¹ ANCSSA, vol.1, 88 (mixt).

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁵⁵ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.990-993.

⁶⁵⁶ Solheim was forced by the communists to leave Romania not long after Wurmbrand’s arrest in 1948, see Sabina Wurmbrand, loc. 890-900.

addresses.⁶⁵⁷ The trial ended after only ten short minutes. Richard was sentenced to twenty years of hard labour, ten years of civic degradation for crimes against humanity, the confiscation of all wealth and the payment of a fine of 3,000 lei for penal expenses.⁶⁵⁸ In this period from his arrest in 1948 and to his trial in 1950, Sabina was left to care for her two children,⁶⁵⁹ for her natural child Mihai (Michael) and their adopted child Alexandru (Sandu).

2.5.4. Târgu Ocna Prison Sanatorium

The next island in the Romanian Gulag Archipelago, for Richard, was the Târgu Ocna prison sanatorium. Days after his makeshift trial in July 1950, because of his worsening health, he was taken there along with other political prisoners who had tuberculosis.⁶⁶⁰ Here, Richard, shortly after his arrival, ended up in the infamous Room Four for the hopeless cases. The next thirty months⁶⁶¹ were spent by him in this room where people died daily and where he inexplicably clung to life. Here, amongst priests, professors, former social democrats, even former communist guerillas, all political prisoners, Richard met a young man of outstanding Christian character, a former Iron Guard member Valeriu Gafencu, later nicknamed “the saint of the prisons”.⁶⁶² Gafencu after a prolonged suffering died⁶⁶³ in Room Four. Richard, due to an inexplicable resilience and the streptomycin he received from his family, smuggled into the prison by Doctor Margareta⁶⁶⁴ Danielescu,⁶⁶⁵ managed to survive. Danielescu’s medical letter transmitted by the prison leadership to the Directorate of Penitentiaries stipulates that Richard was very sick with tuberculosis

⁶⁵⁷ Hulber, 21.

⁶⁵⁸ ANCSSA, vol.1, 76-77v.

⁶⁵⁹ ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001814, 4.

⁶⁶⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.1008.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, loc.1042-1043.

⁶⁶² monahul Moise, *Valeriu Gafencu - Sfântul Închisorilor, Mărturie Despre Valeriu Gafencu, Adunate Și Anotate de Monahul Moise.*

⁶⁶³ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc. 2011-2013.

⁶⁶⁴ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 30.

⁶⁶⁵ Hulber, 23.

and in need of medical treatment.⁶⁶⁶ Having a height of 1,84 meters, the weight of Richard, at that time, touched a very low value of 66 kgs.⁶⁶⁷

In this prison, Richard experienced the devilish Pitești style communist brainwashing and re-education through beatings and torture perpetrated not by guards but by gangs of re-educated prisoners, “Prisoners with Communist Convictions”.⁶⁶⁸ Only the pleading of Danielescu with the communist officials stopped the madness.⁶⁶⁹ Richard found out from other prisoners who had worked on the pharaonic communist project, the Danube-Black Sea Canal, that his wife Sabina had been imprisoned two years after him, and that she had worked forced labour in the Poarta Alba and other penal colonies at the Canal.⁶⁷⁰ In 1954 Mihai (Michael) was allowed to meet his father in a short visit to the Târgu Ocna prison. From him, he found out that his wife was free and that both his wife and his son were able to eke out a meagre existence.⁶⁷¹

2.5.5. Craiova and Other Prisons

The spring of 1955 brought for Richard the end of the period spent in Room Four.⁶⁷² Not because his health improved, but following the higher logic of communist chaos, he was transferred to Craiova⁶⁷³ prison.⁶⁷⁴ Starting with this transfer, until his first release from prison the next year, Richard followed a series of short stays in different prisons. From Craiova, he was transferred to: Poarta Alba⁶⁷⁵, Gherla,⁶⁷⁶ then back to Văcărești,⁶⁷⁷ and then to Jilava close to Bucharest. From Jilava, for a short period of time, from 16 to 22 May⁶⁷⁸ 1956, Richard was taken to Bucharest

⁶⁶⁶ Dr. Danielescu wrote that Richard’s condition needed treatment with streptomycin, Pass pills and large quantities of D2 vitamin, see ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.6, 99v, 101.

⁶⁶⁷ According to his medical file from the Târgu Ocna prison, see Ibid., pp.144-146.

⁶⁶⁸ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.1385.

⁶⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 31.

⁶⁷⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.1501-1502.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., loc.1707-1708.

⁶⁷² Ibid., loc.2060.

⁶⁷³ transfer from Târgu Ocna prison to Craiova prison, see ANCSSA, vol.6, 41.

⁶⁷⁴ Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.2060.

⁶⁷⁵ transfer from Craiova to Poarta Alba (Constanta County) prison, see ANCSSA, vol.6, 31.

⁶⁷⁶ transfer from Gherla to Văcărești, see Ibid. 33.

⁶⁷⁷ transfer from Văcărești to Jilava, see Ibid., 23.

⁶⁷⁸ Hulber, 24.

for more questioning⁶⁷⁹ and then taken back to Jilava prison,⁶⁸⁰ where his first period of imprisonment ended.

Richard's release was possible first because Stalin's death in 1953 started a political "thaw",⁶⁸¹ which was manifested also through the release of hundreds of thousands of prisoners from the Soviet Gulag. Nikita Khrushchev at the 20th Communist Party Congress of the Soviet Union in 1956 denounced the extreme repression of the Stalinist model.⁶⁸² Influenced by this, the Romanian communists also released many political prisoners, amongst them Christian priests and pastors. Also, Sabina appealed in 1956 to the Supreme Court for the application of the Decree of Amnesty Nr.421 of 1955, in the case of her husband.⁶⁸³ The Supreme Court admitted Sabina's appeal and Richard's 20-year condemnation was pardoned. This was possible because even if he was sentenced for "crimes against humanity" he did not commit voluntary manslaughter.⁶⁸⁴ The Supreme Court decided his release on 7 June 1956⁶⁸⁵ and, based on this decision Nr. 1752/950/956,⁶⁸⁶ he was discharged from the Jilava prison on 12 June⁶⁸⁷ after eight and a half years of imprisonment.⁶⁸⁸

2.6. PRISONER: SECOND TERM (1959-1964)

The two and a half short years after Richard's release from prison were only an interlude between two acts. After his release, he lived in Bucharest with his wife and son in relative poverty. His health was very fragile, "his nerves were in shreds".⁶⁸⁹ The torture and years of solitary confinement left him with lasting mental trauma. Mihai earned a living for the family by becoming a piano tuner.⁶⁹⁰ Richard, to fulfil a promise made in prison, met with Orthodox Patriarch Justinian, in an attempt to plead for a persecuted group from the Orthodox Church, the Army of the Lord,

⁶⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.2461-2462.

⁶⁸⁰ ANCSSA, vol.6, 10.

⁶⁸¹ Tismăneanu, 174.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶⁸³ ANCSSA, vol.4, 39.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 48-48v.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol.6, 5.

⁶⁸⁷ Hulber, 25.

⁶⁸⁸ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 42.

⁶⁸⁹ Michael Wurmbrand, 62.

⁶⁹⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.2558.

without achieving much.⁶⁹¹ For a short period, part of the post-Stalin political thaw, Richard was given a license to preach.⁶⁹² He was allowed to preach for a short period in the Orthodox Cathedral in Sibiu and teach in the university city of Cluj in the Cathedral to theology students and professors.

His lectures in Cluj attracted a very large audience from the university,⁶⁹³ exceeding a thousand attendees. The message shared with students and faculty was deemed to be counterrevolutionary, and the communist agent, who hounded Richard's every step, accused him of "a torrent of sedition"⁶⁹⁴ and of poisoning the minds of the youth⁶⁹⁵ by denigrating the government. Quickly, his pastor license was revoked, and Richard was back in the situation of doing underground Christian counselling, preaching and evangelizing.⁶⁹⁶

After his release, the Wurmbrands were under constant surveillance by the communist authorities and his underground Christian activity was known to them.⁶⁹⁷ In 1958, preparations were made by the communists for the re-imprisonment of Richard.⁶⁹⁸ On the 16th of September 1958⁶⁹⁹ the Securitate opened a new dossier called "Wurmbrand and Others",⁷⁰⁰ starting a new investigation of Richard and Sabina and of the close circle of people who were in contact with them. This included people like Alice Panaiodor, Milan Haimovici, Mihai Ciopraga, Nicolae Danciu, Gheorghe Boeru, Levy Emilia Sfoil and Levy Mayer Avram. The communists wanted to keep a close eye on the activity around the mission church on Olteni Street nr.45 and the connections of these people with foreigners like Solheim,⁷⁰¹ the former pastor who had to leave Romania accused of espionage,⁷⁰² Moise Anuța,⁷⁰³ an old friend of the Wurmbrand's emigrated to Norway and others.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., loc.2583-2584.

⁶⁹² Sabina Wurmbrand., loc.5299-5302.

⁶⁹³ Ibid., loc.2613-2614.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., loc.5313.

⁶⁹⁵ Wurmbrand, loc.2651-2652.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., loc.2656-2657.

⁶⁹⁷ ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 157078, vol.1, 35-40.

⁶⁹⁸ Hulber, 25.

⁶⁹⁹ ANCSSA, vol.1, 48.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., vol.1, cover.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid. vol.2, 3.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., 23.

2.6.1. Uranus Detention Center

The inevitable happened to Richard on 15 January 1959, at almost the age of 50. At 1 AM, the Secret Police stormed the small Wurmbrand residence and, after turning the whole place upside down, arrested⁷⁰⁴ Richard and took him to the police headquarters in Bucharest.⁷⁰⁵ Next taken to the Uranus interrogation and detention centre also in Bucharest he was interrogated, beaten and then tried. In the vein of communist trials, it was only a short ten-minute secret session, a rehearing of his previous secret trial from 1951.⁷⁰⁶ By Sentence Nr. 63, on 31 March 1959, the previous amnesty was cancelled and he was sentenced by the Military Court of the Second Military Region for murder⁷⁰⁷ to 25 years of prison, to the confiscation of all wealth and 300 lei legal fees.⁷⁰⁸ At this time the 25 years sentence was for him the equivalent of a life sentence.⁷⁰⁹

2.6.2. Gherla Prison

After the trial, Richard was transferred to the Jilava prison, close to Bucharest, where he spent a few days. The final destination of the second period spent in communist prisons was the notorious prison from the Transylvanian town Gherla, where he had already spent two months in 1956.⁷¹⁰ This prison was overcrowded; Richard was incarcerated with common criminals, other political prisoners, and with clergymen of all denominations.

Despite the punishments, Richard continued to preach to anyone who listened to his teachings⁷¹¹ while he was moved from one cell to another. In the Spring of 1962, priests, pastors, and other clergymen were segregated and put together in a large prison dormitory housing around 100 prisoners.⁷¹² Even in prison, the old religious squabbles continued between representatives of the different Christian

⁷⁰⁴ ANCSSA, Penal Fond, Dossier Nr. 001079, vol.2, 4., also see arrest warrant Ibid., vol.6, 181.

⁷⁰⁵ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.2679-2680.

⁷⁰⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc.5460.

⁷⁰⁷ ANCSSA, vol.2, 11-13.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., vol.4, 10.

⁷⁰⁹ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.377-378.

⁷¹⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.2727.

⁷¹¹ Ibid., loc.2909-2910.

⁷¹² Ibid., loc.3092.

denominations, prisoners being divided amongst them based on their confessional affiliation.⁷¹³

In this room, Richard met the Hungarian Reformed Pastor Visky Ferenc,⁷¹⁴ an outstanding Christian character,⁷¹⁵ a member of the Bethanist revival movement from the Reformed Church and a man also imprisoned for his faith. Visky was sentenced to twenty-two years because some of his sermons displeased the Communists. His wife and seven children were deported to the southern part of Romania to a desert place, where it was difficult to obtain bread and water.⁷¹⁶ Richard was thrown into this room of clergymen from all denominations, a tall man with only skin and bones⁷¹⁷ as Visky describes in his book, *I am Prisoner: 70 Stories About Prison and Friendship*. Here Visky and Richard met,⁷¹⁸ helped each other and became friends for life.

Through loudspeakers installed in the cell, the communists started a program of political indoctrination and re-education of the religious prisoners. Those who accepted the communist re-education lured by the promise of freedom had to attend more lectures, had to glorify in writing the freedom of Socialist Romania⁷¹⁹ and had to give communist lectures to their peers.⁷²⁰ Richard was constantly pressured by Lieutenant Konya and the Commandant Alexandrescu to deny his Christian faith and join the ranks of prisoners who recanted and became instruments used by the communists to re-educate other prisoners.⁷²¹ He was subjected to a treatment alternating between negative and positive experiences. Repeated beatings and prolonged incarcerations in overheated, massively illuminated rooms with loudspeakers spewing constant propaganda were exchanged with positive experiences, and transfers to better rooms with clean sheets and better food.⁷²²

⁷¹³ Ibid., loc.3099-3101.

⁷¹⁴ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 76.

⁷¹⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, Kindle Edition (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2012), loc.71-74.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ Ferenc Visky, *Fogoly vagyok: 70 történet a börtönről és a barátságáról* (Kolozsvár: Koinónia, 2002), 11.

⁷¹⁸ Visky heard about Wurmbrand before his imprisonment and prayed to God to meet him. His request was granted in prison, see Ibid., 13.

⁷¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.3373.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., loc.3376.

⁷²¹ Ibid., loc.3400.

⁷²² Ibid., loc.3408.

Following the malnourishment and relentless psychological pressure, some of the prisoners cracked and openly renounced Christianity. Richard's already poor health worsened and, in 1963, he was moved to the prison hospital⁷²³ where he stayed little because he refused to forsake Christianity.

The communists, wanting results, changed their strategies. The Deputy Minister of Interior Negrea, with other communist officials, came to Gherla prison. Richard was summoned to appear before the delegation from Bucharest. Negrea asked for Richard to become a collaborator with the communists and, in return, offered him freedom, the highest office of the Lutheran Church in Romania, and a big salary.⁷²⁴ The communists realized that their strategy of denouncing Richard as an imperialistic spy⁷²⁵ and attacking the World Council of Churches, denouncing it as a nest of spies,⁷²⁶ was a faulty one because it produced negative effects. So, in an attempt to improve their image abroad, they changed their strategy. They considered that infiltrating this international body instead of demonizing it would better suit their needs. The orthodox church already had representatives at the Word Council of Churches.⁷²⁷ Richard, as a former affiliate of this organization turned communist collaborator and advocate of the Romanian communist regime in the World Council of Churches, would better suit the communist overall strategy.⁷²⁸

Richard was put in front of a very hard decision. On the one hand, collaboration would bring him freedom, rejoining his family, important position, but also betrayal of his beliefs. On the other hand, if he rejected the offer, it would mean prolonged suffering in prison with the perspective of certain death. Richard agonized over the decision:

My soul was like a ship driven from side to side, rocked by a violent tempest, one moment plunged into the abyss, the next carried up to Heaven. I drank in those hours the cup of Christ; it was for me the Garden of Gethsemane. And like Jesus, I threw myself face

⁷²³ Ibid., loc.3334-3335.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., loc.3504-3505.

⁷²⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 71.

⁷²⁶ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.3519.

⁷²⁷ Kaisamari Hintikka, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 1961-1977* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2000), 123–127.

⁷²⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 81.

down upon the earth and prayed with broken cries, and asked God to help me overcome this horrible temptation.⁷²⁹

After a tremendous internal struggle, he decided to refuse the offer of Deputy Minister Negrea. Richard abhorred the idea of becoming a Red bishop⁷³⁰, a denouncer of his brethren, a communist pawn in the World Council of Churches. He did not want to betray his faith, loathing the idea of having a visiting card that would read "Richard Wurmbrand, Lutheran Bishop of Romania, by appointment of the Secret Police".⁷³¹ The rejection of this offer brought more suffering for Richard. He was kept in a special block of the prison and was further exposed to brainwashing techniques in an attempt to break his ties with his Christian beliefs and his trust in the family bonds.⁷³²

The summer of 1964 brought a thaw in the international relationships between the Red East and the capitalist West. As a result, a general amnesty was announced for all categories of political prisoners, meaning the release of thousands of prisoners from the Romanian Gulag. In the Gherla prison, in June 1964, the commandant, Major Alexandrescu, announced the amnesty to the prisoners.⁷³³ Richard was released in the same month.⁷³⁴ From Gherla, he travelled to the city of Cluj and from there by train home to his family in Bucharest.⁷³⁵

2.7. VOICE OF THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH WORLDWIDE (1965-2001)

Upon release from prison, Richard was given a small parish in the village of Orșova and the license to preach there. He chose not to go to Orșova, instead, he continued in Bucharest to conduct underground religious meetings.⁷³⁶ Consequently, on the 31st of August 1964, less than three months after his release, the Securitatea opened the Informational Dossier nr. 146678 for the surveillance of his activity and of

⁷²⁹ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.3542-3545.

⁷³⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 112.

⁷³¹ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.3552-3553.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, loc.3568.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, loc.3583.

⁷³⁴ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 35.

⁷³⁵ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.3614.

⁷³⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, loc.5967.

his connections with people from Romania and abroad.⁷³⁷ People who were in contact with him or who visited him were often informers who reported their discussions with Richard to the Securitate,⁷³⁸ or others informed about these people who were in contact with him.⁷³⁹ He became a controversial person, on one hand, those from the religious realm who collaborated with the communists opposed him, branding him a heretic. Still, on the other hand, many doors opened for him to preach in different churches, old Lutheran churches, Greek Orthodox cathedrals,⁷⁴⁰ and in churches of smaller denominations.

In secret meetings with other leaders of the Underground church, it was suggested to Richard that he should emigrate to the West to avoid another arrest and to inform the West⁷⁴¹ about the political and religious persecution that took place in Romania, thus destroying the carefully crafted communist façade of religious freedom. The means of immigration chosen by the Wurmbrands was the Jewish emigration system from Romania to Israel. Since 1948, the state of Israel paid a certain amount of money for every Jew leaving Romania for Israel, and, on top of this, every Jew allowed to leave the country had to pay a 1000 Romanian lei exit fee.⁷⁴² Romania used this tacit system to acquire foreign currency to shore up their ineffectual centralized economical system.

With the help of Anutza Moise, the Wurmbrand's friend, they immigrated to Norway, and with the help of family members from Israel⁷⁴³, namely Lazăr, Richard's brother from Israel⁷⁴⁴ and Sabina's brother from Paris⁷⁴⁵ they managed to gather the necessary funds.⁷⁴⁶ Along with enlisting the help of the Norwegian Israel

⁷³⁷ The verification Dossier nr. 8246 was changed into an Informational Dossier, see ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 146678, vol.1, 1.

⁷³⁸ For example, informant with codename "Popescu Ioan" reports about his visit to the Wurmbrand residence in the fall of 1964, see ANCSSA, vol. 3, 1.

⁷³⁹ For example, Richard's connections with the Army of the Lord (revivalist Orthodox group) were closely monitored, see ANCSSA, vol. 5, 8.

⁷⁴⁰ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 214, 215.

⁷⁴¹ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 5986.

⁷⁴² Radu Ioanid, *Răscumpărarea evreilor: istoria acordurilor secrete dintre România și Israel* (București: Polirom, 2005), 23.

⁷⁴³ Moise, 91.

⁷⁴⁴ Xavier TILLIETTE, "Le Juif de Bucarest," *Bulletin de La Société Paul Claudel*, no. 166 (2002): 2. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45086945>. Accessed on 26.02.2023.

⁷⁴⁵ Moise, 92-93.

⁷⁴⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6008.

Mission and the Hebrew Christian Alliance Anutza and the close relatives of the Wurmbrand family succeeded in raising the required sum of \$10,000.⁷⁴⁷

Finally, in 1965,⁷⁴⁸ after many delays, the family received the news that the money was paid for their ransom and the decision⁷⁴⁹ was made to allow them to leave the country. Richard was summoned by the Securitate for a last meeting where he was warned that if he spoke against the communists abroad, he would be physically eliminated.⁷⁵⁰ On 6 December,⁷⁵¹ Richard, Sabina, and their son Mihai left Romania from the Bucharest airport,⁷⁵² ironically on the day of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of the prisoners for the Orthodox Church.⁷⁵³

The itinerary that they followed was Rome, to Paris for a few days⁷⁵⁴, then Oslo, Norway, where they met their lifelong friend Anutza and the representatives of the Israel Mission and of the Hebrew Christian Alliance who helped pay their ransom.⁷⁵⁵ After a short period of rest, Richard was anxious to preach and to let the whole world hear the message of the persecuted church from the communist countries. Through Norwegian pastor Myrus Knutson he started to preach at the American Church and the American military chapel in Oslo.⁷⁵⁶ In the beginning the Lutheran World Federation warned the Lutheran churches not to allow Richard to preach because they feared that his message might embitter the communists and hinder the ransom of other persecuted Christians.⁷⁵⁷ Slowly the Lutheran churches opened up for Richard and as the result of his preaching about the persecuted Christians in communist lands the cornerstone for his future mission was laid, the Norwegian Mission behind the Iron Curtain was formed.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 6009.

⁷⁴⁸ Moise, 99.

⁷⁴⁹ The political decision was taken on the highest level by Minister of Internal Affairs, General Colonel Alexandru Drăghici, see ANCSSA, vol.1, 112.

⁷⁵⁰ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6043.

⁷⁵¹ See also the confirmation of their emigration in ANCSSA, vol.1, 10.

⁷⁵² Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6050.

⁷⁵³ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 38.

⁷⁵⁴ The French consulate from Bucharest already gave a visa for a short stay to the Wurmbrand family from 30th of January 1965, and they were not allowed to leave at that time, see ANCSSA, vol. 4, 135.

⁷⁵⁵ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6008.

⁷⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 42.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., 44.

Richard's story caught the wings of the media in Norway and Richard was invited to speak to NATO staff. He emphasized that a peaceful coexistence of the West with communism is impossible because the communist plan was to subjugate the West. The publicity around him and his message triggered an official protest of the Norwegian Lutheran Church against communist persecution and the Norwegian Parliament passed a resolution against communist religious persecution.⁷⁵⁹

Thus, something extraordinary started to take form, something that was until that time only a dream. While in prison, confined to an underground cell Richard dreamed about a worldwide mission⁷⁶⁰ to help the persecuted Christians.⁷⁶¹ From Norway the Wurmbrands went to England where they met an old acquaintance, Pastor Stuart Harris, who had already done mission work in communist countries. Richard with the help of Harris spoke in England in different settings, spreading the news about the harsh life of the Underground church from small churches to universities⁷⁶² and even to the Royal Albert Hall⁷⁶³ in London.⁷⁶⁴ As the vision for a worldwide mission started to grow stronger as the result of the growing notoriety of Richard's message, Harris founded the British Christian Mission to the Communist World.⁷⁶⁵ This mission organized trips to Communist countries with the purpose of aiding the families of persecuted and imprisoned Christians.⁷⁶⁶

The next step for the Wurmbrand family was the United States of America. With the help of friends from Norway, Pastor Knutson and Pastor Cassius Sturdy, the pastor of the American military chapel from Oslo, it was arranged for the Wurmbrand family to go to America early in 1966.⁷⁶⁷ Burning with missionary fervour, at the age of 57, Richard brought the message of the modern-day martyrs trapped behind the Iron Curtain to the shores of America. Traveling from one coast

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁶⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Oracles of God*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2006), loc.739-742.

⁷⁶¹ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 33.

⁷⁶² Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6090.

⁷⁶³ The Securitate was receiving detailed reports about Richard, see the report about the Royal Albert Hall meeting, ANCSSA, vol. 9, 1.

⁷⁶⁴ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 46.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 114.

⁷⁶⁷ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6090.

to the other,⁷⁶⁸ he preached in packed Lutheran churches, urging his listeners to allocate money from their church budgets to help relieve the sufferings of the oppressed families of imprisoned Christians and to help spread the Gospel in communist countries.⁷⁶⁹

In a peculiar twist of events, he was in Philadelphia during the massive anti-war rallies of 25-26 March 1966 that brought tens of thousands of people to the streets of big cities from America. He attended the massive street rally organized by people who protested against the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War. While the speaker from the platform, a clergyman, attacked in his speech Lyndon B. Johnson, the sitting president of the country and praised communism, Richard burst onto the platform, snatched the microphone from the speaker and spoke against communism.⁷⁷⁰ He also partially undressed and showed the torture marks that were on his body, marks made by communist torturers during his 14 years of imprisonment.⁷⁷¹ The police intervened and escorted him out of the meeting, releasing him shortly after the rally. This incident drew the attention of the American media to the person and message of Richard.

Shortly after this incident from Philadelphia, the news about Richard reached Washington D.C. Therefore, on the 6th of May, 1966, along with Sabina, his wife, he was invited to appear in front of a Subcommittee of the United States Senate.⁷⁷² Instead of only a few senators that were supposed to attend, the hearing received wide media coverage. The hearing room was filled with many representatives of newspapers, radio and TV stations. Delegates from big world news agencies like UPI, Associated Press, Reuters,⁷⁷³ and others present covered the event. Richard spoke here about communist persecutions, atrocities, and the suffering of the Underground Church.⁷⁷⁴ In this meeting, he was asked by Senator Thomas J. Dodd who was presiding the hearing to publicly show if he has any scars and torture

⁷⁶⁸ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 57.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 58.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6106.

⁷⁷³ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 58.

⁷⁷⁴ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6108.

marks on his body.⁷⁷⁵ Consequently, Richard stripped to the waist and, in front of the packed audience and TV cameras, showed the collection of eighteen scars⁷⁷⁶ on his body received in the communist prisons of Romania.

The record of Richard's testimony before the Senate's Subcommittee was printed⁷⁷⁷ and became the U.S. Government Printing Office's bestseller, being later translated into several other languages.⁷⁷⁸ The publicity around the Senate hearing meant that invitations to preach and lecture poured in for Richard, bolstering his prison dream, the establishment of a Christian mission to the Communist world.⁷⁷⁹

In these years of political fervour, anti-war protests, and years of pro-communist sympathies in America, Richard supported and sometimes actively joined the ranks of anti-communist protesters. On 21 October 1967, on the same day that the anti-war protesters broke into the premises of the Pentagon, Richard, together with students from Georgetown and George Washington University, conducted an anti-communist counter demonstration in the North Parking of the Pentagon.⁷⁸⁰ He preached from a cherry picker⁷⁸¹ to the gathered multitudes about Christ and the dangers of communism leading people to perdition.⁷⁸² Sadly, the Washington Star the next day labelled the anti-communist group as "Nazis".⁷⁸³

In 1967, Richard started his mission in America. In the beginning, it was a department of the American branch of the European Christian Mission that later was renamed *Jesus to the Communist World*.⁷⁸⁴ His activity was closely monitored from

⁷⁷⁵ United States Congress Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, *Communist Exploitation of Religion: Hearing, Eighty-Ninth Congress, Second Session, May 6, 1966: Testimony of Rev. Richard Wurmbrand* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966).

⁷⁷⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6110.

⁷⁷⁷ Laws, *Communist Exploitation of Religion*.

⁷⁷⁸ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 59.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁰ General CIA Records, Congressional Record Appendix, CIA-RDP75-00149R000600240006-7, 2, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp75-00149r000600240006-7>, visited on 23.04.2019.

⁷⁸¹ Edward Hunter, "Tactics", no. 11 (20 1967): 9, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28147089>. Accessed on 28.02.2023. see also "Tactics", no. 12 (December 20, 1975): 1, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28147189>. Accessed on 28.02.2023.

⁷⁸² Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 94.

⁷⁸³ General CIA Records, 2.

⁷⁸⁴ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 62.

Romania by Securitatea.⁷⁸⁵ In the same year, Richard wrote his first book after his ransom and immigration from Romania, detailing his experience and the experience of the persecuted and tortured Christians in the communist prisons. The book's title was first "Today's Martyred Church Tortured for Christ", and it became a best seller under the name "Tortured for Christ".⁷⁸⁶ The book had a great impact in America and the West, receiving a lot of publicity from this time on.⁷⁸⁷ It sold millions of copies over the years and was translated into 68 languages. The printing of the book in 1967 and after that Richard and Sabina's visits to many countries around the world gave birth to a mission with branches in nineteen countries from Europe, Asia, Australia, and America. The branches of the mission worked together to bring to the Underground Church much needed Christian literature, radio broadcasts in different native languages, and relief⁷⁸⁸ for families of martyrs.⁷⁸⁹

All the publicity surrounding Richard in the West, his anti-communist speeches and lectures all over the world unmasking the lack of religious freedom in Romania and the persecution of Christians and Churches could not escape the notice of the communists. His visits, like the ones made to England for example, had international echoes according to historian Dorin Dobrinu.⁷⁹⁰ Also, during his visit to Ireland in 1967, he addressed a large evangelical gathering in Belfast at Wellington Hall and spoke about the subversive activities of Soviet communists.⁷⁹¹ He also visited Australia as early as 1969.⁷⁹² He came back to Australia and spoke on different topics,

⁷⁸⁵ The Securitatea watched him closely and put in place a series of countermeasures to limit the influence of Wurmbrand in the West, see ANCSSA, vol. 7, 1-5.

⁷⁸⁶ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6120.

⁷⁸⁷ "State Hornet 1971," October 26, 1971, 6, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.33320902>. Accessed on 28.02.2023.

⁷⁸⁸ after only 3 month in America Richard arranged couriers to be sent to the Soviet Union with relief to persecuted Christians, see Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 96.

⁷⁸⁹ Sabina Wurmbrand, *The Pastor's Wife*, 6125.

⁷⁹⁰ Dorin Dobrinu, "Richard Wurmbrand's Tours in Great Britain and Their International Echoes (1968-1972)," in *In and Out of Focus: Romanian and Britain Relations and Perspectives Form 1930- to the Present*, ed. Dennis Deletant (Bucharest: Cavallioti, 2005), 139-62.

⁷⁹¹ Roy Garland, "Protestant Fears & Civil Rights: Self-Fulfilling Conspiracies?," *History Ireland* 16, no. 5 (2008): 30-33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27725869>, accessed on 26.02.2023

⁷⁹² "The Australian Church Record 1969," no. 1441 (June 26, 1969): 8, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32084336>. Accessed on 28.02.2023.

on the persecuted Church from eastern Europe and the religious persecution from Mozambique.⁷⁹³

The Securitate's external service, the General Directorate of External Intelligence, on 14 December 1967,⁷⁹⁴ opened a top-secret operation entitled "Ashaver", a code name for Richard Wurmbrand. The purpose of this operation, as stated in the SIE 7084 and SIE 33446⁷⁹⁵ case files, was "the counteracting and the unmasking of the hateful activity conducted by this (i.e. Richard Wurmbrand) in the exterior, against our country".⁷⁹⁶ With the help of informants⁷⁹⁷ and assets⁷⁹⁸ placed around him the communists during the years conducted activities of misdirection and denigration of Richard in the western media, newspapers and television.⁷⁹⁹ Using his communist past⁸⁰⁰ they fought to discredit his anti-communist message. Richard was aware that he was under observation and that discrediting activities were directed against him.⁸⁰¹ After his testimony before the Senate's Subcommittee, he was conscious⁸⁰² that he was in danger of not only a moral assassination, but in danger of being murdered.⁸⁰³ Richard and the mission Christ to the Communist World was constantly⁸⁰⁴ attacked in the communist newspapers, denounced as fascists⁸⁰⁵ and leaders of criminal activities. Letters and telegrams were sent to communist contacts through the Romanian local embassies to the locations where he travelled with the

⁷⁹³ "The Australian Church Record 1976," no. 1601 (January 22, 1976): 1, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32084502>. Accessed on 28.02.2023.

⁷⁹⁴ ANCSSA, Service of External Intelligence Fond, (from this point on will be referred to as ANCSSA, SIE Fond) Dossier Nr.7804/I, p.1., by the end of 1976 this Dossier grew to 9 volumes with 2232 pages in total, see ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.7804/IX, 11.

⁷⁹⁵ ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.33446, cover.

⁷⁹⁶ ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.7804/IX, 11.

⁷⁹⁷ Report of informant with code name Graur about an English clergyman who was in contact with Wurmbrand, see ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.7804/III, p.86., also reports about the apparently successful actions of informant with code name Andrei against Wurmbrand, see ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.33446, 12.

⁷⁹⁸ Asset Ilie reporting from the city code named "Ghimes", that is from Geneva, about the countermeasures taken to discredit Wurmbrand, see Ibid., 33., also Norwegian historian Iardar Seim from Oslo used to speak against Wurmbrand, see Ibid., 44.

⁷⁹⁹ details of actions taken against Wurmbrand in the West, see ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 073560, 9-19.

⁸⁰⁰ ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.7804/I, p.362.

⁸⁰¹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 84.

⁸⁰² Wurmbrand was informed about a possible plan of assassination against him ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 073560, p.28.

⁸⁰³ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 84.

⁸⁰⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.2601-2604.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., loc.2608-2610.

instructions to discredit him.⁸⁰⁶ Communist assets from around the globe, from South America⁸⁰⁷, India⁸⁰⁸, Africa, and Europe⁸⁰⁹ reported back to Romania detailing the actions taken against Richard.

The damage that he was doing in the West to communist interests can be seen in an exchange of correspondence on the highest level between Romanian and Soviet intelligence services. On 10 June 1971, Yuri Andropov, at that time Chairman of the KGB, and later Secretary General of the USSR, sent a letter⁸¹⁰ to his Romanian counterpart to inquire about the status of actions in the case of Richard.

Ion Stănescu the Chairman of the Securitatea, responded to Andropov's reporting about the discrediting actions already undertaken abroad against Richard.⁸¹¹ In the same letter, Stănescu asked for help, given the resources of the KGB, to unmask and neutralize the problem represented by the anti-communist public stance adopted by Richard. To respond to Comrade Andropov, General Stănescu annexed from the Securitate files materials that he thought would compromise Richard in the eyes of Westerners.⁸¹²

Still, Richard was determined to continue spreading the message of the Persecuted Church around the world, no matter the cost. He continued to write several books about his past experience in communist prisons, books against atheistic ideology, urging all the time the Western Christians to send help to their persecuted Christian brethren behind the Iron Curtain, behind the Bamboo Curtain or from the Arab World. Through books like *The Soviet Saints (1968)*, *In God's Underground (1968)*, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement (1969)*, *If That Were Christ Would You Give Him Your Blanket (1970)*, *Christ on The Jewish Road (1970)*, *If Prison Walls Could Speak (1972)* and other books and articles in newspapers, he made known the incredible world of

⁸⁰⁶ Telegram sent to Santiago de Chile to Comrad Răducu, see ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.33446, 17., Telegram reporting of Wurmbrand from Quito, South America and Africa see, ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.33446, 20,22.

⁸⁰⁷ Telegram from Brazil, Ibid., 24., Telegram from Montevideo, Uruguay, Ibid., 53.

⁸⁰⁸ Telegram from Ahmedabat (Gujarat) India, Ibid. 60., from New Delhi, Ibid., 62.

⁸⁰⁹ Telegram from Bern, Switzerland, Ibid, 24., Telegram from Goteborg, Sweden Ibid., 48., telegram from Germany (city with codename "Bazna" possible Berlin, Ibid., 69.

⁸¹⁰ Response to the letter of Andropov, ANCSSA, SIE Fond, Dossier Nr.7804/II, 289.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Materials about Richard being a Siguranța agent in the days of King Carol II, Ibid.

Christian martyrdom and heroism.⁸¹³ The response in the west was tremendous. Hundreds of thousands of people wrote letters of support⁸¹⁴ and gave financial help to the mission to help the persecuted Christians.

On the other side, Richard's message was also met with antagonism and scepticism. Aided by communist propaganda, tailored specially to dupe the Westerners and Western church officials, some in the West doubted that a persecuted Underground Christian church existed in the communist countries. High officials from the World Council of Churches and the Norwegian and American Lutheran Churches opposed the message of Richard.⁸¹⁵ Some doubted the veracity of his stories⁸¹⁶ and others, while believing his experiences, feared that his public endorsement would further antagonize communists and drive them to harsher persecution of Christians.⁸¹⁷ Accordingly, officials from the World Council of Churches, Lutheran Church officials from America and Germany wrote circular letters to churches in their countries urging church leaders to close the doors of their churches in front of Richard.⁸¹⁸

In spite of the controversies surrounding him, in spite of being called a "madman, demon-possessed, Nazi, Fascist, anti-Semite, Communist, Anarchist, Jesuit agent, illiterate, fake, racketeer, etc."⁸¹⁹ especially in the first years spent in America he opposed everything related to communism.⁸²⁰ He denounced through his writings, through books like *The Wurmbrand Letters* (1967) the compromises that some high church officials made with the communists. He did the same in public meetings. For example, on 14 September 1970, at the 12th Baptist World Congress from Tokyo he

⁸¹³ Richard Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1970), 25.

⁸¹⁴ Wurmbrand, 25.

⁸¹⁵ The Romanian Securitate planned and executed a large activity against Wurmbrand, part of this was feeding misleading information to high church officials from the World Lutheran Alliance, German Evangelical Alliance, German Baptist Union and World Council of Churches, see ANCSSA, Informational Fond, Dossier Nr. 146678, vol.9, 244-252.

⁸¹⁶ Wurmbrand, 29.

⁸¹⁷ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 118.

⁸¹⁸ Wurmbrand, 20., Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 118.

⁸¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 119.

⁸²⁰ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 78.

denounced publicly⁸²¹ the presence of Soviet religious delegates⁸²² at the Congress, who lied to the present delegates about the religious freedom⁸²³ existing in the Soviet Union.

Jesus to the Communist World became one of the fastest growing missions in the world. By 1980, on the anniversary of 15 years of existence, when Richard was 71, the mission had already expanded to fifty countries.⁸²⁴ The mission's income in the first year was \$50,000, and by 1980, it grew to \$3 million.⁸²⁵ This incredible growth was partly due to the involvement of the members of the Wurmbrand family in the mission. Richard, in his travels, was accompanied by his wife, Sabina and his son, Mihai. Mihai became the Mission Director, taking care of all the administrative work. He married Judith, an Israeli-Jewish Christian, and earned three degrees in theology, psychology, and law.⁸²⁶

Besides his family, the mission founded by Richard in America was also blessed by dedicated people around the world, who, inspired by the heroism of the Underground Church, dedicated their lives to help the persecuted Underground Church in the mission's worldwide branches. On the shorter list, people like the Rev. Stuart Harris (UK); Myrus Knutson and Casus Sturdy (USA); J. Mans (Holland); Hans Braun (Germany); H. Zürcher and Hedi Fluri (Switzerland); Pat Henegan (S. Africa); Laiso (Italy); Colette Grasu (France); Reg Werry (Australia); and many others made Richard's dream a reality.⁸²⁷

The end of the year 1989 brought the demise of communism in Romania. In 1990, Richard, at the advanced age of 81, with his wife at the age of 77, could finally visit again Romania, the country they had to leave so many years ago. The old couple was greeted by crowds of people at the Bucharest airport. Richard, while on his visit to Romania, met old friends who had been imprisoned with him, people like Nicolae

⁸²¹ The Securitate was informed about this incident caused by Wurmbrand in Tokyo, see ANCSSA, vol. 9, 253.

⁸²² General CIA Records, CIA Propaganda Perspectives, CIA-RDP79-01194A000300050001-8, 58, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79-01194A000300050001-8.pdf>, visited on 28.04.2019.

⁸²³ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.931-933.

⁸²⁴ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 63.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁷ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 139.

Moldovianu, Visky Ferenc the Hungarian Reformed pastor,⁸²⁸ and many others. He visited old places, prisons where he was imprisoned by communists and Olteni Street nr.45⁸²⁹ in Bucharest where his Jewish Congregation met before his imprisonment in 1948. The organization conducted by Richard started a branch in post-Communist Romania as well. They created a Christian printing press named Stephanus in Bucharest, to produce Bibles and other Christian books. They have also opened a Christian bookshop also named Stephanus, and a Christian video store.⁸³⁰

The Mission Christ to the Communist World was renamed in 1990,⁸³¹ The Voice of the Martyrs⁸³² and had its headquarters in the United States at Bartlesville, OK. Through this mission, Richard's dream from the communist prisons continued to become a reality. In spite of his many illnesses collected during the hard years of imprisonment, Richard and Sabina lived a long and active life in the service of the Persecuted Christian Church worldwide.

Almost until the end, when in his final years sickness and old age made it impossible to travel anymore, Richard and his wife, almost with inexhaustible energy, travelled around the world preaching and helping in the creation of a mission that expanded to approximately 40 countries. During his life, Richard wrote numerous books, which have been translated into more than 70 languages.

The methods used by the Voice of the Martyrs mission were many times considered unorthodox by other Christians, but Richard considered that one cannot be picky when he must fulfil such a vital mission. He considered that his methods after the example of Apostle Paul were biblical: "Paul writes that it was his purpose to save souls "by all means" (1 Corinthians 9:22). He who is choosy about the means of propagating the gospel is not biblical. While we respected Communist laws, we interpreted them in our own manner or broke them".⁸³³

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸³¹ Daniel Brânzei, *Amintiri Cu Sfinți*, Multimedia, vol. II (Arad, 2002), 62.

⁸³² Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.2410-2412.

⁸³³ Ibid., loc.2459-2462.

The mission expanded to Western, Communist, Former Communist, and, after the fading of communism, Muslim countries. They invested millions of dollars in printing Bibles and Christian books in over sixty languages⁸³⁴, smuggling them illegally into these countries, and providing relief to families of imprisoned Christians in Islamic nations, Communist nations and other countries where Christians were persecuted because of their faith.

Later his Voice of the Martyrs achieved world renown “as the pioneering agency in instigating a new movement for global religious freedom by a range of faith-based associations.”⁸³⁵ In the 1990s, Wurmbrand’s organization played a very important role in the adoption of the International Religious Freedom Act “which made the defence and furtherance of such freedom a statutory and key part of US foreign policy.”⁸³⁶

Richard withdrew from public life in 1995, at the age of 86 and spent the last part of his life in Torrance, California surrounded by the family of his son Mihai. His final years were spent in bed under medical care, being the victim of several strokes and because of illnesses that affected his feet, reminders of his time spent in prison.⁸³⁷ His wife Sabina died in Torrance, California, on 11 August 2000, at the venerable age of 87, and he followed her in death the next year on 17 February 2001,⁸³⁸ at almost 92 years old.

Richard left behind an international mission that still ministers today to persecuted Christians and persecuted Christian churches all around the world. Richard Wurmbrand’s message and the message of his mission was, and it still is, the same all over the world, “Hate the evil systems, but love your persecutors. Love their souls, and try to win them for Christ”.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Oracles of God.*, loc.739-742.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

⁸³⁶ Markku Ruotsila, *Fighting Fundamentalist: Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 196.

⁸³⁷ Brânzei, 63.

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

2.8. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the second chapter was to present how the life of Richard Wurmbrand unfolded in the political and religious context of his time. In his life there can be highlighted a few basic factors that gave him direction and purpose, defining him as an outstanding individual.

First, the poverty and personal loss experienced from his initial years, coupled with readings from Voltaire, drove him to doubt the existence of God. This spiritual scepticism, along with his rebellious nature, laid the groundwork for Richard's enrolment in the communist party in his teenage years. His claimed ancestry from the Magid (Preacher) of Mezritsh, the Rabbi Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezritsh (1704-1772), needs further research to be proved or invalidated. The same thing can be said about his initial eight years of schooling in Istanbul, did he start school very early, to finish eight years of schooling by the age of twelve, or were his memories inaccurate?

Secondly, his romantic perception of communists as fighters for lofty ideals, their decisiveness and resolve to fight to achieve these, made a zealot out of the young fifteen-year-old Richard. Communist hermeneutics gave meaning to his inner struggle for a better world without poverty and social inequality. Communist activism empowered him and gave him, in the next ten years, a direction transforming him from a victim into an agent of change. His commitment was wholehearted, he dedicated a hundred per cent of his energies to the cause. The fully committed activist mentality and the illegal conspirative techniques ingrained in him from his communist period would inform his *modus operandi* in the future. One can wonder if he used a particular book from the communist propaganda arsenal for his illegal conspirative techniques in his underground Christian activities.

Thirdly, the betrayal by his communist colleagues when he was twenty-five years old, with the resulting imprisonment and torture, shook him to the core, triggering in him, a crisis of identity. His forced cooperation with the enemy, the *Siguranța* secret police, and the damning information extracted from him by torture deepened his inner turmoil. The public exclusion from the Communist Party upon discovery of his collaboration with the enemy was the final nail in the coffin for his communist

period, setting him adrift. His sense of lack of identity and direction caused by the ideological break with communism was exacerbated by another existential event, his illness, the daunting medical verdict of tuberculosis. This led him on a profound search for meaning and spiritual direction, an unfamiliar realm for a self-proclaimed atheistic Jew.

Fourthly, probably the most important factor in his life was his conversion to Christianity. After he processed his inner conflicts between his Jewishness and the newfound Christian identity, he became again a man with a mission. From this moment on, his involvement in different areas of Christian ministry grew constantly despite the different antagonistic political regimes. There remains the question of the exact date of his baptism, Spring of 1937 or 1938, because his recollections are not very exact on this matter.

The fifth defining factor from Richard's life was the plethora of transforming experiences of the long years of Communist prisons. The years of solitary confinement coupled with the systematic inhuman treatment, manifested through near starvation and torture, deepened his Christian faith. These years also brought with them hard to comprehend mystical experiences, because, given the circumstances, it is almost impossible to draw the borderline between spirituality and mental illness.

The sixth factor, stemming from his prison experience, was his determination, once he was released, to be in the West, the voice of the persecuted Christians, to familiarize the world outside the communist Iron Curtain with the plight of persecuted Christians with the purpose of helping these. Richard dedicated his remaining years to this endeavour, founding a worldwide mission and helping thousands upon thousands of persecuted Christians. His firm anti-communist stance brought him to the attention of the American political regime who recognized the anti-communist propaganda value of his experience and initially popularized his story. This begs the question if Wurmbrand, while focused on his aid ministry, felt used as a pawn in counter-communist propaganda by American agencies.

3. A POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF MARXIST COMMUNISM

The aim of this chapter is to offer an answer to the relevant sub-question: Why is communism a theological problem from Wurmbrand's Christian perspective? To be able to answer this question, first, we have to discover what was Wurmbrand's understanding of his time. The first subchapter labours to acquaint the reader with Wurmbrand's philosophy of history because it is a major factor that influenced his theological stance toward communism. His thinking was especially moulded by his prison years, which left their profound mark on the way he understood history, himself, and his role as Christ's follower. Wurmbrand believed himself to be the possessor of the true understanding of the times. The horrible prison years and his subsequent emigration to the West in 1965 were experiences that prepared him for a special prophetic calling. Therefore, after his emigration and, especially after his arrival in 1966 to America, he believed that he was a man with a mission. His holy mission was to warn everybody, especially the West, that communism represented a serious threat to all the Western world.

The second subchapter explores the theological problems of communism. Wurmbrand investigated possible problems in the metaphysical nature of communism. He looked closely at the spiritual allegiances of the Communist elite believing that something dark was afoot. The problematic spiritual allegiances of the communist leaders influenced their thinking, leading them to articulate problematic communist doctrine. On top of this, Wurmbrand, as seen in section three, also examines the real-life results produced by communist leadership and communist doctrine.

3.1. A CONCEPT OF THE TIMES

Wurmbrand saw himself as infinitely small, "on the surface of the ocean of reality a minuscule drop".⁸⁴⁰ He is part of this reality and is irreversibly impacted by it, but he is not at the centre of it. At the centre of reality, there is God, who is, for him, the

⁸⁴⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2002). Who are Our Opponents, loc.342.

“only one reality”.⁸⁴¹ Wurmbrand adopted a clear conservative Judeo-Christian theocentric view of the existing universe and history.

God is the Creator and sustainer of everything, including mankind. God is involved in the created universe and its history. He reveals Himself as “love in action”⁸⁴² through his sinless son Jesus Christ, who was sent, by God, to care for disobedient humanity. Jesus resolved the sin problem by bearing on the cross the punishment due to sinful mankind. After the cross of Christ, through faith in him and in his redeeming sacrifice, the future of mankind is directed toward heaven.⁸⁴³ Espousing this Christian worldview as the context of his life, Wurmbrand later in his life, looking back to his troubled personal history describes himself as a “general guide”⁸⁴⁴ for humanity. In relationship to God, he viewed himself as minuscule, insignificant, but in relationship to his fellow humans, this self-effacement is replaced by a superior attitude, he sees himself as a man with a special vocation.

Looking at the writings of Wurmbrand, mostly written after his release from prison and emigration to the West, it is possible to distinguish two major phases in his understanding of his times. The first period extends from his emigration to the West in 1965 to 1989, the year that marked the end of the Cold War and the decline of communism in Eastern Europe. This period is marked by his conviction, bordering on obsession, that communism is the major threat to the free Western world. The second period is the one after 1989 when Wurmbrand saw that even if communism remained a threat in some areas of the world, the age of communism passed, followed by the age of terror and terrorists.⁸⁴⁵

Wurmbrand understood himself as a “general guide” with a prophetic vocation received directly from God, a modern-day Noah.⁸⁴⁶ Like in the age of the biblical Noah, people live in ignorance and spiritual apathy⁸⁴⁷ and do not perceive the

⁸⁴¹ Ibid.

⁸⁴² Ibid., loc.734.

⁸⁴³ Ibid., loc. 745.

⁸⁴⁴ Reflecting on his childhood and his work in life he adopts this description see in Richard Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2004). Loc.114.

⁸⁴⁵ Richard Wurmbrand, *Isus, prietenul teroriștilor* (București: Stephanus, 1996), 5.

⁸⁴⁶ Richard Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1970), 122.

⁸⁴⁷ Richard Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers* (Basingstoke: Marshalls, 1985), 74.

imminence of an impending catastrophe. Like his biblical predecessor, he is also mocked and ridiculed by modern day people. He might be seen as a “right-wing crank who sees sinners under every bed”,⁸⁴⁸ someone who does not mind his own business and is, without a doubt, out of his depth when he forecasts a cataclysmic event in his time.⁸⁴⁹

In spite of these allegations, Wurmbrand issued his warnings, that people in the 20th century are at the peak of spiritual indifference and apathy. The clock of history approached the spiritual midnight of humankind:

Looking at history we see that apathy has grown over the centuries. Seemingly, it is now reaching a peak as we approach the midnight which the Lord foretold, when a voice will be heard saying, “Behold the bridegroom comes, go ye out and meet him” (Mat. 25:6). At that moment even the virginal souls who have waited for him will be fast asleep. The few awake will be those who announce his coming.⁸⁵⁰

The extraordinary time brought about by the spiritual midnight is a time of estrangement from God and has a twofold biblical function. The same event impacts people differently, according to their spiritual status. First, it brings trouble to those who choose to live in indifference toward God, and second, it brings a time of great opportunity for those who obey God:

The earth turns on its axis. Midnight is the moment when a part of the earth is the farthest away from the sun. Spiritual midnight is the period of the greatest departure of men from God. Today our generation has experienced unmentionable events in a midnight of unparalleled darkness. But midnight is not received with the same feelings by the children of God as by the world. At midnight, the firstborn of the Egyptians died, but the chosen people obtained their freedom.⁸⁵¹

In order to bolster his understanding of the times, of the spiritual midnight, Wurmbrand draws support⁸⁵² from Oswald Spengler’s philosophy of history worked out in his classic *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*⁸⁵³ (*Decline of the West*). Spengler seemed prophetic when he conceived in his book in 1914, before the First World War,

⁸⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket*, 122.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁰ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 74.

⁸⁵¹ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, Kindle Edition (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2012).loc.2514-2517.

⁸⁵² Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1967), 82.

⁸⁵³ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1920).

and wrote it during the conflagration. Spengler argues extensively that the decline of the Western civilization is inevitable because, in the demise of all other great civilizations there is a pattern: "To birth belongs death, to youth age, to life generally its form and its allotted span".⁸⁵⁴ For Spengler western civilization with its prominent features, the dictatorship of money and democracy, reached its peak and is soon to be overthrown by another power:

The coming of Caesarism breaks the dictatorship of money and its political weapon democracy. (...) The sword is victorious over the money, the master-will subdues again the plunderer-will. If we call these money-powers "Capitalism," then we may designate as Socialism the will to call into life a mighty politico-economic order that transcends all class interests, a system of lofty thoughtfulness and duty-sense that keeps the whole in fine condition for the decisive battle of its history, and this battle is also the battle of money and law.⁸⁵⁵

Wurmbrand uses this idea of the decline of Western civilization for his own agenda. If, for Spengler, this imminent decline is political, "the moment when money is celebrating its last victories, and the Caesarism that is to succeed approaches with quiet, firm step"⁸⁵⁶ for Wurmbrand, this idea is a useful stepping stone. In his opinion, the decline heralded by Spengler is ultimately spiritual and moral. Like in the time of the biblical Noah, the spiritually corrupted civilization would be punished, but this time, the punishment for the Western civilization will assume the form of a political scourge, that of communism,⁸⁵⁷ which threatened to dominate and enslave the West.

Wurmbrand was convinced, especially in the period from 1965 to 1989, that, while the West was in slumber,⁸⁵⁸ totally unaware of the imminent danger that comes from the East, the writing was on the wall, like for the biblical Babylonian king Belshazzar.⁸⁵⁹ But the West willingly ignored the warning, while Westerners spent the time on useless discussions. Wurmbrand, after his release from prison and his ransom from the grip of Romanian communism, went to the West and settled down

⁸⁵⁴ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1927), 40.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 506.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 507.

⁸⁵⁷ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 123.

⁸⁵⁸ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 74.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

in the United States of America because he found a wide audience for his message there. This was possible because, starting in the 1950s, religion was seen by an overwhelming majority of Americans as a bulwark against godless communism and Wurmbrand's religious anti-communist message fit like a glove in this context.⁸⁶⁰ Wurmbrand was convinced that communism represented a real threat for all the free world, a threat for the present and the future⁸⁶¹ of his new home America. The founding of his international mission *Jesus to the Communist World*, which later became *Voice of the Martyrs*, reflects this concern for the free world. He felt that one aspect of his mission, and of the organization he founded, was to sound the distress signal, to "awaken those who had fallen asleep simply because it was night as well as those who were lulled to sleep by the Communists".⁸⁶² For Wurmbrand, it was clear that communism was on a worldwide offensive.⁸⁶³ He saw obvious signs of the communist threat in the demise of democracies in Eastern Europe after World War II, in the communists influence in labour organizations in France, Italy, Great Britain, the Arab countries, Latin America,⁸⁶⁴ and in the spread of communism as far as Cuba. The years following the 1959 communist revolution in Cuba were filled with hope for the communists in Moscow because they hoped that Latin American countries like Guatemala, Venezuela, Chile, and Brazil would follow Cuba's revolutionary example.⁸⁶⁵ Another warning for him was the strong presence and influence of communists in major western organizations like the organization of the United Nations. Many member countries of the United Nations, and representatives of the Third World were influencing the voting in favour of major communist powers.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶⁰ Noah Feldman, *Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem--and What We Should Do About It* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 321.

⁸⁶¹ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters* (Pomona, CA: Cross Publications, 1967), 161.

⁸⁶² Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 75.

⁸⁶³ Richard Wurmbrand, *Dacă zidurile ar putea vorbi* (București: Stephanus, 1995), 180.

⁸⁶⁴ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 123.

⁸⁶⁵ Vladislav Martinovich Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 182-183.

⁸⁶⁶ Richard Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2009).loc.2903.

The long tentacles of communism were reaching toward the Western free world and America. While communists in the East became disheartened because they saw the devastating effects of their ideology, communists in the West were dangerous because they still clung to their utopian illusions. The communists in the West spread their ideology with a missionary “tireless zeal, in the lounges of the upper classes, in the clubs of intellectuals, in colleges, in the slums and in the churches”.⁸⁶⁷ The writing was on the wall in blood⁸⁶⁸, the danger approaches, and this can be seen in America also through the violence and the political assassinations, Wurmbrand wrote in 1970:

We have more signs of approaching catastrophe than in Noah's time. John Kennedy has been killed by Moscow-trained Oswald, Robert Kennedy by Sirhan, who declared in his diary that Communism is the best system. There is hardly a day in the U.S.A. without Communist-inspired blasts, killing of policemen, riots, occupation of university buildings.⁸⁶⁹

After sounding the alarm against it, for Wurmbrand, it was important to understand that communism existed in the world where God makes the rules. Communism is not like a force of primaeval chaos outside of the reign of God. Even communism serves a purpose in the economy of God.⁸⁷⁰ Communism is a flagellum which God uses to punish⁸⁷¹ the self-centeredness and the spiritual decay of Western capitalist societies:

If Communism exists in God's world, it must surely be to fill a vacuum in God's economy. Capitalism makes a man an individualist. Emphasis on personal salvation and personal sanctification reflects man's conscience in the social conditions created by capitalism. The very instigation of the Socialist set-up made a profound difference to the thinking of a great many Christians.⁸⁷²

Wurmbrand, in one of his early books written in America, *The Soviet Saints* written in 1968, viewed communism as a long-lasting phenomenon. He predicted that the

⁸⁶⁷ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 81.

⁸⁶⁸ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 94.

⁸⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 123.

⁸⁷⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road* (Middlebury, IN: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1975), 199.

⁸⁷¹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 123.

⁸⁷² Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 199.

different forms of communism around the world would toughen after the Albanian⁸⁷³ and Chinese model instead of adopting a more moderate stance. This would mean more religious persecution, but moreover, the fulfilment of biblical direction of history and prophecy.⁸⁷⁴ The communists, spurred by their utopian thinking,⁸⁷⁵ have boundless aspirations, they are eager to subdue as much as possible of this world. Wurmbrand saw a pattern repeating itself in the strategy of the communists. First, they infiltrate the power structures of a state and the churches, and later, when they are strong enough, they take over the power, and then the religious persecution begins.⁸⁷⁶

In this all-encompassing communist plan, Wurmbrand saw the marks of biblical times of strife, like those prophesied by the prophet Habakkuk 2:5. Likewise, he saw the fulfilment of biblical signs of the apocalyptic end of history, and the mark of the Antichrist from the book of Revelation 13:7.⁸⁷⁷ The red flag of communism,⁸⁷⁸ for Wurmbrand, was also a sign with apocalyptic overtones. For him, communism was the red dragon from Revelation 12:3, whose intention was to devour the Christian church.⁸⁷⁹

The signs, in Wurmbrand's understanding, predicted times of strife and conflict for Christianity and the Western world. Nevertheless, what gave him hope was the prophetic foreknowledge that the communists' worldwide offensive was ultimately doomed to fail because the outcome was already known:

We had nothing to fear. In September 1970, I wrote to all our missions: The church of Christ is not endangered by Communism. Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. It is Communism that is endangered by the existence of the Church, because the final victory is ours. We have won for Christ the daughter of Stalin, the greatest mass-murderer of Christians; Mrs Kosygin, the wife of the Russian dictator; Pasternak Solzhenitsyn,

⁸⁷³ Albanian researcher Ardit Bido speaks about a total abolition of religion in Albania by the communist in 1967, see Ardit Bido, *The Albanian Orthodox Church: A Political History, 1878–1945* (London & New York: Routledge, 2021), 2.

⁸⁷⁴ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968), 188.

⁸⁷⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*.loc.1761-1762.

⁸⁷⁶ Richard Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church* (Christian Mission to the Communist World, 1982). <http://raygano.com/preparing-for-the-underground-church-by-pastor-richard-wurmbrand> (accessed on 14.11.2016)

⁸⁷⁷ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*. loc.1761-1762.

⁸⁷⁸ Richard Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2000).loc.2021.

⁸⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 135.

Siniavski, and other first-rank Soviet writers, formerly members of the Communist Party. We don't tremble before Communism. It should be in a panic because of us.⁸⁸⁰

According to Wurmbrand, when they have fulfilled their usefulness in the economy of God, the communists will receive their due. They will cause much suffering⁸⁸¹ to the world but in the end, God will vanquish them. History will end with the second coming of Jesus, who will put an end to all the problems:

In the end Jesus will return. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives in Israel. (...) The whole world will witness the return of Jesus (...) The blessed day will come when all authority will reside in the hands of Jesus Christ, after His return to the earth, and under His total rule our poor planet will be rid of its sins and of its sorrows.⁸⁸²

With the advent of the crucial events of 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and, gradually, of the Iron Curtain, Wurmbrand's thinking about his times entered into its second period.

The downfall of communism was a prodigious event in world history and international politics. The utopian dream that drove millions towards destruction just collapsed. New life and new forms of organization started to sprout on the ruins of the collapsed edifice.⁸⁸³ After 1989, in the early years of the second stage, Wurmbrand was still very circumspect. Even if the threat of the communist world domination passed, communism remained a threat in some areas of the world because it was not dead, it only "received a mortal wound".⁸⁸⁴ Communism was not totally defeated, but still he recognized that communism had lost crucial battles and fights for its survival in Eastern Europe.⁸⁸⁵

Later, as it became clearer and clearer, while the worldwide events unfolded in the years after 1989, that the golden age of communism had passed, he conceded that the age of the communist menace was a thing of the past. The Cold War, from an actual

⁸⁸⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*.loc. 2499-2504.

⁸⁸¹ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 189.

⁸⁸² Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc. 1762-1769.

⁸⁸³ Miklós Tomka, *Expanding Religion: Religious Revival in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 2.

⁸⁸⁴ Richard Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 141.

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

threat, entered the realm of history and took its due place with all past events in the history books, and humanity entered another phase, the age of terrorism.⁸⁸⁶

3.2. COMMUNISM: ANTI-THEISTIC POLITICAL RELIGION

In the years right after his release from prison and emigration to the West, in his first phase of political thinking, from 1965 to 1989, Wurmbrand sought to convince his readers that communism was not only a worldwide political and military threat but, communism also had a darker side. He believed that the quandary with communism lay in its metaphysical nature. Communism, in Wurmbrand's consideration, was of metaphysical evil origin, because, behind the curtains of communism, the master puppeteer, who pulled all the strings, was the devil, who, since the beginning, directed the rebellion of man against God.

Consequently, Wurmbrand toiled to awaken people in the West to the spiritual danger of communism. He sought with a passion to unmask the dark forces that lurked behind the Iron Curtain. He first argued that the problems of communism started with the spiritual background of its leaders. Secondly, these people, because of their dark spiritual loyalties, spread an ideology of hatred and rebellion towards God which was anti-theistic, and incompatible with human nature. Lastly, the dark nature of communism revealed itself in its results, in the actions of its cruel, diabolical minions who unleashed an unprecedented persecution of religion, and in the impotence of the communist economy.

3.2.1. *Communist Elite Under Evil Influence*

Wurmbrand mounted a full-fledged attack against communism in his *Marx and Satan*, aiming to deliver a devastating blow to its ideology through the close examination of the spirituality of some of its icons. This work grew from a brochure in 1976 through multiple revisions to the final form in 1990. Over the years, it

⁸⁸⁶ Wurmbrand, *Isus, Prietenul Teroriștilor*, 5.

underwent different title changes, from *Was Karl Marx a Satanist?* (1976) to *Marx: Prophet of Darkness* (1986), and finally it came to *Marx and Satan* (1986).

3.2.1.1. Karl Marx

Wurmbrand admits from the beginning of the book that he sails in uncharted waters in his endeavour to establish a link between Marxism and Satanism.⁸⁸⁷ Still, he invites his readers to consider the evidence presented in the book in favour of his argument. Wurmbrand's major antagonist in this book is Karl Marx (1818-1883), the founding father of Marxist ideology. He seeks to dispel the mythical aura of Marx, perceived by many as a fighter against the exploitation of men.⁸⁸⁸ Wurmbrand is aware that his arguments might be considered by some insufficient and farfetched,⁸⁸⁹ still he hopes that this line of attack will at least raise questions in the mind of his readers.

The argument in the case against Marx starts with his youth. Wurmbrand seeks to prove that Marx, despite his overall antireligious reputation, was not always animated by antireligious sentiments. On the contrary, as a young man, he was animated by strong Christian convictions. Wurmbrand refers to some of Marx's early writings at the end of his gymnasium years in Trier and his early years as a university student in Bonn and Berlin.

First, Wurmbrand mentions one of the examination papers with a clear religious character written by Marx in Trier in August 1835⁸⁹⁰, *The Union of Believers with Christ According to John 15:1-14, Showing its Basis and Essence, Its Absolute Necessity, and Its Effects*. Marx writes, "Through love of Christ we turn our hearts at the same time toward our brethren who are inwardly bound to us and for whom He gave Himself in sacrifice"⁸⁹¹ and,

⁸⁸⁷ Richard Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan* (Westchester IL: Crossway Books, 1990), vii.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁸⁹⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 639., Wurmbrand used the 1974 version, Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. *Werke*. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974).

⁸⁹¹ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 11.

Union with Christ could give an inner elevation, comfort in sorrow, calm trust, and a heart susceptible to human love, to everything noble and great, not for the sake of ambition and glory, but only for the sake of Christ.⁸⁹²

Secondly, Marx also writes in a text from the same period, in *Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession*:⁸⁹³

Religion itself teaches us that the Ideal toward which all strive sacrificed Himself for humanity, and who shall dare contradict such claims? If we have chosen the position in which we can accomplish the most for Him, then we can never be crushed by burdens, because they are only sacrifices made for the sake of all.⁸⁹⁴

These excerpts from the two examination papers written in August 1835, while Marx was finishing his studies at the gymnasium from Trier, seem to bolster the argument of Wurmbrand. On top of this, it is also mentioned the Certificate of Maturity⁸⁹⁵ received by Marx at the end of his years at the Trier Gymnasium, states that "His knowledge of the Christian faith and morals is fairly clear and well grounded. He knows also to some extent the history of the Christian church."⁸⁹⁶

Following Marx's graduation, his spiritual allegiance started to shift in a different direction. Due to some mysterious force at work in his life, the young man, in his early years as a university student, slowly goes down the slope of antireligious sentiments. Lines from his poem *Invocation of One in Despair*, quoted by Wurmbrand, reveal this intense spiritual struggle with God, bordering on psychological torment, "I wish to avenge myself against the One who rules above." and further:

So a god has snatched from me my all
In the curse and rack of Destiny.
All his worlds are gone beyond recall!
Nothing but revenge is left to me!

I shall build my throne high overhead,
Cold, tremendous shall its summit be.
For its bulwark-superstitious dread,
For its Marshal-blackest agony.⁸⁹⁷

⁸⁹² Ibid.

⁸⁹³ Marx and Engels, 1:3.

⁸⁹⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 11.

⁸⁹⁵ Marx and Engels, 1:644.

⁸⁹⁶ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 12.

⁸⁹⁷ Marx and Engels, 1:563-564.

In these lines and others comparable in tone, "Then I will be able to walk triumphantly, Like a god, through the ruins of their kingdom. Every word of mine is fire and action. My breast is equal to that of the Creator"⁸⁹⁸ Wurmbrand finds echoes of the Luciferian haughtiness found in Isaiah 14:13, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God".⁸⁹⁹

The rebellion against divinity fully materializes in *Oulanem*, an unfinished drama written by Marx around the end of his first semester in Berlin.⁹⁰⁰ According to Wurmbrand, the trouble with this writing starts with its title. The word *Oulanem* is a satanic inversion⁹⁰¹, a satanic anagram of the word Emanuel, the name used in the scriptures to describe the salvific aspect of the mission of Jesus Christ.⁹⁰² In contrast with Emanuel, *Oulanem* betrays Marx's ambitions to bring down humanity with him to the *abyssos*, the biblical hell, following the pattern from Revelation 20:3⁹⁰³:

Yet I have power within my youthful arms
To clench and crush you with tempestuous force
While for us both the abyss yawns in darkness,
You will sink down and I shall follow laughing,
Whispering in your ear, "Descend, come with me friend,"⁹⁰⁴

Additional verses from *Oulanem* reveal a hatred of humanity, a Luciferian desire for its eternal damnation,⁹⁰⁵ and destruction that has Faustian echoes:

Ruined, ruined. My time has clean run out.
The clock has stopped, the pygmy house has crumbled.
Soon I shall embrace eternity to my breast, and soon
I shall howl gigantic curses on mankind.⁹⁰⁶

Marx denies all, critiques everything, seeks to undermine the existing political systems, and calls himself "the most outstanding hater of the so-called positive".⁹⁰⁷

⁸⁹⁸ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 13.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁰⁰ David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (London&Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1980), 48.

⁹⁰¹ See further satanic inversions Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 25-26.

⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Marx also seems to believe in an afterlife, one understood as a time of torment similar to the biblical torments reserved to the devil and his demons:

Ha! Eternity! She is our eternal grief,
An indescribable and immeasurable Death,
Vile artificiality conceived to scorn us,
Ourselves being clockwork, blindly mechanical,
Made to be the fool-calendars of Time and Space,
Having no purpose save to happen, to be ruined,
So that there shall be something to ruin.⁹⁰⁸

Wurmbrand concludes that Marx, in the years of his troubled youth, renounced his Christian faith and became an initiate in a highly secretive Satanist church⁹⁰⁹, though this claim is only his personal inference, without solid evidence, its actual existence cannot be proved. From this point forward, the disillusioned young Marx renounces his poetic endeavours to take up the path of the revolutionary. Following in the footsteps of his dark master, he chooses the way of total rebellion against society and God. His doctoral dissertation entitled *Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* further proves this line of argumentation because he makes his own cry of Prometheus, "I hate the pack of gods"⁹¹⁰ adopting a clear anti-theist stance.⁹¹¹ He also made his own rebellious confession of philosophy, "against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity"⁹¹². It seems that Marx had embarked on the great mission to eliminate God and Christian worship of God from the minds of people.⁹¹³

To fully grasp Marx's dark conversion, one must try to understand what the ideas and people that influenced his thinking were. The first and foremost influence on Marx was the German philosopher of his time, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel had a major impact on the development of Marx's thought.⁹¹⁴ Wurmbrand

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 19.

⁹¹⁰ Marx and Engels, 1:30.

⁹¹¹ Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, *History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious: A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory and Practice and The Believer*, vol. 1 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), 13.

⁹¹² Ibid.

⁹¹³ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 30.

⁹¹⁴ For further reading on Hegel's influence on Marx see Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 1–29.

holds that by reading the work of Hegel, Marx's mind was poisoned with anti-Christian sentiments. Hegel glorified the culture of ancient Greece and considered it superior to Christian ideals.⁹¹⁵ The philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach drove Marx further away from Christianity because Feuerbach sought to liberate philosophy from Christian ontology by rebelling against the conceptual foundations of theology.⁹¹⁶

Wurmbrand also believed that Darwin was a major influence on Marx. In this, he is correct because Darwin's magnum opus, *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), was read by Marx in 1860,⁹¹⁷ and, according to Aveling, his son-in-law, Marx carefully studied all of Darwin's writings.⁹¹⁸ Wurmbrand writes that according to Marx, Darwin's argument in the natural sciences had given God "the death blow".⁹¹⁹ Marx actually did not use these exact words, writing in 1860 to his friends Engels, and later, in 1861, to Ferdinand Lasalle, to the German political activist, he stated that Darwin's book "in the field of natural history, provides the basis"⁹²⁰ for his theory of the "historical class struggle".⁹²¹

Also, for Marx, according to Wurmbrand, man is no longer the most important creation of the Creator God, and instead he praised the view from Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) and that man originates from the animal world.⁹²²

Wurmbrand's chronology is not correct, because Marx already in 1864, before the publication of *Das Kapital Vol.1* (1867), wrote to Lion Phillips, one of his financial supporters, that "Darwin demonstrated that we are all descendants of apes".⁹²³

Wurmbrand believed that under the influence of Darwinian anthropology, Marx renounced the Christian notion of man's divine origin and purpose. For Marx, mankind is reduced to his economic interests, and becomes the slave of its physical

⁹¹⁵ Wurmbrand., 95.

⁹¹⁶ Pospelovsky, 10.

⁹¹⁷ David McLellan, *Karl Marx: A Biography* (London: Papermac, 1995), 389.

⁹¹⁸ David Ryazanoff, *Karl Marx Man, Thinker and Revolutionist* (London: Martin Lawrence Limited, 1927), 174.

⁹¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 110.

⁹²⁰ Marx and Engels, 41:232.

⁹²¹ Ibid., 246., for further reading on the connection between Marx and Darwin see Shlomo Avineri, *Karl Marx: Philosophy and Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2019), 214.

⁹²² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 84.

⁹²³ Marx and Engels, 41:542.

needs, and the infrastructure and the superstructure of society aim to fulfil this single purpose.⁹²⁴

Moses Hess, a Jew like Marx, a Zionist pioneer, and the founder of the German Socialist Democrat Party, was also an important influence in the life of Marx,⁹²⁵ pushing him towards the dark side. Wurmbrand credits Hess with the merit of converting Marx to socialism. Hess, in his *Roter Katechismus*⁹²⁶ (Red Catechism), borrows the linguistic baggage of Christianity to advocate his anti-Christian religion, a twisted Luciferian religion, more down to earth than Christianity.⁹²⁷ Hess' religion is the socialist revolution, which people must pursue through class and racial struggle. He is against all established forms of traditional religion for him, "the Jewish as well as the Christian religion is dead".⁹²⁸ These, according to Hess, are obsolete because the socialist society will be the true fulfilment of human aspirations.⁹²⁹ In his book, *The Holy History of Mankind*,⁹³⁰ Hess points the way toward freedom. For people, to attain real freedom, they must be liberated from all kinds of bondage, including religious bondage.⁹³¹

Additionally, Hess' influence over Marx can also be seen in *The Communist Manifesto*. Hess influenced Marx to adopt the notion of the internationalism of the socialist revolution.⁹³² Marx writes in the *Manifesto* that the communist fight for the entire proletariat, indifferent of nationality.⁹³³

The conversion of Marx to Satanism had a profoundly negative impact on his private life and the lives of those close to him, according to Wurmbrand. He finds serious flaws in Marx's moral behaviour. For most of his adult life, Marx and his

⁹²⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 83.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹²⁶ Moses Hess, "Roter Katechismus," in *Politische Katechismen: Volney, Kleist, Hess*, ed. Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1966), 71–73.

⁹²⁷ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 91–92.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁹³⁰ Moses Hess, *Moses Hess: The Holy History of Mankind and Other Writings*, ed. Shlomo Avineri (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁹³¹ Moses Hess, "Socialism and Communism," in *Moses Hess: The Holy History of Mankind and Other Writings*, ed. Shlomo Avineri (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 100.

⁹³² Wurmbrand, 89.

⁹³³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970), 47., for Marx the revolutionist see also Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

family were plagued by financial problems since he dodged his duty of providing financial security.⁹³⁴ As a result, he depended on money from Engels or he “lusted after inheritances”⁹³⁵ from relatives he despised. He went as far as accepting pay as an informer against his comrades in the time he spent in London.⁹³⁶

Marx’s more intimate family affairs came under Wurmbrand’s scrutiny as well. Marx had a problematic relationship with his father.⁹³⁷ He also had problems in his relationship with his mother and with his wife.⁹³⁸ His family experienced poverty and misery.⁹³⁹ He loved his wife Jenny von Westphalen, but later in life had an affair with his maidservant Helen Demuth and, by her, he had an illegitimate child.⁹⁴⁰ Wurmbrand, in addition, notes the shadow of death that hung over the Marx family. Three children of the Marx family died of malnutrition, his daughter Laura and her husband, after the deaths of their three children, committed suicide, and Marx’s beloved daughter Eleanor too took her own life.⁹⁴¹

Wurmbrand’s conclusion, after scrutinizing the writings of Marx, is that Marx converted in his youth to Satanism and was a member of a secretive satanic church. This conclusion is unacceptable because there is no solid evidence found by Marx scholars or biographers to point to this, there is no evidence of him engaging in black Masses or any kind of Satanic rituals, and there is no evidence of the existence of a secret satanic church in Marx’s time.

Still, Wurmbrand is not completely alone in recognizing that Marx had a dark side. Some Marx biographers mentioned this in their accounts, and Wurmbrand was influenced by them and found support for his theories in these writings. Wurmbrand had access to Franz Mehring’s *Karl Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens*,⁹⁴² and he learned from this biography that Heinrich, the father of Marx, in his letters written to the

⁹³⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 32.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹³⁷ Werner Blumenberg, *Karl Marx: An Illustrated History* (London & New York: Verso, 2000), 24–25.

⁹³⁸ Wurmbrand, 34.

⁹³⁹ Heinz Frederick Peters, *Red Jenny: A Life with Karl Marx* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986), 95–137.

⁹⁴⁰ Wurmbrand, 32.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, also about the life and death of Eleanor see Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: A Life*, Illustrated edition (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2015), xvi.

⁹⁴² Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens* (Leipzig: Leipziger Buchdruckerei Aktiengesellschaft, 1923).

young Marx, was concerned that his son had something in him, the father called “the demon”.⁹⁴³

Wurmbrand was mostly influenced by Robert Payne’s *Marx*⁹⁴⁴ and Payne’s findings in exploring Marx’s poetry.⁹⁴⁵ Payne’s inference from Marx’s darker poems was that Marx “had the Devil’s view of the world, and the Devil’s malignity. Sometimes he seemed to know that he was accomplishing works of evil”.⁹⁴⁶ Wurmbrand, in *Marx and Satan*, followed Payne’s pointers and explored for himself Marx’s poetry, and he arrived to more radical conclusions.

American author David Aikman, in his *The Role of Atheism in the Marxist Tradition*, believed that the clues to Marx’s passionate and violent atheism “cannot be found only in an intellectual tradition”.⁹⁴⁷ This line of argumentation, followed by Payne, is still being explored in the present. American historian Paul Kengor, in *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration*,⁹⁴⁸ revisited the idea of Marx’s dark side. Following the steps of Mehring and mostly Payne, he explores Marx’s writings, searching for damning clues. He did not accept Wurmbrand’s conclusion of Marx being a secret Satanist, but he agrees with the fact that Marx had a diabolical side, the devastating effects of which could be seen in the lives of his family and in the deaths of millions of people who perished as the result of the implementation of Marxist-communist ideology.

3.2.1.2. Friedrich Engels and Other Communist Leaders

Wurmbrand also investigates aspects of the life of Friedrich Engels, the other founding father of Marxism. Throughout Engels’ life, he kept in touch with leaders of Social Democratic and Communist parties in Europe and advised them to spread and

⁹⁴³ Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 2, 4, 12.

⁹⁴⁴ Robert Payne, *Marx* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1968).

⁹⁴⁵ Karl Marx, *The Unknown Karl Marx; Documents Concerning Karl Marx, Edited with an Introduction by Robert Payne*, ed. Robert Payne (New York: New York University Press, 1972).

⁹⁴⁶ Payne, *Marx*, 317.

⁹⁴⁷ David Aikman, *The Role of Atheism in the Marxist Tradition* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1979), 7, 183-4.

⁹⁴⁸ Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration* (Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2020).

promote atheism as the only viable alternative to Christian theology, which he considered deceptive and outdated.⁹⁴⁹

He detects in Engels' youth a similar trajectory as the youth of Marx. Like Marx, Engels was brought up in a Christian family and wrote, at first, poems of Christian inspiration.⁹⁵⁰ Engels also experienced a conversion under the influence of Bruno Bauer, a German historian, philosopher, and adept of liberal theology, whom he encountered around 1841.⁹⁵¹ If Bauer planted the seeds of doubt in the mind of Engels pertaining to Christianity, it was Moses Hess who drove him further down the line, converting him to communism. This is seen, by Wurmbrand, as a dark satanic conversion because the goal of Hess, like that of the biblical Lucifer, was to "produce ravages".⁹⁵² Engels was aware of the danger of rebellion against God, as seen in his writing, *Schelling und die Offenbarung*,⁹⁵³ but nonetheless, in the end, surrenders to it and becomes friend for life with Marx, sharing Marx's fight to abolish religion and morals.⁹⁵⁴

After dealing with the founding fathers of Marxist ideology, Wurmbrand, in *Marx and Satan* and other writings, mentions briefly other prominent Marxist communist figures, like Vladimir Ilych Lenin, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, Mao Tse-Tung, and Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, in whose lives he finds traces of demonic influence.

Lenin, because of negative experiences with religion in his early life, developed an aversion towards religion. His primary source of philosophical education was the writings of Marx and Engels which denounced the Christian faith as outdated.⁹⁵⁵ His dislike of religion was additionally cultivated by the study of Baron Holbach's anti-theistic philosophy. The Franco-German philosopher, who considered God his personal enemy, became Lenin's favourite thinker. Lenin later on laboured to

⁹⁴⁹ Pospelovsky, 18.

⁹⁵⁰ Kengor, 36.

⁹⁵¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels Werke*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1961), 638.

⁹⁵² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 38.

⁹⁵³ Marx and Engels, *Karl Marx*, 173.

⁹⁵⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 41.

⁹⁵⁵ Pospelovsky, 18.

propagate to the masses Holbach's atheistic writings.⁹⁵⁶ Under Holbach's influence, Lenin, the founder of modern-day international communism, became a God hater.⁹⁵⁷ In 1912, he wrote to Russian Marxist author, Maxim Gorki, that the idea of God is very dangerous, "God is the personal enemy of the Communist society"⁹⁵⁸, because it cannot cohabit with a Marxist worldview.

After he came to power, Lenin acted very fast to curtail the church's dominance in Russian society.⁹⁵⁹ For Lenin, the notions of religion and God must be eradicated, because of their dangerous potential. Religion "is a kind of spiritual vodka, in which the slaves of capital drown their human features and their reverence for a somehow dignified human life".⁹⁶⁰ Accordingly, after the Bolshevik revolution succeeded, Lenin and the Leadership of the Communist party decided to purge every layer of Russian society of all the old privileges that the Christian Church previously enjoyed under the Russian Empire and devoted his energies to fashion an atheistic state.⁹⁶¹

Stalin continued, in the vein of Lenin's intolerance toward ideological opposition and religious intolerance, and took the carnages committed by the communist state to a whole new level.⁹⁶² The sinister influence in the life of Joseph Stalin can be traced back to his troubled Georgian family and his problematic youth.⁹⁶³ In the judgment of Wurmbrand, his heredity, being an illegitimate child, his education, as a failed seminary student at Tbilisi seminary and his development as illegal communist party member made him vulnerable to Satanic influence.⁹⁶⁴ Stalin rejected God since belief in Him and the social order ordained by this God, as he understood these concepts from his seminarian days, was in stark opposition to his communist aspirations. He

⁹⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.1877-1879.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁸ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.325.

⁹⁵⁹ Stephen Strehle, *The Dark Side of Church/State Separation: The French Revolution, Nazi Germany, and International Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 795.

⁹⁶⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, Kindle Edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2007), loc.325.

⁹⁶¹ Tobias Köllner, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Russia: Beyond the Binary of Power and Authority* (London & New York: Routledge, 2021), 36.

⁹⁶² Metreveli, 40.

⁹⁶³ Stalin used pseudonyms like "Demonoshvili" and "Besoshvili", to sign his illegal communist works, pseudonyms that suggest satanic influence, see in Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 56.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., 55., for more on Stalin's early years see Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

declared that “If God exists, He must have ordained slavery, feudalism and capitalism. He must want humanity to suffer, as the monks were always telling me. Then there would be no hope for the toiling masses to free themselves from their oppressors”.⁹⁶⁵ Stalin built a political system where “constant fear, paranoid suspicion, and massive insecurity became a norm, and where large-scale human killings became a daily routine.”⁹⁶⁶

The demonic influence in the life of Joseph Stalin was, according to Wurmbrand, observed by those who were close to him, like Lazar Kaganovitch, Stalin’s brother-in-law and his highly trusted deputy.⁹⁶⁷ Kaganovitch, in a diary unpublished by 1986, when Wurmbrand published *Marx and Satan*, wrote about this.⁹⁶⁸ Kaganovich allegedly says that, although Stalin looked like any ordinary person, he lacked the emotions of a normal person, and “for some reasons I was convinced that he would live forever...He was not human at all...”.⁹⁶⁹ The same “diary” mentions Stalin and Kaganovich’s common hatred of religion, “Many times Stalin spoke of religion as our most vicious enemy. He hates religion for many reasons, and I share his feelings. Religion is a cunning and dangerous enemy”.⁹⁷⁰ In addition, Kaganovich hints to Stalin’s Luciferian aspirations to replace God, “They all admired him and worshipped him...It may sound strange, but he occupied a position previously reserved only for God”.⁹⁷¹ Stalin was characterized by yet another Luciferian trait, the perverse pleasure in destroying his enemies, he called this method, perfected by him, the theory of sweet revenge.⁹⁷² Lastly, it is worth mentioning that two more people close to him spoke of him as being exposed to demonic influence. Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, in her *20 Letters to a Friend*, recalls that Lavrentiy

⁹⁶⁵ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc.1736-1737.

⁹⁶⁶ Metreveli, 40.

⁹⁶⁷ R. W. Davies et al., eds., *The Stalin-Kaganovitch Correspondence, 1931–36*, trans. Steven Shabad (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁹⁶⁸ It is not clear which “unpublished” biography Wurmbrand refers to and how did Wurmbrand have access to it if it was not published. It is possible that he refers to the controversial Stuart Kahan, *The Wolf of the Kremlin: The First Biography of L.M. Kaganovich, the Soviet Union’s Architect of Fear*, 1st edition (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1987).

⁹⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 52.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷² Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism* (New York: Alliance, 1939), 485.

Beria, the Soviet minister of interior affairs and one of Stalin's close collaborators, had a diabolic influence on Stalin and his family.⁹⁷³ A similar testimony remains from Milovan Djilas, an important Yugoslav communist figure closely acquainted with Stalin. Djilas wrote that Stalin was inspired by a demonic energy and power and, in the midst of confusion created by him, conducted his reign of fear over the Communist movement.⁹⁷⁴

Nikolai Bukharin, a close colleague of Lenin and Stalin, secretary general of the Comintern and great communist theoretician, at the age of twelve, read the book of Revelation from the Bible. Since then, he aspired to become the Antichrist.⁹⁷⁵ When he understood from the Book of Revelation that the Antichrist was depicted as the son of the great apocalyptic harlot, he tried to convince his mother to confess to having been a prostitute.⁹⁷⁶

In China, under Mao Zedong (1949-1976), all religions suffered terrible persecution.⁹⁷⁷ That is why Mao, Chairman of the Communist Party of China and founding father of the People's Republic of China, also came under Wurmbrand's scrutiny. In his case, the demonic influences were manifested through his hatred of religion from an early age. Wurmbrand mentions Mao's disdain for the traditional religion of his people, "From the age of eight I hated Confucius. In our village there was a Confucianist temple. With all my heart, I wished only one thing: to destroy it to its very foundations".⁹⁷⁸ The Chinese Communist Party, under Mao, equipped with the Marxist atheistic ideology, sought to extirpate religion from society, peaking in an overall prohibition "on religious activity during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)."⁹⁷⁹

Yuri Andropov, the fourth General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, also manifested eerie features. People who met him closely described him as a

⁹⁷³ Svetlana Allilueva, *20 Letters to a Friend* (London: Hutchinson, 1967), 64.

⁹⁷⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 54.

⁹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁷ Jason Kindopp, "Policy Dilemmas in China's Church-State Relations: An Introduction," in *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*, ed. Jason Kindopp and Carol Lee Hamrin (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 5.

⁹⁷⁸ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 57.

⁹⁷⁹ Kindopp, 14.

man of no emotions, a person who functions like a computer in his speech and gesture, but all in all cold and detached.⁹⁸⁰ Andropov, a former KGB chief, after he became the leader of the Soviet state, renewed with vigour the communist anti-religious policies, which eased a little under the leadership of his predecessor Leonid Brejnev⁹⁸¹.

Wurmbrand acknowledged from the start that he treads on unmarked territory in his endeavour to prove that Marxist-Communist leaders were Satan worshippers.⁹⁸² He conceded that the arguments he provided are not indisputable, and that they might be considered, by some, lacking and unbelievable.⁹⁸³ Still, after diligently seeking hints and proof, in the often troubled lives of these prominent communist characters, he invites his readers to consider the evidence presented in *Marx and Satan* and other books in favour of his argument. He hoped that after presenting his findings, they would raise questions in the minds of his readers.

The arguments presented by Wurmbrand are not definite, and his conclusion is unacceptable. There is no unquestionable evidence found by biographers or historians to prove that the communist leaders engaged in Satanic rituals, and there is no evidence of the existence of a secret satanic church located in the vicinity that they belonged to.

However, Wurmbrand is not totally off target. He was not the only one who recognized that communist leaders had a dark side. Some biographers and historians mentioned this in their writings. As mentioned earlier, Marx's biographers, Mehring, Payne, and Kengor, approached this subject in their works. About Engels, Kengor mentions according to one of Engels's friends, by the end of his life, Engels was "absolutely without God".⁹⁸⁴

Soviet politician and historian Alexander Yakovlev, in *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia*, writes that Lenin's actions against religion and the Church "are

⁹⁸⁰ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 55.

⁹⁸¹ James A. Kapaló and Kinga Povedák, "Introduction: Reframing the Religious Underground," in *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. James A. Kapaló and Kinga Povedák (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 15.

⁹⁸² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, vii.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 108, 113.

⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, loc.245.

astonishing in their diabolical ferocity and immorality”.⁹⁸⁵ Stalin, driven by the need to get rid of all possible adversaries, conducted great purges which resulted in blood baths, mass exterminations in the midst of his former collaborators.⁹⁸⁶ All these biographies and histories suggest that something evil was behind the communist leaders.

3.2.2. *The “Pitfalls” of Communist Ideology*

Wurmbrand, from the early years of his American emigration, toiled to raise the awareness of people to the unknown dangerous spiritual side of communism. In the United States, he saw that communism was gaining ground in the years of massive anti-Vietnam war protests. So, starting with one of his first books, *The Wurmbrand Letters* (1967), Wurmbrand proclaimed that behind atheistic communism, there are satanic spiritual forces.⁹⁸⁷ Satan, according to Wurmbrand, rebelled against God⁹⁸⁸ and, following his expulsion from heaven, he inspires people to rebel against God. Communist icons like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and others followed the way of rebellion against God and religion, seeking to take over total control of human societies. To ignore this reality means to condemn people to ignorance, defeat, and final destruction.⁹⁸⁹

Wurmbrand reiterates this conviction in the following years. In his hagiography for modern times, the *Soviet Saints* (1968), the communist state is denounced as the devil.⁹⁹⁰ Communism appears as the apocalyptic red dragon⁹⁹¹ in the first sermon collection, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement* (1969). In his apologetic rebuttal of communist atheistic propaganda, *The Answer to the Atheist’s Handbook* (1975), communism is the “great Antichrist predicted in the Scriptures”.⁹⁹² Furthermore, the communists are denounced as sons of darkness⁹⁹³ in *Where Christ Still Suffers* (1982).

⁹⁸⁵ Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 155.

⁹⁸⁶ Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Breakdown* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 80-84.

⁹⁸⁷ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 18.

⁹⁸⁸ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 11.

⁹⁸⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 18.

⁹⁹⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 187.

⁹⁹¹ Richard Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), 180.

⁹⁹² Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*. Loc. 1754-1756.

⁹⁹³ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 28.

The red colour of the communist flag is also seen as a choice that fulfils apocalyptic prophecies⁹⁹⁴ about the red dragon in *100 Prison Meditations*, a second book of meditations conceived while incarcerated.

This trend continues in *The Total Blessing* (1983), *Proofs of God's Existence* (1988), and *The Sweetest Song* (1988) with a slight variation, communism is not only generally labelled evil, but Wurmbrand names several communist thinkers, political leaders, and high officials who he believes were directly the instruments of the devil in perpetrating his rebellious works.⁹⁹⁵ The idea of evil influence over communism⁹⁹⁶ appears also in his transitional *From Suffering to Triumph* (1991), and a little later, in 1993, in the first edition of *The Overcomers*.

3.2.2.1 Militant Anti-Theism

The problems with communist ideology originate from its anti-religious, anti-Christian stance, which, in essence, is not only atheism but a strong militant anti-theism. From the start, an important goal of communism was to eradicate God and religion.⁹⁹⁷

Communists are more than mere atheists; they can be suspected of alternative reasons because they spent too much energy on denying the existence of God.⁹⁹⁸ Communism is stubbornly and forthrightly hostile to the idea of faith in the Supernatural.⁹⁹⁹ Wurmbrand was convinced that communist ideology has satanic roots,¹⁰⁰⁰ and the tremendous force of communism in modern history was due to the extraordinary devilish forces that direct the actions of communists,¹⁰⁰¹ and were embodied in atheistic communism.¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁴ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*. Loc.2020-2021.

⁹⁹⁵ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Total Blessing* (London: Triangle, 1995), 75., Richard Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*. Loc.1744-1745., Richard Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book, 1988), 43.

⁹⁹⁶ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 139–41., Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*.loc.2564-2571.

⁹⁹⁷ Miklos Tomka, *Church, State, And Society in Eastern Europe*, 2005th ed. (Washington, D.C: Council for Research in Values & Philosophy, 2005), 31.

⁹⁹⁸ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.357.

⁹⁹⁹ Pospelovsky, 8.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 19.

¹⁰⁰¹ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*. loc.2564

¹⁰⁰² Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 18.

The origins of atheistic Marxist-communism can be traced back to the fall of man in Genesis. By disobeying God’s command and following the serpent’s suggestion, man became a rebel like Satan, alienated from God. One of the forms through which this alienation manifests itself is hatred toward the Creator. Since that time, hatred of God existed, always in dormant form in human history through the ages, but historical societies managed to contain it in various ways.¹⁰⁰³ With the arrival of communism, all of the restraining ties were shattered, allowing the unrestrained manifestation of hatred, “Marxist hatred of God is the most powerful expression of the human heart alienated from the Creator”.¹⁰⁰⁴ This is why communists’, open and unremorseful, enmity toward religions is one of the core teachings of historical and dialectical materialism.¹⁰⁰⁵

Looking to modern times, communist ideology was also tributary to the anti-supernatural, rationalistic, and anti-religious sentiment that pervaded the Enlightenment and, subsequently, the French Revolution.¹⁰⁰⁶ Wurmbrand’s idea has merit because Neo-Calvinistic thinkers, starting with the mid-1800s, already made the connection between the fall of Adam and Eve, their disobedience toward the Creator, and the 1789 French revolution’s rebellion against God and religion.¹⁰⁰⁷ Wurmbrand emphasizes that prominent figures, like Baron Holbach, the eighteenth-century atheistic philosopher, saw God as his personal enemy.¹⁰⁰⁸ The same can be said of leading French revolutionary Anachasis Clootz, a self-declared personal enemy of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁰⁹

From the nineteenth century, Wurmbrand refers to some atheists who, although continuing in the trend set by the French Revolution, nevertheless argue elegantly against the Christian faith. One of these is Ludwig Feuerbach, the German philosopher who influenced Marx and Engels and who rejected faith in God and

¹⁰⁰³ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 155.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Pospelovsky, 8.

¹⁰⁰⁶ James Eglington and George Harinck, “Introduction: Neo-Calvinism and Roman Catholicism,” in *Neo-Calvinism and Roman Catholicism* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2023), 1.

¹⁰⁰⁷ George Harinck, “Herman Bavinck and the Neo-Calvinist Concept of the French Revolution,” in *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution* (London & New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 13, 20.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*. loc.353.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 86.

rebelled against Christian ontology, believing it to be the product of the human mind.¹⁰¹⁰ However, he still wanted to keep religion as part of “the childhood period of humankind”.¹⁰¹¹ Furthermore, Honoré de Balzac and Friedrich Nietzsche are in the category of respectful atheists. The atheistic professor, the chief character of Balzac’s *La Messe de l’Athée*¹⁰¹² (The Atheist’s Mass), respects the religious beliefs of a deceased Catholic. Nietzsche declared that God was dead, but this declaration filled him with holy awe; he deeply felt the loss, and through the raving words of his madman in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*¹⁰¹³ (The Gay Science), he mourns the death of God.¹⁰¹⁴

On the other hand, there are atheists who irreverently attack Christianity, faith in God and religion. Marx and Lenin fall into this category for Wurmbrand. Marx’s statements are sometimes paradoxical. On one side, Wurmbrand is convinced that Marx believed in the existence of God and still wanted God’s demise, “He believed that God does exist and wanted to see this Absolute Spirit decompose”.¹⁰¹⁵ On the other hand, Marx is engaged in the fight for the obliteration of religion, making fun of religion with Bauer, his friend.¹⁰¹⁶ Marx wanted to replace God, with man as a supreme being.¹⁰¹⁷ He saw conventional Christian morality as a hindrance.¹⁰¹⁸ Under the influence of Bruno Bauer¹⁰¹⁹ he understood that religion was an illusion that hinders humanity in reaching its goals:

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of man is a requisite for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their conditions is a call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, the criticism of this vale of tears of which religion is the halo.¹⁰²⁰

¹⁰¹⁰ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc.855., see also Pospelovsky, 10.

¹⁰¹¹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*.loc.774.

¹⁰¹² Honoré Balzac, *La Messe de l’Athée* (Paris: Manucius, 2013).

¹⁰¹³ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Berliner Ausgabe, 2013).

¹⁰¹⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*, loc.782.

¹⁰¹⁵ Marx had a Hegelian idea about God, see Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 77.

¹⁰¹⁶ Rolf Hosfeld, *Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 12.

¹⁰¹⁷ Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy & Myth in Karl Marx* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 22.

¹⁰¹⁸ Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx*, 2nd Edition (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 143.

¹⁰¹⁹ Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 21.

¹⁰²⁰ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 10., see also Takahisa Ōishi, *The Unknown Marx: Reconstructing a Unified Perspective* (London & Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2001), 22.

Lenin is in perfect harmony with this kind of thinking. For him, “God is the personal enemy of Communist society”¹⁰²¹ and, the slightest idea of God is very dangerous to the communist world. The Marxist communist, according to Lenin, must be an enemy of religion and must not stop at only a theoretical struggle against religion but this must be transposed in a concrete fight in the context on the class struggle.¹⁰²² According to him, “The non-spatial and non-temporal beings which were invented by the clergy are the products of a diseased mind”.¹⁰²³ Lenin was convinced that all forms of organized religion must be eradicated because they are an impediment for communism, “All actual religions and churches, all religious organizations, are considered by Marxism as organs of the bourgeois reactionaries, serving the defence of exploitation and the doping of the working class”.¹⁰²⁴ That is why Wurmbrand thinks that there is no doubt in Lenin’s mind that all old forms of religion must be erased to make way for a new order.¹⁰²⁵ In the end, all prior forms of religion only deceive people, “Religion is a kind of spiritual vodka, in which the slaves of capital drown their human features and their reverence for a somehow dignified human life”.¹⁰²⁶ Lenin’s writings and directives, implemented by the Russian Bolsheviks, led to a policy of hostility toward the Russian Orthodox Church and other churches and religions.¹⁰²⁷ As a result, the agents of the Soviet State were aggressively engaged in anti-religious campaigns and were promoting scientific atheism as an alternative to religion.¹⁰²⁸

Wurmbrand concedes that the attacks of atheists on religion in general can also arise from the historical problems of religions. Atheism can be the result of religious

¹⁰²¹ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*.loc.325.

¹⁰²² Pospelovsky, p.3

¹⁰²³ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 142.

¹⁰²⁴ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*.loc.492-493.

¹⁰²⁵ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*.loc.2335.

¹⁰²⁶ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*.loc.327-329.

¹⁰²⁷ Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia After Communism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 44.

¹⁰²⁸ Pia Koivunen, “The 1957 Moscow Youth Festival: Propagating a New, Peaceful Image of the Soviet Union,” in *Soviet State and Society Under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilic and Jeremy Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 117.

superstition and religious hypocrisy of the past ages.¹⁰²⁹ During the ages, horrible acts were perpetrated in the name of God:

Terrible things have been done in the name of God, and great stupidities have been preached or written as His revelation. "God" is truly a polluted human word. (...) In His name religious wars, often the most bitter and intense, have been fought. In His name inquisitions were carried out. Nazi soldiers had "God with us" inscribed on their belts.¹⁰³⁰

Therefore, Wurmbrand manifests a kind of sympathy toward atheists because he sees that atheism can be the result of spiritual turmoil. This perspective was also explored by Alec Ryrie in his *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt*.¹⁰³¹ According to Ryrie, the waning of Christian faith and the blooming of atheism historically happened not because of the influence of philosophers and celebrated thinkers, but it was an emotional response of people from every layer of society. Anger and anxiety were the driving forces toward atheism: anger at immoral priests and anxiety in turbulent times drove people to religious doubt.

Atheists, according to Wurmbrand, might be people who were frustrated in their religious searches¹⁰³² by all the misfortunes of religion in history or were personally disappointed by a representative of religion¹⁰³³ and decided, in the end, to reject it all. But to totally reject faith in God on this account is an error because, in the end, all atheists do is reject a distorted view of God. The tragedy is that many atheists cannot grasp the God who is beyond all the human failures and distortions of religion.

3.2.2.2. A New (Political) Religion

The rise of communism was, using the words of historian Archie Brown, "the most important political phenomenon of the first half of the twentieth century. For Communism turned out to be a much stronger, and longer lasting, movement – and political religion – than fascism."¹⁰³⁴ The often-overlooked irony of atheistic

¹⁰²⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*.loc.352-353.

¹⁰³⁰ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*.loc.190-193.

¹⁰³¹ Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹⁰³² Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*.loc.357.

¹⁰³³ Richard Wurmbrand, *Avraam Tatăl Tutoror Credincioșilor* (București: Stephanus, 1994), 123.

¹⁰³⁴ Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 11.

communist ideology is that while it preaches liberation from all religious ideas, this ideology itself becomes a religion, an anti-theistic political religion.

Marxist Communism dismissed completely the traditional sources of European identity.¹⁰³⁵ The communist regime used Marxism as a universalist explanation of existence and as a system of moral and social order.¹⁰³⁶ Wurmbrand believed that communist atheism, at its core, is not a fight against a false idea, but “a fight against God to snatch believers from Him”.¹⁰³⁷ Communist endeavoured to replace faith in God with faith in communist ideology. The communists are the perpetrators of a secular messianism, fighting “to replace the transcendent God with a social collective.”¹⁰³⁸ Wurmbrand finds proof of this in the great anti-God fighter Nietzsche’s acknowledgement of the fact that the assumption upon which atheism rests is also a matter of faith, “Even we..., godless ones and anti-metaphysicians, still take our fire, too, from a flame, which a faith, thousands of years old, has kindled: that Christian faith, which was also the faith of Plato, that God is truth, that truth is divine”.¹⁰³⁹

Furthermore, communism is a new religion that has many of the accoutrements of a traditional religion. Based on Marxist ideology, the communists developed their own “institutions, dignitaries, hierarchy, public creeds and rites”.¹⁰⁴⁰

Communism has its own Holy Book, Marx’s *Das Kapital*,¹⁰⁴¹ which, in Engels’s words, from the book’s foreword to the 1886 English edition, was popularly labelled “the Bible of the working class”.¹⁰⁴² This new religion, new church, has its own supreme authority in Marx, according to the mocking words of his political opponent Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian anarchist, whom Wurmbrand refers to when calling Marx “the Pope of Communism”.¹⁰⁴³ In terms of the authority of its teachings,

¹⁰³⁵ Romocea, 95.

¹⁰³⁶ Tomka, 9.

¹⁰³⁷ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 77.

¹⁰³⁸ Lee Trepanier, *Political Symbols in Russian History: Church, State, and the Quest for Order and Justice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 301.

¹⁰³⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*.loc.314-315.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Tomka, 9.

¹⁰⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital - Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, ed. Otto Rühle (Berlin: SAV, 2011).

¹⁰⁴² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 81.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid. Wurmbrand refers to Mikhail Bakunin, *Works, vol. III* (Berlin, 1924), 206.

communism considers itself infallible and all who fail to acknowledge and accept the Communist creed face the danger of excommunication.¹⁰⁴⁴ Communism has its own martyrs and sacraments:

Those who die in the service of Marxism are feasted as "martyrs." Marxism also has its sacraments: the solemn receptions in the toddlers' organization called "the Children of October," the oaths given when received as "Pioneers," after which come the higher grades of initiation in the Komsomol and the Party Confession is replaced with public self-criticism before the assembly of Party members.¹⁰⁴⁵

Thus, it is undeniable, for Wurmbrand, that Marxist-communism is a new religion,¹⁰⁴⁶ a new church, because it has many attributes of a traditional religion. And behind all this veneer of atheism, the hidden and much guarded truth is that Marxist-communism has its own god and that god, Wurmbrand labours to prove, is none other than Satan.¹⁰⁴⁷

One thing that some of the prominent leaders of communism, people like Marx, Engels, Stalin, Mikoyan, and others, have in common is a mutual Christian religious education.¹⁰⁴⁸ That's why it is understandable that the new communist "religion" is attractive for the masses due to the fact that all that is charming and winning in this ideology is borrowed from Christianity.¹⁰⁴⁹ Wurmbrand is thoroughly convinced of this shameless misappropriation of basic Christian concepts. For example, ideal communism is very similar to the Christian holiness ideal: "Holiness is the same thing as ideal Communism. Holiness means to have nothing of your own, no material goods, no sin, no righteousness of your own, not even repentance of your own. Holiness is perfect communion or sharing with Jesus and the saints".¹⁰⁵⁰ The same can be said about other basic Christian concepts like love, holiness, mutual support, interest in social problems,¹⁰⁵¹ and necessity of labour:

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Moses Hess calls the Socialist revolution his religion, see Ibid.,87.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*.loc.833.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 201.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *Alone With God: God and Suffering: New Sermons from Solitary Confinement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 106.

¹⁰⁵¹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 200.

The essential idea of every socialist constitution— “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”—is copied textually from the Bible (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The idea of communism was taken from the Bible, in which we are told: The multitude of those who believed [in Jesus] were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common (...) The first disciples of Jesus lived under communism, but a communism based on love and free will. Nobody was pressured, nor was anything expropriated. Love prompted everyone to share with his brother. In spite of dissimilarities, today’s communism was also of biblical origin.¹⁰⁵²

The communist ideal of having things in common reminds people of the wonderful communion that existed between the first Christians. It is also appealing to people who were, or are, disillusioned by the fierce individualism of Western capitalist societies and by the many religious schisms of Christianity.¹⁰⁵³ Moses Hess, founder of the German Social Democrat Party, a man with great influence over Marx and Engels, borrowed similar religious language to present his ideology in a palatable way to believers.¹⁰⁵⁴ In the second edition of his *Red Catechism for the German People*, he talks in amiable terms about Christianity, but in his opinion, the fulfilment of Christian ideals will be in the socialist society.¹⁰⁵⁵

Communism is a new political religion that distorts and corrupts what was originally good and beautiful. All this religious façade fits very well with the deception of communist propaganda. Communists use deceptive language to seduce people they use “beautiful ... words of freedom, of democracy, of religion”.¹⁰⁵⁶ Communist propaganda is based on lies and deceit and, in Wurmbrand’s opinion, this unveils the paternity of communists, their father is Satan, the arch-liar¹⁰⁵⁷, the father of lies.¹⁰⁵⁸ Wurmbrand unmasks such examples of the art of distortion¹⁰⁵⁹ used by communists. For example, one important piece of communist propaganda was *The Atheist’s Handbook* which Wurmbrand refutes in his *The Answer to the Atheist’s*

¹⁰⁵² Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*.loc.837-844.

¹⁰⁵³ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 111.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 87.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 19.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Wurmbrand, *Alone With God*, 14.

Handbook. In this piece of communist propaganda, the authors systematically misquote different authors:

The Atheist's Handbook cares nothing about truth or trust. My opponents quoted Immanuel Kant as having written that religion is the understanding by man of moral duty. Following are the words of this philosopher, quoted directly: "Religion is morals in reference to God as legislator. It is the recognition of our duties looked upon as divine commandments." My opponents say that Ludwig Feuerbach defined religion as the connection between men. This again is false. In his book *The Essence of Christianity*, he says, "Religion is the dream of the human mind." Even the definitions given by atheist authors are falsified. Salomon Reinach is quoted as having taught that religion is a system of contradictions. We find the correct text in his book *Orpheus*: "Religion is the sum of superstitious beliefs which hinder the legitimate working of man's faculties."¹⁰⁶⁰

Once one is ensnared by communist propaganda, they will discover that communists are totalitarian.¹⁰⁶¹ Marxist communists cannot accept any other faith.¹⁰⁶² Beneath the tolerant veneer that they struggle to project to the West,¹⁰⁶³ communists are intolerant, and their propaganda is forceful, a fact people from communist realms readily acknowledge:

The communists are impolite. They enter by violence into our hearts and minds. They oblige us from morning to late in the night to listen to them. They do it through their schools, radio, newspapers, posters, movie pictures, atheistic meetings and everywhere you turn. You have to listen continuously to their godless propaganda, whether you like it or dislike it.¹⁰⁶⁴

Instead of love and acceptance, communism is, in reality, spreading hatred and violence. In achieving their purpose of world domination, communists appeal to base human passions; they use hate, envy, and violence. Communist revolutions worldwide claimed millions of victims.¹⁰⁶⁵ Wurmbrand concludes that communism is a religion of hatred¹⁰⁶⁶, "They hate not only capitalists, Christians, and Jews, but also each other."¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*.loc.409-421.

¹⁰⁶¹ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 208.

¹⁰⁶² Tomka, 9.

¹⁰⁶³ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 188.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 28.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 107.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 23, 119.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 24.

3.2.2.3. Limited Materialistic Perspective

Communism is a “religion” that adheres to materialistic philosophy.¹⁰⁶⁸ This is, from the beginning, a handicap from Wurmbrand’s point of view. Communist top figures, like Lenin and Mao, took pride in themselves in having a broad multi-angled view of reality, recognizing the limited perspective of a one-sided view.¹⁰⁶⁹ But in the end, the materialistic understanding of reality forces communists to adopt a very limited perspective. This narrow perspective led, in communist countries like China, to extreme measures against religion and, finally, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), led to a total prohibition of religious activities.¹⁰⁷⁰

Feuerbach, as well, suffered from this ailment. He himself, a major influence on Marx and Engels’ thought, states that God does not exist and He cannot exist.¹⁰⁷¹ Communism, because of its materialistic, atheistic creed, is doomed to a very narrow understanding of reality, “they do not know about the Godhead and the eternal Spirit of love and truth who rules this world”.¹⁰⁷² Drawing a mock parallel, Wurmbrand likens the atheistic perspective to a frog’s view of the sky from the bottom of a well, “the sky atheists see from their particular pit contains no God...But the sky, even in the natural world, is much greater than the small portion we see”.¹⁰⁷³

Confronted with the problem of the existence of God, the atheist’s answer, according to their materialistic philosophy, is that a reasonable man can believe only in what he can perceive with his eyes.¹⁰⁷⁴ Wurmbrand confronts this self-imposed blindness of the atheists with the claim that people, even atheists, based on the testimony of other people believe in many things that they have not seen. Consequently, there are testimonies of old about encounters with God, “the prophets of old say they saw God. Jesus said He came from God. Many Christian saints have

¹⁰⁶⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*, loc.144.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc.107.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Kindopp, 14.

¹⁰⁷¹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*,loc.142.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid., loc.147.

¹⁰⁷³ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence.*, loc.108-110.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid., loc.177.

had visions of God, too".¹⁰⁷⁵ Therefore, Christians have plausible reasons to reject atheism and to believe in the existence of God.

Communists are confident that they can understand reality based on their senses and reason. But the conundrum is that they lack the proper senses to perceive and understand the existence of God. Like blind men who lack sight, that is how atheists lack the spiritual sense that the believers have.¹⁰⁷⁶ A second handicap for atheists is the limited scope of human reason. Historically speaking, reason failed humanity time and again: "Reason justified slavery, absolute monarchy, superstition. It made us cheer dictatorships and justify world wars, which were mass slaughters of innocent beings".¹⁰⁷⁷ Reason is not free of petty human prejudice: "Reason, in order to produce right results, would have to be unsullied by low sentiments and animated by noble desires".¹⁰⁷⁸ A third handicap of atheism is that the very limited human reason cannot arrive to a notion of universal objective truth. God does not fit into the rational categories of mankind; He does not act according to human reason, so it is somewhat understandable why atheists are ignorant concerning His existence.¹⁰⁷⁹ Wurmbrand agrees with the notion from Kabala of a non-existent God¹⁰⁸⁰, in the sense that God is unlike people imagine Him to be. God is not matter but Spirit, and His power is a spiritual power. He is different than people would think about Him¹⁰⁸¹. According to Wurmbrand, if atheists want to comprehend objective truth, they must dispose of their egos because, in the quest for truth, egos only hinder.¹⁰⁸² Unfortunately, this is not the case, so the atheist quest for objective truth fails. Ultimately, communist truth is limited, "conditioned by social class. The economic conditions in which a man lives determine his convictions"¹⁰⁸³ so it cannot have the pretence of universal validity.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid., loc.183-184.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid., loc.672.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.299-300.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ibid., loc.302.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.729.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.1253.

¹⁰⁸¹ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.293-300.

¹⁰⁸² Ibid., loc.683.

¹⁰⁸³ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.280-286.

Marxist philosophy assumes with pride the self-proclaimed title of being the most fundamental and scientific critique of religion in its endeavour to destroy people's religious beliefs.¹⁰⁸⁴ That is why communist atheism does not stop at denying the existence of God. They use the same materialistic worldview in their critique of the Bible, "they deny the most important events of Bible narrative and relegate the principal biblical personalities to the realm of myth".¹⁰⁸⁵ Major characters of the Old Testament and events surrounding them, for example, Adam and Eve and the original sin that led to the expelling of the first couple from the Garden of Eden, belong to the realm of mythology for the atheists. Wurmbrand answers that a myth is not necessarily something "unreal, but is rather, highest reality expressed in images and symbols arising from, and appealing to, the depths of the human soul".¹⁰⁸⁶ Adam and Eve and the biblical narratives that surround them are history and myth in the same time.¹⁰⁸⁷ The paradigmatic nature of the Genesis story does not render impossible the existence of the historical figures of Adam and Eve. Another similar Old Testament story classified as a myth by atheists is the story of Noah and the flood. Wurmbrand's answer to this challenge is to enumerate the Sumerian, Babylonian (Gilgamesh epic), Chinese, Greek, British, and Mexican stories of the flood.¹⁰⁸⁸ At the base of these legends is the very historical reality of the universal flood and the thought ingrained in human conscience that generalized sin will bring catastrophe for humanity.¹⁰⁸⁹ Atheists use the same reasoning to undermine the historicity of Abraham and his descendants.

If the Bible is not a reliable source of information, only a religious text full of ancient myths, and if God, Jesus Christ,¹⁰⁹⁰ and the spiritual realm do not exist, then, for the communists, the origin of man must be explained, according to the adopted materialistic worldview. Instead of being created by God, communist atheists believe

¹⁰⁸⁴ Pospelovsky, 8.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.869

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ibid., loc.876.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Ibid., loc.877.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid., loc.898.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid., loc.905.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 23.

that life on earth is the result of random processes of matter.¹⁰⁹¹ To understand the origin of man, communists make use of the theories of Charles Darwin. Man is no longer the making of a Creator God, instead Darwin, in his writings *On the Origin of the Species*(1859)¹⁰⁹² and *The Descent of Man* (1871),¹⁰⁹³ writes that man originates from the animal world,¹⁰⁹⁴ particularly from the family of apes.¹⁰⁹⁵ The Darwinian anthropology adopted by communists reduces man to his economic interests, mankind becomes the slave of its physical needs, the infrastructure and the superstructure of society aims to fulfil this single purpose.¹⁰⁹⁶ Communists assert that man is only material, “For Marxists, man is only matter. They do not believe in the existence of soul or spirit”.¹⁰⁹⁷ Given all this when man comes to the end of his life he becomes once again part of the mineral world.¹⁰⁹⁸

Wurmbrand refuses to accept this limited perspective of materialistic anthropology, despite the communist boastful claim that it is a thoroughly scientific viewpoint.¹⁰⁹⁹ For him, life and man are much more than the communists acknowledge:

Atheists don't know what life is. The Russian academician Oparin says, “Life is one of the forms of movement of matter.” What should a young man do with such a definition? He asks his atheist father, “How should I believe in life? How can I best use my life?” But his father cannot possibly give him an answer, because he has really asked how one of the forms of movement of matter with its intrinsic, unalterable laws should behave. How much more powerful is the Christian's answer: “Life is a person, Jesus Christ, whose friendship you can accept and whose example you can follow. Life is an eternal boon. Its earthly span is to be used unsparingly for others, and its eternal aftermath in Paradise—to which earth is the anteroom—for one's enjoyment of his Creator and His glory.”¹¹⁰⁰

Darwinism, according to Wurmbrand, does not offer a satisfactory answer to the question of the existence of life on earth and the origin of man.¹¹⁰¹ Man is much more

¹⁰⁹¹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.194.

¹⁰⁹² Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (San Diego, CA: Printers Row, 2022).

¹⁰⁹³ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2004).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 84.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc.1226.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 83.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 51.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 23.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Pospelovsky, 8.

¹¹⁰⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.1848-1854.

¹¹⁰¹ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.757.

then only matter, flesh. The human body is only the transitory abode of the human soul,¹¹⁰² which is the spiritual part of man. The human body is subjected to mortality, but the human soul, which is different from the body and many times in conflict with it, is immortal.¹¹⁰³ The divine revelation, through the Holy Scriptures, reveals to humanity that the soul survives the death of the body therefore the soul has infinite value.¹¹⁰⁴

Wurmbrand believed that the so called “scientific” arguments of communism, used by these figures to discredit the biblical worldview, are, in the end, not worthy of being called scientific. Communist ideologues aim to exchange the religious belief of the people in communist lands with a cult of science.¹¹⁰⁵ However, these arguments are not the result of genuine scientific research but only pseudoscience. In Wurmbrand’s opinion, there is no contradiction, no conflict between true science and the Bible, only between some scientists and the biblical perspective. Illustrious scientist, like Einstein and Max Planck and others, identified no conflict between the Bible and science:

...there must be something wrong with the discovery by my opponents of the terrible conflict between science and religion. Most scientists know nothing about the conflict. (...) they will have to admit that Einstein knew at least a little bit more science than they. (...)Einstein speaks about a higher intelligence which reveals itself through nature. (...) the great physicist Max Planck says in his scientific autobiography. We quote his words: Religion and natural science are fighting a joint battle in an incessant, never relaxing crusade against skepticism and against dogmatism, against disbelief and against superstition, and the rallying cry in this crusade has always been and always will be “Unto God.” The authors of *The Atheist’s Handbook* are men of science. Then let them give a scientific explanation of the fact that such great scientists knew nothing about a conflict between science and religion!”¹¹⁰⁶

So called contradictions between some scientists and the biblical perspective on the existence of God, life, and man occur because “there are as many theories as there are academicians in the greatest scientific issues”.¹¹⁰⁷ Instead of contradicting each other,

¹¹⁰² Wurmbrand, *In God’s Underground*, loc.633.

¹¹⁰³ Richard Wurmbrand, *Oglinda Sufletului Omenesc* (București: Stephanus, 1994), 9.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁵ Zubok, 180.

¹¹⁰⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*, loc.2047-2056.

¹¹⁰⁷ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc.973.

Wurmbrands thinks that science and religion are interlinked. The proper approach is to accept a union between religion and science¹¹⁰⁸ because it was proven time and again that science is limited. There are examples of biblical facts first contradicted by science, and as science evolved, proven to be true:

The fact is that as science advances, it discovers what was said thousands of years ago in the Bible. To give just one example: It was predicted by the Evangelist John in Revelation 21 that a city, called the New Jerusalem, about 2,500 km high and wide and deep, would come to Earth out of heaven. For 2 millenniums science has denied such a possibility. Now we launch skylabs from our tiny planet and seriously talk about space—"cities." The book written by an uncultured fisherman 2,000 years ago was science because it was religious.¹¹⁰⁹

Wurmbrand's verdict to the so called "severe contradictions" between religion and science advocated by communist atheists is that all this is only part of communist doctrine and propaganda. Scientists in communist countries cannot pursue genuine science and cannot grasp the truth because they lack the sine qua non-element of real science, which is free and fair discussion.¹¹¹⁰ Scientists from communist countries are coerced to draw atheistic conclusions, arriving at "religious conclusions"¹¹¹¹ would risk imprisonment. Atheists are quick to dismiss the Bible and the Christian faith on pseudoscientific reasons, however, when it comes to accepting the examination of their theories from believers, they refuse criticism.¹¹¹² Wurmbrand is certain that communist criticism of Christian worldview is only "propaganda of unbelief". Atheists question a lot of things, but when it comes to their position, they do not have strong arguments to support their worldview.¹¹¹³ Sadly, they do not accept the miracles from the Bible but accept, without questioning, communist lies propagated by the Communist party.¹¹¹⁴ This is why, for Wurmbrand, atheistic argumentation presented in a scientific disguise in atheistic books is poisonous but, in the end, "atheistic books are only books about atheism"¹¹¹⁵ nothing more.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid., loc.1013.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid., loc.1014-1018.

¹¹¹⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook.*, loc.2139-2141.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid., loc.2142.

¹¹¹² Ibid., loc.142.

¹¹¹³ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.1782.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid., loc.1466-1470.

¹¹¹⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.2333-2334.

3.2.2.4. Incompatibility with Human Nature

Communist dialectical and historical materialistic atheism presents itself as a modern liberating alternative to old religious dogmatism.¹¹¹⁶ Yet Wurmbrand believes that living after the precepts of atheism creates significant problems because atheism is deeply incompatible with human nature, “Communism has no divine side. It is not even human. It is anti-human”.¹¹¹⁷ Contrary to atheist belief, mankind was conscious from ancient times that they were the creation of divinity. This is reflected in some of the oldest writings of mankind, in the Maneva-Dharma-Sostra, in the Gilgamesh epic, in the Vedas, in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, in the books of Moses and in others, “They are unanimous in saying that we were created by a heavenly being, who disclosed to prophets of old the essential truths that different religions have in common”.¹¹¹⁸

All people have in common “the inner voice”,¹¹¹⁹ the voice of the conscience that speaks internally to everyone. People’s consciences make them aware of the existence of divinity. The existence of conscience, in the way humans are structured, is, for Wurmbrand, another argument proving the existence of God. The same conscience troubles all people, atheists and believers alike, when they commit wrongs.¹¹²⁰ Christianity and religion, in general, is mockingly called by atheists an “opium of the people”,¹¹²¹ a kind of “spiritual gin”¹¹²² because it gives a way to alleviate the pain provoked by their conscience.

Atheists, instead of embracing faith in God, choose to follow a *via negationis*, denying the existence of God, to cope with their troubled conscience. Thus, Wurmbrand turns Marx and Lenin’s mocking remarks on their head, using them against atheism. For him, atheism is an opiate used to “stifle the reproaches of conscience”.¹¹²³ Atheism and the revolutionary actions used to proliferate it are

¹¹¹⁶ Pospelovsky, 21.

¹¹¹⁷ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 117.

¹¹¹⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook.*, loc.483-485.

¹¹¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc .918.

¹¹²⁰ Brown, 607.

¹¹²¹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*, loc.455., see also reference in Karl Marx, *Marx on Religion*, ed. John Raines (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 171.

¹¹²² Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist’s Handbook*, loc.455.

¹¹²³ Ibid.

painkillers, an opiate for rebellious hearts.¹¹²⁴ Communists intoxicate the world with this drug to dull people's senses and win them for their ideology because, deep down, their intuition tells them that the claims of the Bible and Christianity are true.¹¹²⁵ The communist dialectical and historical method is at the core of the Marxist-Leninist worldview.¹¹²⁶ According to Wurmbrand, this is just another example that communist atheists fight restlessly against God because they fear his existence:

Marxist atheists practice dialectic thinking. The average mind can think only logically, in the best of cases: "A is A," which means "A is not B. A is either A or non-A. A third possibility is excluded." Dialectics says the contrary: "All things are interpenetrations of contradictions." To live means to die. To be an atheist means to be so concerned with God that you have to deny His very existence in order to have peace of mind.¹¹²⁷

Communists try to show that communism is a viable alternative for the world that communism also has a human face. Wurmbrand totally disagrees with this claim for him, "communism with a human face as proclaimed by the Czech Communist Dubcek is either fantasy or clever propaganda".¹¹²⁸ The truth is that, through the spread of atheist, Marxism, and historical dialectical materialism, communists have devastated the reality¹¹²⁹ of people under their dominance. Marxism eliminated any intervention of the supernatural and viewed people as "natural products of the interplay of material forces"¹¹³⁰ in an objective, self-sufficient universe.

Wurmbrand believed in the incompatibility of communist doctrine and human internal emotional structure. The hearts of communists often revolt when faced with communist doctrine and the role allotted to them.¹¹³¹ The reality of human sacrifice in the service of an ideal does not make any sense if man is only a compound of minerals and chemicals. In addition, the brutality required by communist oppression wreaks havoc in the interior of communists. Many communists forced to commit

¹¹²⁴ Ibid., loc.451.

¹¹²⁵ Ibid., loc.750.

¹¹²⁶ Pospelovsky, 20.

¹¹²⁷ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc. 534-539.

¹¹²⁸ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 57.

¹¹²⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.725.

¹¹³⁰ Pospelovsky, 21-22.

¹¹³¹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 99.

brutal acts of torture in the service of the cause find that their nature sooner or later rebels against such inhuman acts.¹¹³²

The suppression of spirituality and the denial of human nature¹¹³³ cause deep problems within indoctrinated people because it does not provide an adequate answer to fundamental human problems and questions:

Critical analysis is impotent before interior anguish. Atheistic theories do not help a dying man or his bereaved family. Your own doctrines are of no value to you when you pass through the anguish of doubt and ask yourself if you have not committed a terrible offense. You may not think about it today, but there will come a day when you will have to think, the day of your death.¹¹³⁴

Wurmbrand's inference is that communism is shallow and superficial. Communists, even in the higher echelons, live unhappy lives.¹¹³⁵ Many who believed with sincerity in the beginning in the providential role of the Communist party, when faced with the harsh reality of the terror and party purges, have lost faith in the ideals of communism.¹¹³⁶

They long for something that atheist communism cannot offer, a deeper life to satisfy the yearning of their spirit.¹¹³⁷ Communist atheism fails to equip its adherents with the means to cope with ultimate existential problems, "Karl Jaspers calls 'limit-situations,' when the soul is in an ecstasy over seeing beauty or is urgently seeking answers in a moment of great danger, such as passing into an unknown world. There are no atheists at that moment".¹¹³⁸ Because of internal anguish caused by troubled consciences and the lack of answers to fundamental issues of human existence like death, sadly many communists seek relief in alcohol or suicide.¹¹³⁹

¹¹³² Ibid.

¹¹³³ Wurmbrand talks about people wanting to have personal possessions, in Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 91.

¹¹³⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Answer to The Atheist's Handbook*, loc.2312-2315.

¹¹³⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 100-101.

¹¹³⁶ Brown, 110.

¹¹³⁷ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 99.

¹¹³⁸ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.893-895.

¹¹³⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 99-100.

3.2.3. *The “Bitter Fruit” of Communist Reign*

Wurmbrand was certain that the evils of communism start with the spiritual background of its founding fathers and prominent leaders. These people, because of their dark spiritual loyalties, spread an anti-theistic ideology, which is also incompatible with human nature. All of this dark nature of communism is revealed in its practical results. Communist ideology, put in practice in real life and embodied in countries under communist rule, produces bitter fruit. At first, cunningly envelops subjected societies in a web of lies and deceit with the sole purpose of acquiring absolute power. Secondly, after the seizing of power, everyone who resists communist dominance is subjected to persecution and some to devilish re-education and torture. Finally, the Communist takeover produces negative economic results.

3.2.3.1 **The Reign of Lies and Deceit**

After the Second World War, the Soviet Union expanded communist rule over all of Eastern Europe. This great dominance was achieved by deceit. Free elections were promised in the countries ceded to them by Roosevelt and Churchill at the Yalta Conference, but Stalin never kept his word.¹¹⁴⁰ Communists have a long history of strategically using the tools of lies and deceit, aiming to subvert the world with their poisonous doctrine.¹¹⁴¹ They follow an elaborate strategy when they want to take over a country. In some countries lacking enough power, they start with empty promises to attract people. In a steady rhythm, they infiltrate the power structures, the police, and the army with their own people.

Another important target for the communists is the organized Church in a country. The aim of communists is to destroy the different Christian denominations because the Church was perceived as an adverse, reactionary organization of vast influence over the populace of a country. So, in the early stages of their plan, they do

¹¹⁴⁰ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 140.

¹¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

not follow a straight confrontational path¹¹⁴² but pursue the usual path of lies and deceit. For a short period of time, while they infiltrate the structures of the official Church, communists allow religious liberty¹¹⁴³ and even show signs of respecting religion.¹¹⁴⁴ After this period, as seen in Russia after the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, and later in the Soviet Union, all religions were under attack.¹¹⁴⁵ Religious education was forbidden, faith-based organizations did not have elementary property rights, religious assembly, and gathering in either public or private space was banned and property owned by religious organizations was confiscated.¹¹⁴⁶

The communist strategy also involved playing different denominations against each other and with exploit the weaknesses of different church leaders:

In Russia, the Communists gave immediately great liberty to the Protestants in order to destroy the Orthodox. When they had destroyed the Orthodox, the turn came for the Protestants. The initial situation does not last long. During that time they infiltrate the churches, putting their men in leadership. They find out the weaknesses of pastors. Some might be ambitious men; some might be entrapped with the love of money. Another might have a hidden sin somewhere, wherewith he may be blackmailed. They explain that they would make it known and thus put their men in leadership.¹¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, in society, they employ the powerful tool of communist propaganda to educate and politically enlighten the masses, to replace the religious element from the hearts and minds of people with the Marxist element.¹¹⁴⁸ Communist propaganda is forceful and intrusive. In countries under the Iron Curtain, it employed a diverse range of approaches to people's hearts and minds the education in schools, the means of mass communication, the radio, newspapers, posters on the streets, movies, and all kind of atheistic meetings.¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴² Wurmbrand presents in detail a document redacted by the Chinese Communist Party from Peking in 1959 outlining a plan for their Latin American section about how to deal with the Catholic church in Cuba in Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 163-167.

¹¹⁴³ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹¹⁴⁴ Wurmbrand talks about witnessing communists in Romania kissing holy images and crossing themselves like orthodox Christians in Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 124.

¹¹⁴⁵ Dimitry V. Pospelovsky, "The Survival of the Russian Orthodox Church in Her Millennial Century: Faith as Martyria in an Atheistic State," in *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Geoffrey A. Hosking (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 271.

¹¹⁴⁶ Metreveli, 39.

¹¹⁴⁷ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹¹⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 164.

¹¹⁴⁹ Wurmbrand tells the story of conversion of a Red Army soldier and contrasts the way Christ gently seeks admittance to a man's heart and the way communist propaganda forcefully tries to change people's minds in Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 28.

Communists furthermore sought to involve the Church and religious people in the People's government with the intention to reduce the Church's otherworldly character, to additionally subject the Church to the influence of centralized government and weaken the standing of the Church.¹¹⁵⁰

When the society, religion, and churches are brought under the control of the communist government, the strategy of lies and deceit continues to be used in the external policy. The communists work hard to project the image of freedom of speech, fair treatment of all, and religious freedom.¹¹⁵¹ They allow people from Western countries to visit churches where clerics, controlled by them, conduct religious services. When representatives of Western churches visited The Soviet Union, the warm welcome of the clergy and the big congregations impressed them.¹¹⁵² They, many times, had no idea of the communist discrimination and persecution against religious communities and individuals.¹¹⁵³ Foreigners often don't understand eastern European languages and are persuaded by the rites of the performed liturgy to think that religious freedom exists. But many times, Western visitors do not understand the words spoken by these clerics, who often use religious language to spread communist propaganda in the church.¹¹⁵⁴ Likewise, church high officials from communist countries, the delegates of Eastern churches, subservient to communists, attended religious conferences in the West and praised the liberties of people under communism following the instructions of their communist masters.¹¹⁵⁵

All this carefully woven cloak of lies and deceit, the carefully orchestrated religious show is only a cunning strategy. While communists speak about "friendly coexistence"¹¹⁵⁶ between communism and Christianity, they have an alternative agenda¹¹⁵⁷. Religion, if possible, must to be used by communists, and when they have

¹¹⁵⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 164.

¹¹⁵¹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 20.

¹¹⁵² Knox, 55.

¹¹⁵³ Koivunen, 54.

¹¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26. Wurmbrand speaks of a sermon he personally heard in the Orthodox Church of St. Catherine from Bucharest in which the priest interpreted the verse "Christ our peace", as Christ being against the Americans and on the side of the communist countries.

¹¹⁵⁵ Leuştean, 58., also see Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 21.

¹¹⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 188.

¹¹⁵⁷ For example Romanian Orthodox Church officials were encouraged by the communist regime to meet with World Council of Churches leaders to promote a positive, tolerant image of the Romanian regime, see

attained the position of strength, then religion must be destroyed on a global scale.¹¹⁵⁸ Wurmbrand is utterly convinced about this, “the aim of Romanian Communists is the same as that of Leninists all over the world: the destruction of religion”.¹¹⁵⁹

3.2.3.2. The Reign of Demonic Terror

When communists attain power in a country, another bitter fruit of communism will be tasted, the rule of terror and endless suffering.¹¹⁶⁰ After a period of accommodation, the communist start to reveal their dictatorial streak, and the stage of purges and persecution begins. Those who oppose the communist subjection of the church to the centralized government will face fierce attacks:

Then, at a certain moment the great persecution begins. In Romania such a clamp-down happened in one day. All the Catholic bishops went to prison, along with innumerable priests, monks and nuns. Then many Protestant pastors of all denominations were arrested. Many died in prison.¹¹⁶¹

Once the communists are in a position of power, they will attempt to subdue religion and churches to their designs. The former Church leadership will be gradually purged and replaced by religious leaders who are totally obedient to the communist government. Through these subservient leaders, the communist party will labour to eliminate religious beliefs that are incompatible with communist doctrine.¹¹⁶²

Persecution, detentions, and torture are the tale of most communist takeovers, “Blood and tears – this is the story of Communism everywhere”.¹¹⁶³ The communists indiscriminately persecute all Christian denominations¹¹⁶⁴ all over the world.¹¹⁶⁵ This

Lucian N. Leustean, “Between Moscow and London: Romanian Orthodoxy and National Communism, 1960-1965,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 85, no. 3 (2007): 495.

¹¹⁵⁸ Wurmbrand speaks about the formation in the Soviet Union of the Orginform, a huge state agency with the purpose of the worldwide destruction of churches.

¹¹⁵⁹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 67.

¹¹⁶⁰ Yakovlev, 235.

¹¹⁶¹ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹¹⁶² Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 167.

¹¹⁶³ Wurmbrand lists a series of atrocities committed by communists in different parts of the world, in Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 86.

¹¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹⁶⁵ Wurmbrand lists a series of examples of communists persecuting religion in general and Christianity in particular in different parts of the globe in Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 7-15.

is because their quarrel is ultimately with God and Christianity in general. The communists do not struggle against a false belief in a non-existent God but struggle to “snatch believers” from God.¹¹⁶⁶

The communist reign was a horrible experience in countries where it failed and it still is terrible where it continues to exist.¹¹⁶⁷ Communist regimes, once installed in the halls of power, breed terrible state institutions and savage dictators:

History proves there have never been regimes so cruel as those governed by atheists. (...) the greatest savagery has been inflicted by the Soviet rulers, Lenin and Stalin, followed by Khrushchev and Brezhnev—not to mention the refined cruelties of Mao Tse-Tung. In the whole communist world, there cannot be found one philanthropic or charitable private institution. A heartless state may care for the sick, the old and the orphans, but a hospital run by love is quite different from one run as a business paid by the state.¹¹⁶⁸

The merciless communist state and its communist dictators are not limited by any notion of morality. If God does not exist, then there is no reason to behave in a human way because there is no ultimate reward or punishment, and there is no restraining moral sense.¹¹⁶⁹ Wurmbrand strongly believed that there was more to the communist leaders and dictators than met the eye. The rejection of faith in God,¹¹⁷⁰ the utter lack of morality, cult of violence, and mass exterminations all point to the fact that “the devil himself works through these anti-Christian dictators”.¹¹⁷¹ Wurmbrand thought that this was true only about the elite, “Presumably only a few top leaders of communism have been and are consciously Satanists”.¹¹⁷²

Moreover, he has no problem equating communist dictators with Satan’s minions because, following the satanic rebellious pattern, some of these directly claimed divine status or it was attributed to them.¹¹⁷³ During the years of communist reign in different parts of the globe, bread dictators like Stalin, who instated autocratic

¹¹⁶⁶ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 77.

¹¹⁶⁷ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 113.

¹¹⁶⁸ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God’s Existence*, loc.1752-1756.

¹¹⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 38.

¹¹⁷⁰ Wurmbrand quotes Lenin and Mao’s statements against God and religion in Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc.2339-2340. and in Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 57.

¹¹⁷¹ Wurmbrand gives the example of Christians who refused to recant and were killed before bloody dictators Idi Amin and Fidel Castro, in Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 43.

¹¹⁷² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 119.

¹¹⁷³ for example Wurmbrand finds evidence in the early works of Marx of rebellion against God, rejection of God and His worship and the enthronement of man, in *Ibid*, 30.

regimes, were “cults of personality”, the rule of one man divorced from reality pervaded.¹¹⁷⁴ Mao and others, willingly followed the path of Stalin, “Mao Tse-Tung has been hailed as the one “whose mind created the world.” Kim Il-Sung, dictator of North Korea, is also deified, as is Nicolae Ceausescu, Communist dictator of Romania”.¹¹⁷⁵

The lack of faith in God, or open rejection of Him, and the resulting lack of morality in a communist society bred monsters like Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Andropov, Pol Pot, and Fidel Castro, who were free to employ aggression and brutal torture to bring the society under their total control.¹¹⁷⁶ Communists do not shy away from any method in achieving their purpose. Marxist communists spurred the basest passions of men, using envy and violence.¹¹⁷⁷ That is why in the communist realm, love for men is replaced with a culture of limitless violence, in the words of Che Guevara: “Hate is an element of fight-pitiless hate against the foe, hate that lifts the revolutionist above the natural limitation of man and makes him become an efficient, destructive, cool, calculating, and cold killing machine”.¹¹⁷⁸ Communist dictators have no regard for human life, condemning to extermination of entire classes from society¹¹⁷⁹, resulting in killing people by the thousands¹¹⁸⁰ and tens of millions.¹¹⁸¹ In societies controlled by communists, for example in Russia and China, communists do not kill only those who oppose the regime. The communist killing frenzy continues in the purging waves conducted even against the members of the communist party.¹¹⁸² This kind of behaviour never leads to anything good and, for Wurmbrand,

¹¹⁷⁴ Ian D. Thacher, “Khrushchev as Leader,” in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953–64*, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic (Routledge, 2011), 10.

¹¹⁷⁵ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 71.

¹¹⁷⁶ Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.1168-1172. See also an account of Fidel Castro personally supervising the execution of a Christian in, Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 26.

¹¹⁷⁷ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 106.

¹¹⁷⁸ Che Guevara is the follower of Engels and Marx in his beliefs about revolution and violence, in *Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *Isus, Prietenul Teroriștilor*, 11.

¹¹⁸⁰ the Russian communists are for Wurmbrand the followers of the French revolutionists in their disregard for human life, in Wurmbrand, *Proofs of God's Existence*, loc.1172.

¹¹⁸¹ Wurmbrand, *Isus, Prietenul Teroriștilor*, 11.

¹¹⁸² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 107.

it is simply killing for the sake of killing.¹¹⁸³ Terror instead of leading to emancipation always leads a society on a downward spiral.¹¹⁸⁴

The communists, starting with Lenin in 1918, angered by anti-Bolshevik resistance in Russian society, started vast amounts of detention camps.¹¹⁸⁵ In their labour to refashion whole societies after their utopian model, communists in the countries controlled by them, created vast prison systems and detention camps for the re-education and extermination of those elements who resisted the implementation of their model.

In the communist detention system, people identified as reactionary elements ceased to be human, being reduced to the status of objects.¹¹⁸⁶ Communism for Wurmbrand has an abnormal way of relating to human beings and to doing politics, “Communism is to politics what Picasso is to art. As he distorts his models on canvas, the Communists contort the bodies of their adversaries”.¹¹⁸⁷ Torture, forced labour,¹¹⁸⁸ and starvation are the tools of the trade in the “re-education” or extermination of unwanted people. The aim of the communist re-education programs is to crush the human personality,¹¹⁸⁹ to dissolve individuals in the great masses and achieve their total obedience. Wurmbrand, to bolster his argument, referring to the inhuman conditions of the concentration camps, also mentions the testimony of others, he mentions *Vorkuta*¹¹⁹⁰ by Edward Buca and the *Gulag Archipelago*¹¹⁹¹ of Solzhenitsyn.¹¹⁹²

One of the most terrible manifestations of the communist terror regime in Romania lasted from 6 December 1949 to the end of 1952 and was the so called “Pitești Experiment”¹¹⁹³ implemented by Alexandru Nicolski, the Assistant Director

¹¹⁸³ Ibid., 65.

¹¹⁸⁴ Wurmbrand, *Isus, Prietenul Teroriștilor*, 31.

¹¹⁸⁵ Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 5.

¹¹⁸⁶ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 90.

¹¹⁸⁷ Wurmbrand, *Alone With God*, 14.

¹¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 92. in a letter a Russian orthodox priest from a labor camp speaks about the despair felt by prisoners forced to slave labor.

¹¹⁸⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 87.

¹¹⁹⁰ Edward Buca, *Vorkuta* (London: Constable, 1976).

¹¹⁹¹ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago (1918-1956): An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, vol. 1 (New York: HarperCollins, 2020).

¹¹⁹² Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.586, 594.

¹¹⁹³ Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitești* (București: Humanitas, 1990), 16.

or the Securitatea.¹¹⁹⁴ The “Experiment” started in the Pitești prison and later extended to other Romanian prisons as well. Its aim was the re-education of political prisoners through unspeakable physical and psychological torture in order to create a New Man.¹¹⁹⁵

The re-education process of this experiment was conducted in four stages. The first stage, called “external unmasking”, consisted of the victim confessing under torture, in the second stage, called the “internal unmasking”, the victim had to denounce those who made his life easier in prison.¹¹⁹⁶ The third stage, the “public moral unmasking”, crossed the borders of humanity into the realm of sadistic insanity. In this stage, the victims were forced through unspeakable torture and degradation to blaspheme and renounce any allegiance to God and family.¹¹⁹⁷ Nothing was off limits for the torturers, everything sacred had to be desecrated:

I have testified before the Internal Security Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate. There I described awful things, such as Christians tied to crosses for four days and nights. The crosses were put on the floor and hundreds of prisoners had to fulfill their bodily necessities over the faces and bodies of the crucified ones. Then the crosses were erected again and the communists jeered and mocked: "Look at your Christ! How beautiful he is! What fragrance he brings from Heaven!" I described how, after being driven nearly insane with tortures, a priest was forced to consecrate human excrement and urine and give Holy Communion to Christians in this form. This happened in the Romanian prison of Pitești (...) This is only a very small part of what happened on one Sunday and on many other Sundays in the prison of Pitesti.¹¹⁹⁸

At Easter, they clothed a prisoner in sheets, he having to play the role of Jesus Christ. Out of soap they made a genital organ, which the theological student, the would-be Christ, had to wear on his chest instead of the cross. He had to walk around the room, beaten with sticks—the road to Golgotha. Other Christians had to bow before him, to kiss this genital organ and say, "I bow before your Almightyness." There was only one who did not accept to descend to such blasphemy. He was tortured for hours.¹¹⁹⁹

¹¹⁹⁴ Deletant, 200.

¹¹⁹⁵ Vladimir Tismaneanu and Marius Stan, *Romania Confronts Its Communist Past: Democracy, Memory, and Moral Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 86–87.

¹¹⁹⁶ Ruxandra Cesereanu, “Reeducarea Prin Tortura a Studentilor Din Inchisoarea Pitesti (1949-1952),” <http://www.comunism.ro/fisiere/cercetatori/cesereanu/cesereanureeduc.htm>., (accessed on February 14, 2018)

¹¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁸ Wurmbrand met in prison the priest who was forced to partake in these horrors, see in Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 38, and in Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 73.

¹¹⁹⁹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 73. and in Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.765.

The zeal with which communist henchmen mocked the religious symbols of Christianity and tortured Christians to compel them to blaspheme¹²⁰⁰ portrays a dark influence. Wurmbrand experienced firsthand some of these horrors,¹²⁰¹ and he firmly believed that the communist re-education was a satanic re-education, a diabolical pedagogy. Behind the communist veneer, Wurmbrand saw the work of the devil in this appalling torture system. The devil “delivers only misery, death, and destruction – awful, complete, universal, and pitiless”.¹²⁰² Such maleficent persecution perpetrated with the tacit approval of communist leadership extends beyond mere atheism and passes into the realm of satanic orgies:

Such blasphemous practices were perpetrated for at least two years with the full knowledge of the Party's top leadership. What have such indignities to do with socialism and the well-being of the proletariat? Are their anticapitalist slogans not merely pretexts for organizing Satanic blasphemies and orgies? (...) In these extreme circumstances, Marxism has lifted its atheistic mask to reveal its true face, the face of Satanism. Communist persecution of religion might have a human explanation, but the fury of such perverse persecution can only be Satanic.¹²⁰³

The purpose of the fourth and final stage of the re-education program was to turn the tortured into the torturer of his friends and fellow prisoners.¹²⁰⁴ Those who cracked and were “re-educated” had to conduct the re-education of one of their friends through exemplary dedication to their torture: “these tortures were practiced not by communists (...) but Christians tortured Christians, patriots tortured patriots”.¹²⁰⁵ The turning of friends into enemies¹²⁰⁶ was having a thorough dehumanizing, demoralizing and destabilizing effect on the prisoners:

From hundreds of prisoners in Pitesti, some detained there for their Christian beliefs, others for patriotic activities, three succeeded in committing suicide. Two kept their faith undefiled. All the others denied their beliefs, divulged secrets, denounced even their

¹²⁰⁰ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 63.

¹²⁰¹ the diabolical reeducation, the “Pitești experiment” was for a while extended to the Târgu Ocna prison where Wurmbrand was at that time incarcerated, in Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc.1237.

¹²⁰² Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 63.

¹²⁰³ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 131.

¹²⁰⁴ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 70.

¹²⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁰⁶ Neculai Popa, *Coborârea în iad: Amintiri din închisorile României comuniste* (București: Vremea, 2009), 117.

parents, became in their turn, torturers of other prisoners. The experiment has succeeded.¹²⁰⁷

The Pitești experiment, according to Wurmbrand, was the apex of communist reign of terror with terrible consequences.

3.2.3.3. The Reign of Economic Failure

The great promises of communism failed one after the other, instead of unity, there was division, instead of visionary leaders, there were mass murderers. However, more than an ideological disappointment, communism brought huge economic problems that were felt by hundreds of millions of people. Communists, in chasing their utopian society, sought to break with traditional class society and restructure it by an accelerated program of modernization and urbanization.¹²⁰⁸ Many believed in the beginning that communism would bring the eradication of poverty and would inaugurate, in this life, a golden era, a communist paradise, something less elusive than the Christian view of the afterlife and heaven.¹²⁰⁹ These expectations were unmet, the much promised “improvement in the standard of living”¹²¹⁰ proved to be a chimaera and the communist paradise proved to be another lie of the communist propaganda machine.

Wurmbrand believes that this happened because communism might sound good in theory, but once it is put into practice, it contravenes to the way humans are built.¹²¹¹ People have ingrained in themselves the need to own something, “even a dog wishes to possess a bone of its own”¹²¹² but communist sought to abolish private property.¹²¹³ Nationalization of private business and private capital, the appointment of communists in leadership positions in the economy led to the loss of interest in

¹²⁰⁷ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 77.

¹²⁰⁸ Tomka, 14.

¹²⁰⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 70., on Marx’s eschatology see Murray N. Rothbard, “Karl Marx: Communist as Religious Eschatologist,” in *Requiem for Marx*, ed. Yuri N. Maltsev (Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1993), 221.

¹²¹⁰ Lazar Volin, “Soviet Agriculture under Khrushchev,” *The American Economic Review* 49, no. 2 (1959): 15.

¹²¹¹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 91, according to Wurmbrand theory must be put to the test, must be put into practice and communism put in practice brought terrible results.

¹²¹² *Ibid.*

¹²¹³ Romocea, 95.

economic performance by skilled workers and managers, and led to economic incapacity in the end.¹²¹⁴ Communist doctrine goes against this innate human desire for private property, they wish to strip people of the fruit of their labour “communism wishes to take from everybody everything”,¹²¹⁵ leaving them destitute. This whole economic system was made possible only by the menace of the military might of the Soviet Union.¹²¹⁶

Instead of embodying the communist principles, communist leaders live opulent lives, blatantly defying their own doctrine of equality of all people, while the masses in communist countries are in great material need,¹²¹⁷ “And now their peoples are hungry. Wheat has to be imported from capitalist countries”.¹²¹⁸ The much-preached equitable distribution of goods and better social institutions¹²¹⁹ came to nothing and “the simple worker or farmer who is a party worker is very little cared for”.¹²²⁰

The putting into practice of the communist dogma in agriculture yielded horrible crops.¹²²¹ The communists, inspired by Lenin’s famous words about collectivization, “we will introduce collectivization, not fearing coercion”¹²²² stripped peasants who owned plots of land of their properties and of their livelihood.¹²²³

In Romania, the Communists did indeed act militarily in taking away from the peasantry everything they owned: fields, sheep, cattle, implements, houses, furniture. Every small farmer became a slave of the state, working for a pittance on a field no longer his. Ceausescu was one of the principal organizers of this collectivization.¹²²⁴

The savage treatment of peasants in the countries all over the Soviet Union compromised the agriculture. Contemporary ongoing research, for example, in the series *The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside*,¹²²⁵ which involved scores of historians and

¹²¹⁴ Tomka, 96.

¹²¹⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 91.

¹²¹⁶ Tomka, 14.

¹²¹⁷ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 14.

¹²¹⁸ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 70.

¹²¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 29.

¹²²⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 14.

¹²²¹ Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2017).

¹²²² Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 65.

¹²²³ Wurmbrand gives the example of Romania in, Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 65.

¹²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²²⁵ Lynne Viola et al., *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005).

researchers, focuses on revealing crucial moments in the fate of the Soviet countryside like, “the grain procurement crises of the late 1920s and the demise of NEP; the collectivization of Soviet agriculture and the liquidation of the kulak as a class; the famine of 1932-33; the evolution of the collective farm system and rural economy; and the impact of the Great Terror on the countryside.”¹²²⁶

Wurmbrand holds that the same was true about Romania, “With this, the agricultural sector of Romania was destroyed. In a country that formerly could feed all of western Europe, farmers were forced to stand in line for bread and were unable to obtain it”.¹²²⁷ The countryside, the peasantry in communist states, were extorted by the communist state, its material and human resources were “redeployed in the interest of Soviet”¹²²⁸ and other Iron Country regimes. In countries under the Iron Curtain, tens of millions of people died because of extermination and starvation, resulting from the forced collectivization of agriculture.¹²²⁹

The haphazard way the communists managed the sector of agriculture extended to the sector of industry as well. Two-, three-, and five-year plans were introduced in the sustained effort to expedite industrial growth. This was not for purely economic motives. The communist ideology was pushing this agenda of industrial growth also for propaganda reasons, wanting to impress the world with its economic and military might. Communists desired “to catch up with and outdo the West in every aspect, economic and military; (...) and (...) to impress the uncommitted nations by the prestige of economic progress in the Communist-controlled countries”.¹²³⁰

A fundamental mistake of the communist approach to the economy, according to Wurmbrand, is neglecting the concept of profit which, in his opinion, is first a biblical concept:

¹²²⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹²²⁷ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 65.

¹²²⁸ Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 186.

¹²²⁹ Wurmbrand quotes from Churchill's *Memoirs of World War II*, from the confessions of Stalin to Churchill about the effects of collectivization in the Soviet Union in, Wurmbrand, *Marx & Satan*, 99.

¹²³⁰ David J. Dallin, *Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin* (Philadelphia, Chicago, New York: Lippincott, 1961), 38.

The Communists tried to build an economy on something other than the desire for profit and failed. God himself placed it within the human heart. The Bible warns against “vanity, and things wherein there is no profit” (Jeremiah 16:19). It teaches men to calculate “what profit he has from all his labor (Ecclesiastes 1:3). It claims, “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). (...) Jesus himself taught explicitly that we should seek what is profitable. He said, “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26).¹²³¹

The communists, by demonizing the concept of profit upon which capitalist economies are built, are incapable of producing sustained economic progress. The centralized planned economy and the state-owned industry stifled investments and initiative:

Under socialism, (...) there can be no long periods of progress. No one is interested in investing capital because all the profit goes to the state. A political organism, the state, decides what factories should be built and how the goods should be distributed.¹²³²

If the economy is centralized, profit is shunned, and initiative stifled, then the industry lacks the checks and balances that are necessary to ensure economic growth and the result is disaster:

The profit incentive tends to prevent economic catastrophes. Under Communism, antiquated enterprises continue to function even though they bring no profit. The breakdown of Communism came in many countries without revolution. Romania was the exception. In Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, and Russia, Communism died a natural death because it simply doesn't work.¹²³³

Moreover, the planning commissions responsible for the communist centralized economy of the running of things disregarded the signals that pointed to the unhealthy nature of the communist economy.¹²³⁴ They had no motivation to seek higher performances in the industry because there was no profit incentive, they “receive a modest salary whether or not the plan is fulfilled”.¹²³⁵ They were also not selected for their competency but based on their loyalty to the system, according to

¹²³¹ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.118-125.

¹²³² Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 62.

¹²³³ Ibid.

¹²³⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹²³⁵ Ibid.

Applebaum.¹²³⁶ These counterproductive economic policies, coupled with corruption and excessive bureaucracy, were detrimental to the economy.¹²³⁷ The result was underperformance and economic disaster that, in the end, led to the general collapse of Communism.

3.3.PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this chapter was to answer the question: Why was communism a theological problem from Wurmbrand's Christian perspective? The endeavour to decipher this must, in the first place, take into account his specific understanding of himself and history. The long prison years left their imprint upon his theological thinking, moulding his understanding of history and his self-perception as a Christ follower in the world.

Wurmbrand firmly believed that the dreadful years spent in the Romanian communist gulag and his emigration to the West prepared him for a prophetic vocation. He was convinced that, unlike the vast majority of people in the West, he had the privilege of truly understanding the times. Thus, his role was to enlighten and warn people of the dangers of present history. The primary danger to which people had to be alerted was that of the potential spreading of totalitarian communism to encompass the free world, which threatened everything the free world held dear.

The theological problem of communism, for Wurmbrand, starts first with deep issues in its metaphysical nature. Consequently, he embarked on the strenuous quest of unmasking the disconcerting spiritual allegiances of the Communist elite. He examined aspects of the lives and writings of Karl Marx, Moses Hess, an important influence on the life of Marx and others like Friedrich Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Bukharin, Mao, and Andropov. His conclusion, a certainty for him, was that iconic members of the communist elite were covertly Satanists.

¹²³⁶ Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2020), 32.

¹²³⁷ Knox, 57.

Wurmbrand was conscious that his conclusion can seem farfetched for some of his readers, and his arguments were not irrefutable. Agreeing in part with Wurmbrand, we can argue that at the origin of totalitarian ideologies, which wreaked havoc in the world in the twentieth century, something dark and evil was afoot. Similar argumentation can be found in Eric Voegelin's book *The Political Religions*. According to Voegelin, at the root of totalitarian political ideologies like German National Socialism and Marxist Communism, evil is at work. To Voegelin, this evil is not something indefinite but a satanic force that has to be denounced and countered by the forces of good.¹²³⁸ For Wurmbrand, this idea of satanic influence, which is not very clearly defined by Voegelin, means literally satanic in the biblical sense.

The evidence presented by Wurmbrand after scrutinizing the writings of communist leaders is not convincing enough. His prison experience impacted his thinking and left him with permanent physical and psychological scars. His anti-communist stance and his writings on this subject are not really searches for the truth but justifications of what he already believes to be the truth. Accordingly, the feeling is that he many times grasps at straws, seeking everywhere so-called evidence to bolster his position. When he approaches the writings of his communist opponents, like Marx, Engels, Hess, and others, he does not find concrete evidence proving that these figureheads were consciously Satan worshippers. There is no undisputable evidence to suggest that these people belonged to an actual satanic church or that a satanic church existed where these people lived. But we have to mention, as we observed before, that Wurmbrand is not alone in his observations that communist leaders and communism had a dark side. For example, hints of this can be found amongst others in the biographies of Franz Mehring,¹²³⁹ Robert Payne,¹²⁴⁰ Paul

¹²³⁸ Voegelin, 24.

¹²³⁹ Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 2, 4, 12.

¹²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 317.

Kengor,¹²⁴¹ and histories of Alexander Yakovlev,¹²⁴² and Leszek Kolakowski.¹²⁴³

These biographies and histories suggest that something malevolent was behind the communist leaders.

Secondly, the theological problem of communism for Wurmbrand continues with its ideology. If the communist leaders were under satanic influence, then according to Wurmbrand, this altered their whole thinking, and that is why communist doctrine, the product of their thinking, was fundamentally flawed. These people spread an ideology of hatred and rebellion against God, which is not only atheistic but clearly anti-theistic. This ideology gave rise to a new religion, a political one which corrupts and destroys what originally was good. In this assertion, Wurmbrand is correct because political religions are in general “intolerant, invasive and fundamentalist”.¹²⁴⁴ But, Wurmbrand is only partially correct because Marxism is only a caricature of religion, according to Leszek Kolakowski, because “it presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system” something that is not characteristic in general to religious belief.¹²⁴⁵

Wurmbrand correctly understood that communism cannot tolerate another source of authority in society; communist ideology, as a political religion, must be the single source that defines the meaning and purpose¹²⁴⁶ of human existence. Wurmbrand underlines multiple points of contact between communism and Christianity. Communism adopted many elements of traditional religions, like a scripture (Marx’s *Das Kapital*), a Pope (Marx himself), sacraments (the different loyalty oaths to the Party), confessions (communist self-critique), excommunication (exclusion from the Party) and a cult of martyrs (communist dead for the cause). Communism, according to Wurmbrand, also misappropriated basic Christian concepts: love, holiness, mutual support, interest in social problems, and the necessity of labour, having things in

¹²⁴¹ Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration* (Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2020) Kindle edition.

¹²⁴² Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 155.

¹²⁴³ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Breakdown* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 80-84.

¹²⁴⁴ Gentile, xv.

¹²⁴⁵ Kolakowski, 526.

¹²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xvi.

common in the effort to gain converts. All this is in concert with what political religions do, according to Gentile.¹²⁴⁷

Wurmbrand was convinced that communism, having a limited, atheistic, materialistic perspective about the world, does not have the necessary senses to perceive the ultimate realities of human existence. Human reason alone is too limited to grasp objective truth. Human beings are more than only matter, they were aware since ancient times of being created by divinity, and men have an inner voice, the conscience that, according to Wurmbrand, proves the existence of God, a higher reality than the material world. In this assertion, Wurmbrand is close to Voegelin, who also believed that man, in his inner soul, has a feeling of dependency, the feeling of being bound to the supernatural, and men strive to reconnect with the divinity in order to “rediscover themselves and God”.¹²⁴⁸ So, according to Wurmbrand, communism is incompatible with real human nature. As a result, even higher echelon communists lived unhappy lives, they had troubled consciences, and the lack of answers to fundamental issues of human existence like death, drove them to seek relief in alcohol or suicide.

Thirdly, the theological problem of communism for Wurmbrand continues with its disastrous results. Wurmbrand correctly understood the religious appeal of communism and felt its danger and its proselytizing propensity all over the world. In the period after the Second World War, communism spread with religious fervour from Europe to Asia, Africa, and Latin America¹²⁴⁹. So Wurmbrand felt compelled to prove that the embodiment of communist principles in real life produced bitter fruit everywhere. Communist ideology put in practice in real life, embodied in countries under communist rule, produced many psychological problems and economic disasters for the general population. At first, communists, using communist doctrine, cunningly enveloped subjected societies in a web of lies and deceit with the sole purpose of acquiring absolute power. Secondly, after the seizing of power, everyone who resists communist dominance is subjected to persecution and some to devilish

¹²⁴⁷ Ibid., xviii.

¹²⁴⁸ Voegelin, 31.

¹²⁴⁹ Gentile, xix.

re-education and torture. Persecution, detentions, and torture are the story of most communist takeovers in a country. According to Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, totalitarian regimes, in their final stages, reveal an absolute, inhuman evil.¹²⁵⁰

Finally, communism revealed its true nature when, instead of wealth and economic stability, it produced negative economic results and disillusionment. Communism heralded the eradication of poverty and the inauguration in this life of a golden era, of the communist paradise. Instead, it delivered the “subjugation of the peasantry”¹²⁵¹ substandard agriculture, undersupply of food, underpayment, general poverty, economic privation and disastrous results in the industrial sector, all in the name of progress.¹²⁵² These results for Wurmbrand speak louder than any words about the malign nature of communism.

¹²⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Book, 1973), ix,459.

¹²⁵¹ Viola et al., 319.

¹²⁵² Dallin, 38.

4. A POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF THE VARIEGATED CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The emigration to the United States in 1966, after his release from the Romanian communist prisons in 1965, meant, for Wurmbrand, a new stage in his life. His arrival in the United States in the midst of the 1966 anti-Vietnam War major protests, which he perceived as a result of communist agitation, drove him to anti-communist activity. His desire was to sound the alarm for America and the West, to seriously consider the threat of global communism. He believed that because of his personal history and because he survived the Romanian communist prisons, he had the authority to speak about communism, especially to an unaware Western audience.

Therefore, after he sounded the alarm to the public about the communist danger, he addressed the problem of the Christian Church. He reflected on the Christian church through the filter of his personal pastoral and missionary experiences before his imprisonment and through his prison experience. He founded in America his international mission, *Jesus to the Communist World*, which later became *Voice of the Martyrs* in an attempt to fight against communism. Also, he wanted to involve the Christian churches from the Western world and beyond in this fight because they had the potential to help the persecuted Christian churches from communist countries. That is why he travelled the globe and spoke at many different conferences and all kinds of meetings to Christian audiences to gain support for his mission.

In his thinking, the Christian church is a central theme. On the turbulent waters of political clashes on a global scale, on the chaotic sea of ideological conflict between the communist East and the capitalist West sails the boat of the Christian church. Wurmbrand reflected, in America, in an existing anti-communist context on how the Christian church adapted to the plethora of challenges brought about by communist regimes and the strategies that could help the Church survive communism.

Consequently, the objective of this chapter is to offer an answer to the relevant sub-question: How did the Christian church adapt to the communist regimes and how should the church survive the challenges of Marxist communism according to the “American” Wurmbrand?

Wurmbrand's answer, his political ecclesiology, concerning this problem is multifaceted. We will first look at the existing American context. In this context, Wurmbrand first examined the difficult existence in communist countries of the Official Church and then approached the persecuted Underground Church, and thought about an ideal Underground Church as an answer to this challenge.

4.1 THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

Following the Second World War the 50's and 60's witnessed in the United States a resurgence of the anti-communist sentiment amongst Americans.¹²⁵³ Americans feared that communists want to infiltrate American institutions and take over the U.S. government. This was not a totally new anxiety for America. As early as the 1930s Christian fundamentalists and other American conservatives started to identify, the Red Menace, that is international communism, as a danger for America.¹²⁵⁴

Conspiracy theories, along with right-wing politics and Christian fundamentalism, had, in America, a long history of mutual association.¹²⁵⁵ America had a history of conspiracy theories which vilified Communism in fundamentalist religious circles. In 1933, for example, Arno C. Gaebelein, Bible scholar, dispensational writer and itinerant preacher, in his book, *The Conflict of the Ages*,¹²⁵⁶ connected ancient and modern conspiracies to Karl Marx and the Bolshevik revolution. The aim of this latest communist led conspiracy was, according to Gaebelein, "to overthrow, legitimate government, the rule of law, and private property, to destroy national loyalty, traditional morals, and family life, and to crush the Christian religion."¹²⁵⁷

¹²⁵³ Paul Matzko, *The Radio Right: How a Band of Broadcasters Took on the Federal Government and Built the Modern Conservative Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 13.

¹²⁵⁴ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 103.

¹²⁵⁵ Paul Apostolidis, *Stations of the Cross: Adorno and Christian Right Radio* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000), 130.

¹²⁵⁶ Arno Clemens Gaebelein, *The Conflict of the Ages: The Mystery of Lawlessness - Its Origin, Historic Development and Coming Defeat* (New York: Our Hope Publishing Office, 1983).

¹²⁵⁷ Carpenter, 103.

During the Second World War because of the emergence a new enemy in the form of German National Socialism and Nazism, and because of the complex relationships that were required with the Soviet Union, the anticommunist fight was temporarily suspended.¹²⁵⁸ The defeat of Nazi Germany and after the end of the war, refocused the attention of conservatives on communism in the beginning of the Cold War. In America different kind of politically conservative forces started to fuse into a new anticommunist political force.¹²⁵⁹

The late 1940s and early 1950s found Joseph McCarthy at the vanguard of American anti-communism. Senator Joseph McCarthy from Wisconsin fanned the flames of anticommunism in the 1950s when he unleashed a series of attacks in his speeches and congressional hearings upon the universities, Hollywood and even upon the U.S. Army, claiming that they were infiltrated by communist agents.¹²⁶⁰ He also pinned the loss of China to communism and the expansion of international communism on “Democratic subversives in the State Department.”¹²⁶¹ McCarthyism became a label for extreme anticommunist. In 1954 the Army vs. McCarthy congressional hearings revealed that McCarthy’s accusations were mostly unfounded discrediting him and his followers.¹²⁶²

However, the anticommunist drive survived McCarthy and continued in the following years spurred by the Vietnam War and U.S. election campaigns. In the late 1950s and early 1960s with the American media’s attention shifting from the radio to television, radio broadcast became more affordable and conservative patriotic right wing political and religious groups could afford to buy extensive media coverage.¹²⁶³ This led to the propagation of conservative ideas to millions of listeners spread out across America.

¹²⁵⁸ Markku Ruotsila, *British and American Anticommunism Before the Cold War* (London & Portland , OR: Frank Cass, 2001), 220.

¹²⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁰ David E. Settje, *Lutherans and the Longest War: Adrift on a Sea of Doubt about the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 31.

¹²⁶¹ Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: OUP USA, 2010), 21.

¹²⁶² Settje, 31.

¹²⁶³ Matzko 14.

The call to action of these conservative right-wing broadcasters gave birth to “a wave of grassroots activism (that) swept the nation in the late 1950s and early 1960s.”¹²⁶⁴ The principal secular broadcasters were the *Manion Forum*, *Dan Smoot Report*, and *Life Line*.¹²⁶⁵ The Dan Smoots Report and Manion Forum were funded by listener donations and subscriptions. Life Line conservative print and broadcasting empire was funded by Texan oil mogul H.L. Hunt.¹²⁶⁶

The Manion Forum grew to become one of the foremost political programs of its time with an audience of approximately four million listeners.¹²⁶⁷ The radio program helped conservative politicians, intellectuals, and activists to broadcast their message. Transcripts of radio programs were published in print in weekly bulletins that could be distributed in conservative circles and beyond.¹²⁶⁸ The Manion Forum discussed topics like “communist subversion in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and southern Africa as powerful allegories for political crises in the United States, influencing debates about campus protest, the Vietnam War, and civil rights.”¹²⁶⁹

In the sphere of religious broadcasting Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis were notable because they were not only fundamentalist preachers but also conservative activists. Carl McIntire’s *Twentieth Century Reformation Hour* and Billy James Hargis’s *Christian Crusade* were the leading religious broadcasters.¹²⁷⁰ They approached topics like anticommunism, the United Nations, creeping socialism, the Vietnam War and U.S. elections.¹²⁷¹

Worthy of notice in this direction is Arizona republican senator, Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign which further polarized the American public and boosted conservative mobilization in spite of his failure to be elected in the end.¹²⁷² Also, Conservative politicians and their constituencies in the 1960s supported the

¹²⁶⁴ Matzko 14.

¹²⁶⁵ Hemmer, 110.

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁷ Kyle Burke, “Radio Free Enterprise: The Manion Forum and the Making of the Transnational Right in the 1960s,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhu056>. accessed on 13.03.2023

¹²⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹²⁷⁰ Hemmer, 110-112.

¹²⁷¹ Ibid., 113.

¹²⁷² Matzko 15.

Vietnam War. American Christians, Protestants and Catholics with few exceptions, added their support to the conservatives because they were convinced that communism was an evil force and its spread on a global scale must be stopped or at least limited.¹²⁷³ Evangelical Christian magazine *Christianity Today* in March 1968 added its weight to this conservative sentiment declaring that “those who think these values [freedom and human dignity] are best preserved by an end to effective resistance to Communist expansionism seem incredibly naïve.”¹²⁷⁴

In this politically effervescent context Wurmbrand arrived in the United States in 1966 and testified before the Congress, recounting his personal experience of vicious torture and horrific deprivation in communist prisons.¹²⁷⁵ His words “My body represents Romania, my country, which has been tortured to a point that it can no longer weep (...) These marks on my body are my credentials”.¹²⁷⁶ This appearance made Wurmbrand suddenly a celebrity and triggered in the American society a series of discussions about the treatment of Christians under communism. His maimed body became a powerful symbol for the anticommunist campaign shared by secular and religious right-wing conservatives, Catholics and Protestants.¹²⁷⁷ Starting with 1966 and the following years Wurmbrand came in contact with a wide range of conservative patriotic, secular and religious organizations and he was also in contact with different Christian organizations and denominations.

Manion contacted Wurmbrand in June 1966, promising the Manion Forum’s support in generating funds for Wurmbrand’s nationwide speaking tour in support for the communist persecuted Christians.¹²⁷⁸ Wurmbrand, after an exchange of several letters, accepted and was present in a series of programs on the Forum in June and July 1966. In these appearances, he repeatedly described his persecution and the religious persecution by the Romanian Communists.¹²⁷⁹ Manion also helped

¹²⁷³ David E. Settje, *Faith and War: How Christians Debated the Cold and Vietnam Wars* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 65.

¹²⁷⁴ Settje, 66.

¹²⁷⁵ Burke, 130.

¹²⁷⁶ Melani McAlister, “The Politics of Persecution,” *Middle East Report*, no. 249 (2008): 19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25164876> accessed on 25.02.2023.

¹²⁷⁷ Burke, 130.

¹²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

him in the producing and selling of a documentary film. This contained mainly material from his testimony before Congress and from his appearances on the Forum, “The twenty-seven-minute film told of life in the Eastern Bloc, offered viewers close-ups of Wurmbrand’s many scars, and closed with a pointed plea for donations from individuals, churches, and businesses.”¹²⁸⁰

Life Line radio show, sponsored by Hunt, the Texan oil magnate, broadcasted from 1958 to 1979.¹²⁸¹ Wurmbrand made repeated appearances on the radio show and transcripts of his messages were then printed and circulated among the Life Line readers. Life Line printed all kinds of topics in connection to Wurmbrand. For example, it recounted his testimony before Congress and his critique of the World Council and Churches because they admitted Churches from Communist countries,¹²⁸² the fact that he was not invited to speak on anti-communism at the St Louis Jesuit University in Missouri,¹²⁸³ on the power of prayer that can break chains,¹²⁸⁴ Wurmbrand’s appearance at a Dallas Patriotic rally, and his claim that the Reds could take over the U.S. in the next 5 years.¹²⁸⁵ It also repeated his testimony years after it happened.¹²⁸⁶

Wurmbrand’s appearance before Congress also brought him the attention of Christian organizations and denominations. The fundamentalist MacIntire, in the pursuit to broaden his message about global religious freedom and to reach Christians beyond the fundamentalist audience, contacted Wurmbrand. They corresponded on topics of mutual interest, religious oppression in Eastern Europe, the problematic acceptance of Soviet clergy in the World Council of Churches, and others.¹²⁸⁷ McIntire was a preacher and activist, an emblematic figure of the conflict between old-time religion and the forces of modernity in the 1960s and 1970s.¹²⁸⁸

¹²⁸⁰ Ibid. 131.

¹²⁸¹ Hemmer, 11.

¹²⁸² “Life Lines” 8, no. 81 (Jul.08 1966), <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28145921>.

¹²⁸³ “Life Lines” 9, no. 13 (Jan.30 1967), <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28146009>.

¹²⁸⁴ “Life Lines” 9, no. 17 (Feb.08 1967), <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28146013>.

¹²⁸⁵ “Life Lines” 10, no. 41 (Apr.05 1968), <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28146193>.

¹²⁸⁶ “Life Lines” 11, no. 119 (06 1969), <https://jstor.org/stable/community.28146427>.

¹²⁸⁷ Markku Ruotsila, *Fighting Fundamentalism: Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 196.

¹²⁸⁸ Heather Hendershot, *What’s Fair on the Air?: Cold War Right-Wing Broadcasting and the Public Interest* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 103.

Through his contacts he also helped him to smoothen his visa problems in America.¹²⁸⁹ The two agreed to plan together various programs publicizing the communist religious persecution in Eastern Europe.

After a short time, MacIntire's organization, the International Council of Christian Churches, started to advertise, publish, and distribute Wurmbrand's books because his testimony confirmed what McIntire preached for decades about religious persecution behind the Iron Curtain.¹²⁹⁰ The ICC's financial problems were alleviated by the cash infusions generated by Wurmbrand's publicity.¹²⁹¹ By the 1970s, most of the ICC office space had been taken over by Wurmbrand's ministry.¹²⁹²

Wurmbrand's association with the MacIntire Movement made him a persona non grata in new evangelical circles. Evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry (1913 – 2003) in 1966 cancelled Wurmbrand's invitation to the World Congress on Evangelism from Berlin, while he welcomed Soviet clergymen.¹²⁹³ The Berlin conference was a manifestation of the cultural dimension in global leadership that the US evangelicals were assuming after the Second World War.¹²⁹⁴ Evangelicals in the US were very concerned of the religious persecution in communist nations. This led them to fight against it and to raise the awareness of the American public concerning the suffering persecuted churches. American evangelicals did this through political lobbying, and through supporting private advocacy organizations.¹²⁹⁵

In the first several years in America Wurmbrand worked together with Los Angeles based Underground Evangelism directed by Reverend L. J. Bass, a minister for the United Association of Evangelicals. This inter-denominational Christian organization sent couriers, who smuggled into Communist countries Christian

¹²⁸⁹ Ruotsilla, 196.

¹²⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹²⁹¹ Ibid.

¹²⁹² Ibid., 197.

¹²⁹³ Ibid., 196.

¹²⁹⁴ Uta A. Balbier, "The World Congress on Evangelism 1966 in Berlin," *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 4 (2017): 1171–96. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26803497> accessed on 18.03.2023.

¹²⁹⁵ Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 75.

literature approved by Wurmbrand.¹²⁹⁶ Wurmbrand's appearance on the Manion Forum generated substantial funds for Underground Evangelism. Together with other internationally oriented organizations like the Oriental Missionary Society, the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, and the International Missionary Fellowship, these organizations sought to use private resources to counterbalance the influence of the World Council of Churches, because they accused this organization of acting in favor of communist governments.¹²⁹⁷

With the fresh exposure and the new income generated by Wurmbrand's appearance on the Manion Forum, Underground Evangelism became part of a swelling network of conservative Christians who combined their resources to send money, clergy and smuggle bibles into communist countries.¹²⁹⁸ Wurmbrand and Bass will later walk separate paths due to a serious fallout that led to defamation trials in the court of law.¹²⁹⁹

Both, Bass' Underground Evangelism and Wurmbrand's organization Jesus to the Communist World, were also in contact with like-minded international anti-communist religious organizations.¹³⁰⁰ Worthy of notice amongst these, is the Danish Pentecostal reverend Hans Kristian Neerskov, the founder of the transnational Danish European Mission, a self-proclaimed Bible smuggling organization in the Cold War period, who cooperated with Richard Wurmbrand.¹³⁰¹ They had in common similar concerns and their dogged determination to help Christians from the Iron Curtain countries.¹³⁰²

Billy James Hargis (1925-2004), evangelist and Christian right-wing broadcaster was another collaborator of Wurmbrand, the two developed a lifelong

¹²⁹⁶ Burke, 131.

¹²⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁹⁸ Ibid., 132.

¹²⁹⁹ Joe Gouverneur, "Underground Evangelism: Missions During the Cold War," *Transformation* 24, no. 2 (2007): 82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052695> accessed on 26.02.2023 and Settje, 79.

¹³⁰⁰ Boel Bent, "Bible Smuggling and Human Rights in the Cold War," in *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks*, ed. Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 266.

¹³⁰¹ Ibid., 269-270.

¹³⁰² Ibid., 266, 270.

friendship.¹³⁰³ He appeared on Hargis' Christian Crusade radio show and in his ministry's magazine. In 1969 the World Council of Churches held for the first time in history one of the semiannual meetings of its executive committee in Tulsa Oklahoma an important city of the American Bible Belt on Hargis' home turf. Hargis, MacIntire and Wurmbrand together protested in Tulsa against the WCC because Russia's Orthodox Archbishop Nikodim, seen by them as a communist marionette, was also part of the WCC executive committee. Wurmbrand in Tulsa interrupted a press conference of the WCC and confronted the organization's general secretary Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, calling him a communist.¹³⁰⁴ Blake's predecessor at the helm of the WCC was Dutch Theologian Willem Visser't Hooft, another of Wurmbrand's opponents.

The consistent appearances in the conservative right-wing media, the distribution of his documentary film, the appearance of his book *Tortured for Christ* in 1967, increased his popularity throughout the United States. In the following years he traveled all across the country speaking in all kind of settings to many Christian organizations and denominations.¹³⁰⁵

Wurmbrand, himself having a Lutheran background, was in contact with the Lutheran World Federation and in America appeared in Lutheran contexts and spoke in Lutheran churches.¹³⁰⁶ From inside the American Lutheran Church, member of the World Council of Churches, conservative Lutherans accused the World Council of Churches of colluding with Soviet communism because this religious body accepted the membership of churches from the communist countries.¹³⁰⁷ Wurmbrand denounced this in his writings, decrying like Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) in his time, the spiritual blindness in clergymen, western clergymen in Wurmbrand's case, because they did not understand the disguised communist

¹³⁰³ Keith Wilkerson, "Founder Dr. Billy James Hargis Dead at Age 79," *Christian Crusade* 53, January February (2005): 10. http://www.christiancrusade.com/memorial_edition_pages.pdf accessed on 18.03.2023

¹³⁰⁴ "World Council: Confrontation in Tulsa," *Time*, February 7 (1969), <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,838930-1,00.html>. Accessed on 18.03.2023

¹³⁰⁵ Burke, 131.

¹³⁰⁶ Ruotsilla, 196.

¹³⁰⁷ Settje, 64.

danger.¹³⁰⁸ Wurmbrand's appearance and performance in Lutheran churches stirred the anti-communist passions and raised concerns amongst moderate Lutherans that Wurmbrand could push this church toward McCarthyism. Frederick A. Schiotez, President of the American Lutheran Church antagonized Wurmbrand by writing a circular letter to Lutheran pastors recommending that they would not offer a speaking opportunity in their churches to him.¹³⁰⁹

Wurmbrand came into contact also with American Catholics. Right after the Second World War American Catholics observed with great alarm how Stalin crushed Churches in the Iron Curtain Churches.¹³¹⁰ Pope John Paul II had a tacit alliance with American evangelicals in the fight against communism.¹³¹¹ That is why Catholics were in the vanguard of the American anticommunist movement, organizing rallies and parades in support of imprisoned Catholics like Cardinal Mindszenty from Hungary. Cardinal Spellman and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen spoke often against the Communist crimes and about the threat of communism in America.¹³¹² At the height of the Cold War, evangelical Protestants started to forge alliances with conservative Catholics viewing them as valuable partners in the fight against atheistic communism.¹³¹³ Sheen having extensive knowledge about the subject, through radio and television programs, speeches, sermons, articles, pamphlets and books attacked communism and was "thought to be the premier spokesman of the Church in the United States".¹³¹⁴ Wurmbrand met Sheen and appeared on his television show recounting his experience in communist prisons.

In his extensive travels in the United States Wurmbrand also came in contact with Raymond de Jaeger, a Belgian-born Roman Catholic missionary and educator in

¹³⁰⁸ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 74., referring to the admonition of clergy in Savonarola's sermons, for example in Savonarola's Renovation Sermon from the Psalms delivered on 13 January 1494/5 and Aggeus Sermon VII delivered on 28 November 1484, see Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, eds. Anne Borelli & Maria Pastore Passaro, New Haven & London (Yale University Press, 2006), 64, 147.

¹³⁰⁹ Settje., 78.

¹³¹⁰ Thomas C. Reeves, *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 205.

¹³¹¹ Zidane Mériboute, "L'offensive Évangélique Dans Les Pays Musulmans (Maghreb-Machrek et Afrique)," *Diplomatie*, no. 48 (2011): 30–35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26981577> accessed on 28.02.2023

¹³¹² Reeves, 205.

¹³¹³ Burke, 130.

¹³¹⁴ Reeves, 206.

China and Vietnam for many years and director of the Asian Speakers Bureau in New York. In 1968, he became a featured lecturer for de Jaegher's Asian Speakers Bureau, and started speaking on college campuses about his experiences under communist rule as well as the dangerous spreading of communism in Southeast Asia and Africa.¹³¹⁵

Wurmbrand's message found favourable ground in America. His sudden celebrity triggered in American society a series of discussions about the treatment of Christians under communism. Conservative organizations, both secular and religious, Christian organizations, and Christian Denominations found him to be a symbol for the anti-communist campaign that stirred America after the Second World War. These organizations publicized and supported his message because it validated their anti-communist message and tapped into the powerful fears shared by many Americans.

Wurmbrand's organization, Tortured for Christ, found support in the North American missionary endeavour. The military triumph of the Allied forces and the technological advances that made this possible gave wings to postwar missionary planning.¹³¹⁶ Wurmbrand and the founding of his new organization benefited from this important factor. In American society, another powerful unifying force has been the sovereignty of popular appeal. Religious movements in America had the opportunity to be innovative, demanding, peculiar, unusual, and eccentric as often their leader was and still, they had the chance to win extensive support. The new movements were often prophetic, challenging the status quo and offering an alternative vision of the existing reality and the future.¹³¹⁷

Wurmbrand's charismatic presence, his powerful anti-communist message, his call to action in favor of persecuted Christians gave wings to the imagination of western Christians. Millions of ordinary Americans moved by the appeal of often fundamentalist religious organizations found purpose and empowerment in

¹³¹⁵ Burke, 131.

¹³¹⁶ Carpenter, 178.

¹³¹⁷ Ibid., 241.

investing their lives and resources in what they saw as a higher calling, a larger purpose for their otherwise ordinary lives.¹³¹⁸

4.2. THE OFFICIAL CHURCH

Wurmbrand envisioned a Christian church with a glorious future ahead. In the meantime, until that glorious vision comes into existence, one facet of the ecclesiastical reality experienced by him was the existence of the *Official Church*. This term encompasses, for Wurmbrand, all the existing Christian denominations, mainly officially recognized churches, which were affected by the ascendance to power of communist regimes in different parts of the world and which had to adapt to this change in political context.

First the Official church, heir to many historical problems, in the time of Wurmbrand, became a church that accepted compromise. Second, Wurmbrand, in many of his writings, points fingers at the church leadership, especially to high church officials, as culprits to be blamed for the situation of the church. But in the end, despite the general compromise of the Official church and despite the personal compromise of church leadership, Wurmbrand does not totally dismiss the Official Church because, for him, it was still a tool used by God.

4.2.1. *Historically Compromised*

First, the Official Church is the heir of the historical Christian church. This inheritance gives her a dual identity. As the inheritor of the first-generation Christians “who were aflame with gentle love”,¹³¹⁹ she is beautiful and the beloved of Christ.

The other inherited side is less appealing; Wurmbrand calls it ugly, black.¹³²⁰ The Official Church inherited her institutionalism from the Roman emperors Constantine the Great and Theodosius, interwoven with the political or personal interests of

¹³¹⁸ Ibid., 243.

¹³¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 44.

¹³²⁰ Ibid.

historical leaders like Emperors Constantine, Theodosius, King Clovis, and others.¹³²¹ It inherited concepts like the Byzantine church and state symphonia which shaped the historical and cultural development of Eastern churches and societies.¹³²² Sadly, the Official Church is the heir of a church created and sustained on faulty principles like the “*Cuius regio, eius religio*”¹³²³ (“whose realm, their religion”) that is artificial conversions dependent on regional or political affiliations.

Wurmbrand thinks that a church that has this kind of historical baggage cannot be totally faithful to Jesus Christ.¹³²⁴ Generally speaking, for Wurmbrand, the problem is that there is no distinction between Catholic, Orthodox, or Reformed Churches. The major historical Christian denominations that constitute the vast majority of the official churches have a common problem. They are distinct from the non-Christian world only in theory. Church membership in these official churches is not based on true conversion but on birth, “Everybody is baptized as an infant and everybody is a Christian”.¹³²⁵

Furthermore, part of the dark side of the Official Church is its lack of religious tolerance toward smaller denominations and her anti-Semitism.¹³²⁶ During interwar period and during the Second World War, Wurmbrand experienced firsthand these two aspects. The Romanian Orthodox Church functioned as a state church, and the other religions suffered the consequences.¹³²⁷ The largest Christian denomination, the Orthodox Church, persecuted the smaller denominations, called “sects”, the Baptists, the Brethren, and the Adventists. Likewise, the Orthodox participated in the persecution and killing of Jews.¹³²⁸ The anti-Semitism of the official church is

¹³²¹ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc 1527. Wurmbrand lists a series of emperors, kings, political and religious leaders who forcibly converted their subjects to Christianity.

¹³²² Knox, 106.

¹³²³ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc 1537.

¹³²⁴ *Ibid.*, loc.1538.

¹³²⁵ *Ibid.*, loc.1547.

¹³²⁶ See the antisemitism and antisemitic theology developed in the Orthodox Church in this period, in Ionut Florin Biliuta, “Sowing the Seeds of Hate. The Antisemitism of the Orthodox Church in the Interwar Period,” *S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods, Documentation* 3, no. 1 (2016): 20–34, http://simon.vwi.ac.at/images/Documents/Articles/2016-1/2016-1_ART_Biliuta/ART_Biliuta01.pdf. accessed on 05.11.2023

¹³²⁷ Maria Alina Asavei, *Art, Religion and Resistance in (Post-)Communist Romania: Nostalgia for Paradise Lost* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020), 287.

¹³²⁸ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 38.

partially understandable given the recurrence of anti-Semitism in church history. Wurmbrand points out that some very important Fathers and Theologians of the Church like St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas, were “rabid anti-Semites”.¹³²⁹

After the Second World War, once the Iron Curtain descended upon the countries of Eastern Europe, the Official Church was harshly persecuted by the communist regimes. Churches were closed down; ministers and many ordinary Christians were sent to jail. Under the aggressive atheistic Soviet communist regimes, the Orthodox Churches adopted a mainly submissive stance toward the state.¹³³⁰ Wurmbrand points to the example of Russia. Here, the communist regime rejected the traditional Byzantine symphony, Church-State model, and totally subjugated the Russian Orthodox Church.¹³³¹ In Russia, he writes in 1970, churches were transformed into “warehouses, museums, factories and dancing clubs”.¹³³² Also, in Russia the number of churches was drastically reduced, “Out of 50,000 Orthodox churches before the Revolution, only 7,000 remained”.¹³³³ This number of churches is far from enough to satisfy the needs of the millions of members of the Official Orthodox Church.¹³³⁴ Wurmbrand does not specify from where does he have these numbers, which are roughly accurate, his focus is on the closing of the churches and not really on the exact number of them.

Researcher Zoe Knox states that before 1917 there were 50.000 functioning Orthodox churches in the Russian empire and by 1966 only 7.466 churches remained.¹³³⁵ Researcher Nathaniel Davis writes that in 1961, 10.000-11.000 churches existed and after the 1960-1965, Khrushchev era church closings, 7.500 remained.¹³³⁶ According to historian Tatiana Chumackenko in 1965, 7.873 Orthodox churches

¹³²⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹³³⁰ Nenad Živkovic, “Surrendering to Public Pressure: The ‘Macedonian Orthodox Church’ and the Rejection of the Niš Agreement in 2002,” in *Orthodox Religion and Politics in Contemporary Eastern Europe: On Multiple Secularisms and Entanglements*, ed. Tobias Köllner (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), 215.

¹³³¹ Knox. 104.

¹³³² Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 42.

¹³³³ Ibid.

¹³³⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹³³⁵ Knox. 45.

¹³³⁶ Nathaniel Davis, “The Number of Orthodox Churches before and after the Khrushchev Antireligious Drive,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (1991): 617, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2499857>. visited on 29.01.2023.

survived.¹³³⁷ Wurmbrand's numbers are closest to historian Dimitry Pospelovsky's account, "The number of functioning Orthodox churches has been reduced from over 60.000 (this includes parish and monastic churches and institutional chapels) before the revolution to less than 7.000 in the late 1970s."¹³³⁸ However, the Orthodox Church was not the only persecuted church under communism but all denominations of the Official Christian Church.¹³³⁹ Other religions were visited by the same calamity, they have seen the numbers of their churches and temples closed, confiscated, or demolished.¹³⁴⁰

The officially recognized and also persecuted churches by the communist authorities were not entirely faithful to their Lord, Jesus Christ, Wurmbrand states. In their fight for survival, the Official Churches compromised in many ways with the communist authorities and retained many forms of entanglement with the state because they functioned as national churches before the advent of communism.¹³⁴¹ A particularly disturbing case of collaboration is the infamous Sergianism, that is the declaration of unconditional loyalty to the Bolsheviks in 1928 by the *locum tenens*, Sergii Stragorodskii, the temporary replacement of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Tichon, later Patriarch Sergius of Moscow.¹³⁴² The Official Church respected the communist law and often agreed to the demand of the communists not to propagate the Gospel.¹³⁴³ Official churches were granted legal recognition in exchange for their cooperation but the price was high, because the communist demanded complete loyalty from the churches.¹³⁴⁴

Wurmbrand, in his commentary on the Song of Songs, pulls the curtains off this rather duplicitous behaviour of the Official Church:

¹³³⁷ Tatiana A. Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years*, trans. Edward E. Roslof (New York: Routledge, 2015), 187.

¹³³⁸ Pospelovsky, ix.

¹³³⁹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 45.

¹³⁴⁰ Pospelovsky, ix.

¹³⁴¹ Paschalis Kitromilides, *Religion and Politics in the Orthodox World: The Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Challenges of Modernity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), 88.

¹³⁴² Vasilios N. Makrides, "Orthodox Christianity and State/Politics Today: Factors to Take into Account," in *Orthodox Religion and Politics in Contemporary Eastern Europe: On Multiple Secularisms and Entanglements*, ed. Tobias Köllner (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), 244.

¹³⁴³ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.528-529.

¹³⁴⁴ Kapaló and Povedák, 8.

Jesus has many queens in every denomination, but also he has concubines. Concubines are girls or women who have illegitimate relationships with men. ...The official churches, which have compromised with Communism, are anti-churches. Some of their pastors or bishops are real believers, but they are believers who waver between two masters, - Christ and Communism. They serve Communism, but stealthily slip away from it to say words of love to Christ.¹³⁴⁵

Wurmbrand finds this duplicitous behaviour somewhat understandable thinking in retrospect about the history of Christianity. The Official church, looking back to its dark periods, excuses herself, saying that the compromise happened because it was important to survive and not all the clergy collaborated with the oppressors, some priests chose prison instead of cooperation with the communist regime.¹³⁴⁶

Compromise happens, Wurmbrand believed, because the vast majorities of Christians were not and are not prepared to pay the ultimate price for their faith. History tells us that only a minority is ready to suffer torture and death for the faith. Still, both categories are Christians, the weak ones and the strong ones, and God understands the weak, "God saw how sorry they were for their weakness and how eagerly they returned to faith when the immediate danger had passed".¹³⁴⁷

Part of the communist strategy was also that, after persecuting the church and closing thousands of churches, they permitted the existence of some closely controlled Official Churches. Communists cleverly used the compliant centralized ecclesiastical structures of the Official Churches to observe the religious landscape and control Christians.¹³⁴⁸ Wurmbrand was offered the pastorate of a church from this category, monitored by the communists, and he refused it. The offer came during his second period of prison in 1963, while he was in the Gherla prison, and it was conditioned by regular reports from him on his church members to the secret police.¹³⁴⁹ The Secret police, in these countries controlled by communist regimes, was one of the primary actors involved in the close monitoring of the churches and

¹³⁴⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 184.

¹³⁴⁶ Adrian Velicu, *The Orthodox Church and National Identity in Post-Communist Romania* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 47.

¹³⁴⁷ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc. 1069-1070.

¹³⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 94.

¹³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

conducted all kind of anti-religious operations.¹³⁵⁰ For example, Soviet secret services orchestrated a revolt led by cooperative bishops from inside of the Russian Orthodox Church against the leadership of this church hoping to weaken this church.¹³⁵¹ Still, even the closely monitored churches in Wurmbrand's estimate were becoming fewer and fewer in communist lands, "I wonder if in the whole of the Soviet Union there are still five or six thousand churches. (The United States, with the same population, has some three hundred thousand.)".¹³⁵²

The communist often used the compliant Official Churches as pawns in their external policy. They tried hard to project to the Western world an image of freedom of speech and of religious tolerance.¹³⁵³ Western guests were allowed to visit Official Churches controlled by communists. Wurmbrand witnessed firsthand how foreign tourists, because of their lack of understanding of the different Eastern European languages, were misled by the external accoutrements of religion to think that religious freedom really existed.

4.2.2. *Compromised Leadership*

Secondly, after mentioning the general compromise with the communists and branding the Official Church with the shameful stigma of "the church of collaborators",¹³⁵⁴ Wurmbrand turned more specifically to the church leadership. Many times, they brought shame on the Christian Church because, sadly, not every Church leader is a genuine follower and child of God.¹³⁵⁵

The church leaders can be divided into two categories: the high church officials and the lower echelons of ordinary church ministers. Wurmbrand had much against the first category. The people holding important offices, the "faithless bishops"¹³⁵⁶ in the church, were culpable. Wurmbrand believed that the problematic historical religious context from the time of Jesus, the corruption of Jewish religious officials,

¹³⁵⁰ Kapaló and Povedák, 1.

¹³⁵¹ Artan R. Hoxha, *Communism, Atheism and the Orthodox Church of Albania: Cooperation, Survival and Suppression, 1945–1967* (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 39.

¹³⁵² Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 95.

¹³⁵³ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters* (Pomona, CA: Cross, 20).

¹³⁵⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 93.

¹³⁵⁵ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 118.

¹³⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc.1266-1267.

repeated itself in his time. Jesus, during his time on earth, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 19:46, called the Temple in Jerusalem a den of thieves because its top leaders were corrupt and disgraced the Temple.¹³⁵⁷ Wurmbrand holds that the same is true for his time, the Official Church was disgraced by many church representatives becoming a den of thieves.

Understandingly, the communist regimes were determined to subvert and control churches and religion.¹³⁵⁸ But many of the high church officials from all denominations in communist controlled countries served the communists deliberately.¹³⁵⁹ In Russia, Orthodox high officials, starting with the bishops and higher ups, were KGB officers.¹³⁶⁰ Church officials had much to gain by their servitude because, like in the case of Russian Orthodox Metropolitan, later Patriarch Sergius, the relationship was mutually beneficial.¹³⁶¹

In Romania, the election of Orthodox bishops came under state control. The Romanian communists packed the Holy Synod, the leading body of the Orthodox Church, with Communist Party members.¹³⁶² Communism imposed on the Orthodox Church, "a new statute centralizing its administration under the Patriarch, all of which allowed the regime to manipulate the Church more easily."¹³⁶³

Wurmbrand provides, in his bestseller *Tortured for Christ*, a list of shame, a series of high church officials from different countries who collaborated with the communists, some of these right from the beginning of the Russian Communist revolution in 1917:

It began immediately after the Russian Socialist Revolution with the "Living Church," headed by a bishop called Sergius. (...) We have had some such Sergius in every country. In Hungary, among the Catholics, it was Father Balogh. He and some Protestant ministers helped the communists take complete control of the state. In Rumania, the communists came to power with the help of an Orthodox priest called Burducea, a former Fascist, who

¹³⁵⁷ Ibid., loc.1266-1269.

¹³⁵⁸ Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan, *Churches, Memory and Justice in Post-Communism* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), 227.

¹³⁵⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 27.

¹³⁶⁰ Niels C. Nielsen, ed., *Christianity After Communism: Social, Political, and Cultural Struggle in Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 26.

¹³⁶¹ Kalkandjieva, 5.

¹³⁶² Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 67.

¹³⁶³ Ibid.

had to make up to the Reds for his past sins by becoming even more "Red" than his bosses. (...) As to those like Nikodeme of Russia, it is on record that they are informers for the government. (...) This is the situation in nearly all denominations. The present leadership of the Rumanian Baptists was imposed by force. It denounces the real Christians. In Russia the leadership of the Baptists does the same. The president of the Rumanian Adventists, Tachici, told me that he had been an informer of the communist secret police from the very first day of their coming to power.¹³⁶⁴

To this list, in *The Wurmbrand Letters*, more names are added, the name of Patriarch Justinian of Romania and that of Patriarch-Deputy Tomescu. Both of these men had communist sympathies long before the communists came to power in Romania.¹³⁶⁵ Justinian was an active supporter of communist policies.¹³⁶⁶ Patriarch Teoctist, from Romania, is unapologetically called by Wurmbrand the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's bootlicker.¹³⁶⁷ Long before Ceaușescu's dictatorship, Teoctist was involved in the denigration campaign against the Romanian politician Iuliu Maniu, a political adversary of the Romanian communists, who died in a communist prison.¹³⁶⁸ Bishop Hromadka from Russia and Archbishop Moisescu from Romania are also named as collaborators of the secret police of the regime.¹³⁶⁹ The Catholic bishop of Saigon is labelled a communist stooge.¹³⁷⁰ Also, the leaders of the Pentecostal Union of Romania lent their voices to the official communist propaganda machine, speaking of full liberty when Pentecostals were imprisoned.¹³⁷¹ In Poland, a progressive group of Catholics collaborated with the communist for diverse reasons.¹³⁷² Some benefited personally, father Antoni Lemparty was made chairman of the Polish Caritas, the charity arm of the Catholic church and Father Jan Czuj, in 1954, was made rector of the Academy of Catholic Theology at Bielany near Warsaw.¹³⁷³ In Czechoslovakia, the communist, because they could not produce a division in the Catholic Church, created, in 1971, the Association of Catholic Clergy

¹³⁶⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 93,94.

¹³⁶⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 22.

¹³⁶⁶ Turcescu and Stan, 95-96.

¹³⁶⁷ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 157.

¹³⁶⁸ Turcescu and Stan, 99.

¹³⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 72.

¹³⁷⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 97.

¹³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹³⁷² Marian S. Mazgaj, *Church and State in Communist Poland: A History, 1944-1989* (Jefferson, NC & London: McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2010), 34.

¹³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 59,94.

Pacem in Terris in order to control this church from the inside. This name was borrowed from the well-known encyclical of Pope John XXIII from 1963, *Pacem in Terris*, on the rights and obligations of individuals and of the state, as well as the proper relations between states. The communists gave the chairmanship of this organization to Josef Plojhar, an excommunicated priest, who, along with communists selected “weak, ambitious or corrupt clergy (...) took over the church press, publishing and charitable organizations and (...) control of two remaining seminaries”¹³⁷⁴.

Wurmbrand decries the loyalty shown by these high church officials to the communist regime. The motives of the Russian, Hungarian, Romanian, Yugoslavian, and Polish church officials are clear for Wurmbrand. The communist rewarded their obedience with vast sums of money,¹³⁷⁵ properties, and the ability to travel freely abroad to attend international religious conferences.¹³⁷⁶ Romanian high church officials were present at official festive occasions among the communist representatives.¹³⁷⁷ Russian church delegates to the World Council of Churches and other religious bodies supported the Soviet foreign policies.¹³⁷⁸

Sadly, for a high office, a good job, power, popularity, and income, these people were ready to sacrifice their own principles to the extent of betraying their own faith¹³⁷⁹. Wurmbrand sees these examples as proofs of his point that, in general, high church officials were communist stooges.

On the other hand, the ordinary ministers of the church were subjected to severe pressure by the communists. The Ministry of Cults had, in every town, in every city, eyes and ears through secret police agents who regularly questioned all ministers about their church members.¹³⁸⁰ The secret police in communist countries had the task of “identifying, surveilling and infiltrating religious communities in order to

¹³⁷⁴ Alexander Tomsy, “‘Pacem in Terris’ between Church and State in Czechoslovakia,” *Religion in Communist Lands* 10, no. 3 (December 1, 1982): 275–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637498208431034>.

¹³⁷⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 22.

¹³⁷⁶ Some frequently attended in Geneva the meetings of the World Council of Churches *Ibid.*, 73.

¹³⁷⁷ Velicu, 47.

¹³⁷⁸ Robert Collins, *Global Tensions in the Russian Orthodox Diaspora* (London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 48.

¹³⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *Cele Șapte Cuvinte de Pe Cruce*, 123.

¹³⁸⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 2568.

undermine, eliminate or control them from within.”¹³⁸¹ Wurmbrand tells, from experience, that this kind of dealing divided ministers in four groups: “those in prison, those who informed under pressure and tried to keep things back, those who shrugged and did what they were told and those who had acquired a taste for informing”.¹³⁸²

In the end, even if the Official Church has a troubled historical background, even if she was a church of collaborators with the communists, and even if many church high officials betrayed the Church and the ordinary Christians, Wurmbrand still loves this Church:

Never allow yourself to be discouraged by things that you see in the church. The story is told of a Jew who was converted after having seen the Vatican during the time of Borgia. He said, “A church which exists in spite of such leaders must be with God.” I love the church mostly for its ugly sides.¹³⁸³

Wurmbrand was aware that the Official Church from the countries under communist domination can endure only through some kind of compromise and cooperation with the regime.¹³⁸⁴ He believed that he understood the motivation behind the compromise. His reasoning was that, in many cases, the motivation behind the compromise was the right one:

There was nothing intrinsically wrong with this. During all church history, Christian leaders have taken contradictory attitudes in times of persecution. All had to resolve for themselves the question: ‘Is it wisest to allow the wolves, when they are numerous and strong, to devour the sheep and the shepherds? Is it wise to die heroically and have the whole church destroyed at the same time? Would it not be wise to howl with the wolves, to let them believe we belong to them, and to make it possible for at least some of the church structure to survive?’ So many Christian leaders chose to simulate friendship with the enemy. I can guarantee that the late Patriarch Justinian of Romania and the late Lutheran bishop Muller and Argay were not traitors, their intentions were the best. So were the intentions of many Baptist, Pentecostal and other official pastors.¹³⁸⁵

¹³⁸¹ Kapaló and Povedák, 1.

¹³⁸² Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 2601-2604.

¹³⁸³ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc. 1587-1589.

¹³⁸⁴ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 3534.

¹³⁸⁵ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 36.

The church needs Official Church leaders who, under communist regimes, serve God, accepting the limitations imposed by the communist dictatorships.¹³⁸⁶ Church officials bear the responsibility of the existence and preservation of broad ecclesiastical organizations, which can survive only by repeated adjustments to successive political regimes.¹³⁸⁷ Many of them accepted the compromises motivated by the thought of saving the churches and their members.¹³⁸⁸ Wurmbrand thinks that God, who is rich in mercy, understands these motives, and he urges people to follow the path of God and extend mercy and understanding to those who compromised.¹³⁸⁹

Still, obedience to the call of Christ to love all people does not mean a lack of discernment for Christians. Like Christ, Wurmbrand understands that he is called to “distinguish between sheep and wolves”¹³⁹⁰, which is why he teaches some discrimination. Hypocrites and tyrants must be loved but treated differently than beloved disciples and victims.¹³⁹¹ People who betrayed the principles of Jesus Christ should never be accepted as friends.¹³⁹²

4.2.3. *God's Tool*

Putting aside the compromise of the church and church officials, the positive thing in the Official church is the existence of real spiritual life.¹³⁹³ Many, but not all, church leaders and pastors were corrupt and indulged in compromise.¹³⁹⁴ The Official Church continued to be used by God as well. To explain this better, Wurmbrand draws again a parallel between the first-century Temple in Jerusalem and the Official Church. The Temple was a “den of thieves”, its leadership was marked by compromise, and corruption. But then, the Temple still had pious ordinary priests and devout worshippers:

¹³⁸⁶ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 42.

¹³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹³⁸⁸ For example, Polish progressist Catholics cooperated with the communist regime to reach a peaceful legal settlement for their church, even if many disagreed with a settlement with the communist regime see, Mazgaj, 34.

¹³⁸⁹ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc. 5079-5081.

¹³⁹⁰ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 116.

¹³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹² Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc.3021-3022.

¹³⁹³ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 94.

¹³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

Zacharias, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist, “were both righteous before God” (Luke 1:5,6). They were righteous in a den of thieves. “[Simeon] came by the Spirit into the temple” (into the den of thieves). “This man was just and devout ... and the Holy Spirit was upon him” (Luke 2:27,25).¹³⁹⁵

Wurmbrand’s inference from this biblical situation is that the Holy Spirit can work in temples where corruption and compromise exist on the highest level. A further biblical example of this is the prayer of the tax collector:

A publican stood in the temple, in the den of thieves, and found there no encouragement to continue in his sinful life. On the contrary, he “beat his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ ... This man went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:13,14). So a man can find salvation even in a temple which has deteriorated to the point of becoming a den of thieves. The Jewish temple was not a dead or apostate church. It was a den of thieves which the Messiah had not forsaken, in which He worshiped, in which the rituals prescribed by God were fulfilled, in which the law was taught, and in which there were many saints. Look for the saints in your church, too. Don’t forsake a church lightly or casually. Better still, be a saint.¹³⁹⁶

The equivalent is true for the Official Church. Like in the Temple in Jerusalem, people could find, in the Official Church of Wurmbrand’s time, aspects of Christian worship that directed people toward God. There was the unchanged Orthodox liturgy, nourishing the souls of the worshippers. There were the sermons that, although sometimes delivered by informers, contained parts of Scripture.¹³⁹⁷ In the Protestant Official Churches, the Lutherans, and the Presbyterians still sang the old songs and hymns.¹³⁹⁸ The divine miracle of conversion continued to happen in the Official Church. God, in the Official Church, ironically used the sermons of traitors and informers to convert people:

People are converted under the influence of men whom they know to be traitors, about whom they know that they will tell the secret police their conversions, who have to hide their faith from the very one who gave them this faith by his corrupted sermon. This is the great miracle of God cited in Leviticus 11:37 in symbolic language: "If any part of a carcass (which is, according to the Mosaic law, defiled) fall upon any sowing seed which is to be sown, it shall be clean."¹³⁹⁹

¹³⁹⁵ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc. 1269-1273.

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, loc.1273-1279.

¹³⁹⁷ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 94.

¹³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

Furthermore, Wurmbrand illustrates this paradoxical reality by a specific example from the Soviet Union. The Baptist pastor Karev¹⁴⁰⁰ was, in 1960, one of the leaders of the Official Baptist church and was also an eager collaborator. Still, the treacherous behaviour of the pastor did not deter people from his church to continue to seek and to worship God:

The rank-and-file Christian knew that his pastor was a traitor. But in the show church in Moscow this same pastor had to read from the Bible. The songs praised the Savior. The sermon, though not delivered in the right spirit, mentioned the name of Jesus. What a mighty work of God it was that thousands of Christians did not take offense at the wicked character of their pastor but thronged the church to hear the name of Christ and to adore Him. One can worship God even in a religious service led by a Judas. This same thing happened in the Soviet Orthodox Church.¹⁴⁰¹

Therefore, Wurmbrand urges people not to be judgmental of the leaders of the Official Churches, branded traitors by many, but to remember them “lovingly in prayer”.¹⁴⁰² God, who is rich in mercy, comprehends their reasons. People must follow the example of God and, instead of judgment, they must extend mercy and understanding to those who compromised with the communist regimes.¹⁴⁰³

4.3. THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH

The strand that colourfully fills the tapestry of the Variegated Christian Church is the thread of the Underground church. The Underground church is a reality that emerges when the Official Christian church is subjected to powerful institutional pressure and persecution from the authoritarian state. Wurmbrand’s way of addressing the problem of the Underground Church can be divided into three main categories. First, there are affirmations that can be categorized as general observations, and definitions, about this church. Secondly, Wurmbrand talks about the corpus of beliefs of the Underground Church which, under persecution, is not organized into a comprehensive system, it was biblical but rather unsystematic.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 1003.

¹⁴⁰¹ Ibid., loc.1007-1011.

¹⁴⁰² Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc. 5079-5081.

¹⁴⁰³ Ibid.

Thirdly, Wurmbrand discusses the way the Underground Church is organized and how she should organize herself to function efficiently in a hostile environment.

4.3.1. General Observations

First, when Wurmbrand addresses the problem of the Underground Church, definitions are needed for this peculiar reality. Covert religious communities in modern times are not a totally new phenomenon; they existed before the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent rise of the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰⁴ But, under the long communist reign in Eastern Europe and beyond, they reappeared in different forms. The more all-encompassing the communist control is over a country, the more the Christian church from there will have to go underground.¹⁴⁰⁵

For Wurmbrand, the expression *Underground Church* is a generic term that gathers under one umbrella the description of the multi-faceted phenomenon that took place in the Christian church as a reaction to communist persecution:

"Underground Church" is a name given by the communists, as well as by Western researchers of the religious situation in the East to a secret organization which formed spontaneously in all communist lands. The members of the Underground Church don't call their organization by this name. They call themselves Christians, believers, children of God. But they lead an underground work, they meet underground, they spread the Gospel in clandestine meetings, attended sometimes by the very foreigners who claim that they did not see the Underground Church. It is an adequate name given by the adversaries and by those who look lovingly from the outside to this wonderful secret organization.¹⁴⁰⁶

As Wurmbrand observes, the Soviet communists used the term Underground Church or religious underground as early as 1920 when they were referring to religious groups which lacked official legal status because they were denied registration or were banned by the state.¹⁴⁰⁷ Reacting to the punitive way the communist regimes approached religious matters, individuals and religious communities reorganized their religious communities, their Churches "non-official study groups, grass-root-movements for promoting religious socialization, a clergy

¹⁴⁰⁴ Kapaló and Povedák, 5.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 96.

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Kapaló and Povedák, 5.

not admitted to services in the officially acknowledged Church, (...) etc., constituted an underground church".¹⁴⁰⁸

The Underground Church existed behind the Iron Curtain; she refused the compromise, and kept the truth of God and gave birth to thousands upon thousands of martyrs.¹⁴⁰⁹ This Church should have had seniority in the Universal church of modern times because she gave, in the 20th century, the greatest number of men who were tortured and died for Christ.¹⁴¹⁰ This Church existed in one third of the world¹⁴¹¹ and the Underground Church from the Soviet Union, Russia, China, Korea, and from the communist satellite countries, has opposed communism from the beginning.¹⁴¹² In every context, each Church had a body of believers who refused to totally surrender to the communist regime and organized itself in order preserve their religious values.¹⁴¹³

The existence of the Underground Church was often denied. Western visitors, sometimes high church officials who visited¹⁴¹⁴ the communist countries, doubted the existence of the Underground Church because during their visit, they did not encounter anything that would fit such a description.¹⁴¹⁵ Moreover, many of these visitors spoke directly with Christians from the Official Church of communist countries who denied the existence of the Underground Church.¹⁴¹⁶ Wurmbrand uses analogies to explain why the Underground church is not visible and not easily found. First, you must look in the right place for her:

If these same church leaders had travelled to Palestine 2,000 years ago, they would not have met with the Son of God. They would have been on an official visit to the chief priests. Their banquets would not have been attended by Jesus. Quite by accident they might have been some prisoners being led through the temple yard, none of whom gave

¹⁴⁰⁸ Tomka, 11-12.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 27.

¹⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴¹¹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 33.

¹⁴¹² Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 30.

¹⁴¹³ Kapaló and Povedák, 8.

¹⁴¹⁴ Wurmbrand tells of a conversation he had with a bishop from World Council of Churches who visited Romania and Russia and had doubts about the existence of the Underground Church, see Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 29.

¹⁴¹⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 107.

¹⁴¹⁶ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 81.

any outward sign of being anyone special. The visitors would have said that the report of the Son of God living in Palestine was false.¹⁴¹⁷

Secondly, because of her secretive nature, the Underground Church is, in many ways, similar to a spy network. People can travel through Western countries for years and not encounter, for example, a Soviet spy network. This does not prove anything; it certainly does not prove the inexistence of the network. It is logical to assume that spies are not that stupid as to reveal themselves to inquisitive travellers.¹⁴¹⁸ The Underground Church learned from bitter experience to be careful in revealing her secrets and in disclosing the locations of where her members meet to foreigners¹⁴¹⁹ because the danger of communist infiltration and then betrayal was very real.

The Underground Church is not totally separated from the Official Church. There are no well-defined separating barriers between the two churches, the two are interwoven.¹⁴²⁰ The new entity was often not an opposing body to the Official Church, but it was an extension of it.¹⁴²¹ The Underground Church frequently acts under the cover of the Official Church.¹⁴²²

Members of the Underground Church are in important positions¹⁴²³ in the Official Church, except those who have to be in hiding. These members strengthen the church and maintain the fighting aspect of the Christian faith.¹⁴²⁴ In many instances, pastors of the Official Churches from communist lands like Yugoslavia, Poland, and Hungary defied the limitations imposed upon them by the communists and performed parallel secret underground ministries.¹⁴²⁵ The Underground Church is similar to an iceberg, "It is mostly below the surface, but a small part of it is often in

¹⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 102.

¹⁴²⁰ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 93.

¹⁴²¹ Tomka, 12.

¹⁴²² Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 3534-3535.

¹⁴²³ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 27.

¹⁴²⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 95.

¹⁴²⁵ Ibid., 106.

the open".¹⁴²⁶ She mostly works in secret but when she becomes strong enough she dares to conduct semi-public work frightening the communists.

The Underground Church, like Jesus Christ and like the early Christian Church, through her actions, attract a lot of hatred.¹⁴²⁷ The communists ruthlessly persecute the Underground Church because they understand that she is a very powerful and dangerous anti-Communist force:¹⁴²⁸

They recognized in it the only effective resistance left and just the kind of resistance, the spiritual resistance, which, if left unhindered, would undermine their atheistic power. They recognized, as only the devil can, an immediate threat to them. They knew if a man believed in Christ he' would never be a mindless, witting subject. They knew they could imprison men, but they couldn't imprison faith in God. And so they fought very hard.¹⁴²⁹

Wurmbrand is sure that the Underground Church is not a discouraged, downtrodden aspect of Christianity, rather, for him, she is the main stronghold of Christianity.¹⁴³⁰ She is the last hope of those under communist domination.¹⁴³¹ In spite of the harsh opposition and persecution, the Underground Church flourishes in the communist realm, "in the Soviet Union, in China and in almost all communist lands".¹⁴³² In Russia, not only the Protestant Church but the Orthodox Church as well, underwent dramatic changes. Orthodox priests and monks were killed by the communists. A telling example is the 1918 massacre of the monks from St. Trinity Liutikov monastery. All of the monks were shot by the communists, together with eight villagers who tried to aid the monks to defend the monastery from the communist armed attacks.¹⁴³³

In the midst of the relentless religious persecution, imprisonments, and lack of religious paraphernalia, the Christians found a true connection with God through the Holy Spirit. This resulted in a genuine spiritual awakening amongst the Orthodox,

¹⁴²⁶ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴²⁷ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.768-769.

¹⁴²⁸ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 50.

¹⁴²⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 32.

¹⁴³⁰ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 93.

¹⁴³¹ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 30.

¹⁴³² Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 125.

¹⁴³³ Milena Benovska, *Orthodox Revivalism in Russia: Driving Forces and Moral Quests* (London & New York: Routledge, 2021), 143.

and the Orthodox Underground gave birth to great martyrs.¹⁴³⁴ The same was true in most of the countries¹⁴³⁵ where persecution existed.

4.3.2. Corpus of Beliefs

The second problem, after the articulation of a working definition for the Underground Church, is the definition of the corpus of beliefs, the theology that represented the foundation of the Underground Church. Wurmbrand makes it very clear that the diverse multi-ethnic, international, Christian phenomenon, called, by him, the Underground Church, does not have a very carefully articulated systematic theology. In addition, the Underground Church had problems of doctrinal purity. Nonetheless, the Underground Church adopted a simple and powerful biblical faith. This faith is mainly based on the sacrificial paradigm of Jesus Christ, on unity with the Man of Sorrows, and on the model of the early Church that followed the model of Christ regardless of the costs.

4.3.2.1. Unsystematic Theology

The underlying motive for the unsystematic nature of the Underground Church's theology is linked directly to the extraordinary existence of this persecuted Church. The Church often lived in independent cells without a centralised hierarchical structure. Given this diversity, The Underground Church was open to the danger of heterodoxy.¹⁴³⁶

After a communist dictatorship that lasted half a century, the Christians had very few or no Bibles nor other Christian literature. The pastors of the Underground Church were not seminary trained theologians because there were no seminaries to train them in Christian theology.¹⁴³⁷ Unfortunately, this also meant that they had

¹⁴³⁴ Wurmbrand mentions disappearance of the aged archbishop Yermogen of Kaluga who dared to denounce the shameful collaboration of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchy and the communist regime from Moscow, see Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 124.

¹⁴³⁵ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 11, 12. A number of communist atrocities against Christians are listed, amongst them the murder of Premysl Coufal, a priest of the Czechoslovakian Underground Church.

¹⁴³⁶ Tomka, 107.

¹⁴³⁷ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 110.

weak qualifications for their role, but in the case of China, they compensated their sketchy theological training with a religious zeal that led many to martyrdom.¹⁴³⁸

Wurmbrand, to help his readers grasp this enormous problem, paints, with broad strokes, the grim picture of the overwhelming need of Russia's religious landscape:

Russia has practically no Bibles. In a country of 200 million inhabitants, the last 20,000 copies were printed in 1955—and this after a pause in printing of at least thirty years. Compare this figure against the figure of 3,666 registered baptisms in the Official Baptist Church for the one year of 1964. In addition, nobody can count the numbers of converts in the Underground Church or among the Orthodox and others. Records are not available. (...) (The Anglican Digest, organ of the Episcopal church of U.S.A., estimates in its January 1968 issue that forty-five million Russians practice their religion 'underground'. Where are the Bibles for all these?) (...) And if there are practically no Bibles, how much less can we expect there to be textbooks on Christian doctrine, or theological magazines.¹⁴³⁹

Subsequently, the Underground church knows virtually no doctrinal debates. There are no inter-church arguments about doctrinal tenets like child or adult baptism, papal infallibility, the interpretation of prophecies, or eschatology.¹⁴⁴⁰ The doctrinal sermons preached by the underground ministers were rare.¹⁴⁴¹ The Underground Christians identified loosely with different Christian denominations, but their religion was basic, "their religion is love toward God and neighbour, and faith in Christ".¹⁴⁴²

The lack of doctrinal teaching and the problems with doctrinal purity from the Underground Church should not cause the questioning of the authenticity of her faith. Wurmbrand does not question the need for sound doctrinal teaching; he only stresses the importance of having genuine faith and not only theoretical doctrines,¹⁴⁴³ and he was convinced that this church possessed that. Inspired by the Anglican theologian and martyr Hugh Latimer (1487-1555), Wurmbrand was convinced that God had the power to preserve His church in the midst of all adversity and doctrinal challenges. If Latimer thought that people can be saved in the Catholic Church, seen

¹⁴³⁸ Kindopp, 98.

¹⁴³⁹ Wurmbrand reports this figures in 1968 to his western readers, see Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 38.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 91.

¹⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁴⁴² Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 39.

¹⁴⁴³ Ibid.

by some as idolatrous and doctrinally incorrect, then the same must be true about the Underground Church, in spite of her doctrinal shortcomings:

Bishop Latimer, during his trial by the Catholics, was asked if he considered all his Catholic predecessors were damned because they believed in such things as holy images and prayers to the Virgin Mary, a faith which he did not share. His answer was as follows: 'God knows his elect and diligently watches and keeps them, so that all things serve to their salvation. (...) This answer of Latimer's made clear that it was possible to belong to a Church, considered by some Protestants as idolatrous and erroneous, and still be saved.¹⁴⁴⁴

Wurmbrand's personal experience mirrors the experience of the Underground Church. He lived through astonishing circumstances and experienced extraordinary states of mind through communist persecution and imprisonment. He passed through similar experiences as tens of thousands of persecuted Christians in Communist prisons, subjected to all kinds of deprivations, starvation, and unimaginable tortures.¹⁴⁴⁵ Of the long years spent in communist prisons, three were spent in solitary confinement.¹⁴⁴⁶ Wurmbrand had no Bible in prison, no access to any kind of Christian literature or theological literature, and while in solitary confinement he could not verify the orthodoxy of his thoughts through the input of others because he lacked the company of other Christians.¹⁴⁴⁷

A significant part of the theological and political thinking of Wurmbrand from this time was preserved in his mind, composed in the form of verses that were ingrained in his memory through repetition¹⁴⁴⁸ and were later, after his release, transcribed in the form of sermons. Books like *Sermons in Solitary Confinement* (1969), *If Prison Walls Could Speak* (1972), and *100 Prison Meditations* (1982) written after his release, contain these so-called sermons. The unspeakable circumstances drove Wurmbrand to the brink of a psychological abyss. He acknowledges being, many times, on the threshold of madness, close to losing his sanity.¹⁴⁴⁹ His faith was subjected to terrible pressure,

¹⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 40. Wurmbrand quotes from a sermon preached by Latimer at Stamford in 1550, see Hugh Latimer, *Sermons by Hugh Latimer* (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL), 210-211.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 8.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc. 81-83.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 10.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 7.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 10.

“There were times when I was near to apostasy. Happily, just on those worst days I was not tortured. Probably I would have cracked then. The tortures happened only after I had overcome despair”.¹⁴⁵⁰ In his opinion, the same was true about many underground Christians from under the Iron Curtain. In the Soviet Union, many Christians were interned in psychological asylums and „after a while, some lost their minds.”¹⁴⁵¹

Wurmbrand holds the opinion that the theological thinking of the Christians from the Underground Church, including his own, even if they are not systematic and are sometimes of questionable orthodoxy, still represents a treasure of the universal church.¹⁴⁵² The thoughts conceived in extreme circumstances by the persecuted Christians are precious and must be cherished and preserved with the “respect due to sacred things”.¹⁴⁵³ They must not be examined too much from a doctrinal perspective because they represent the cries of the suffering and they are a living proof of the true Christian faith.¹⁴⁵⁴ Oftentimes, the sinuous path of Christian living in extreme circumstances defies dogma and reason. Wurmbrand finds biblical precedent for his argument:

These sermons are not to be judged for their dogmatic content. I did not live on dogma then. Nobody can. The soul feeds on Christ, not on teachings about him. From the dogmatic point of view, David and Job were wrong to argue with God. (...) Dogmatists could even find fault with Jesus himself. He ought not to have trembled in Gethsemane. But life, even religious life, is not concerned with dogmas. It pursues its own course, and that course seems foolish to reason.¹⁴⁵⁵

Christians faced with long years of persecution, sufferings, and with the prospect of imminent death¹⁴⁵⁶ cannot think systematically.¹⁴⁵⁷ Men, in general, cannot think systematically even when they are subjected to small sufferings like a bad toothache. Certainly, people who endure prolonged sufferings, Christians who are carrying a

¹⁴⁵⁰ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 9.

¹⁴⁵¹ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 10.

¹⁴⁵² Ibid.

¹⁴⁵³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 7-8.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus*, 51.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 185. In a discussion with a Soviet Underground pastor Wurmbrand agrees that people in the midst of sufferings cannot think systematically.

cross, do not think theologically in an ordered, rational, and systematic way.¹⁴⁵⁸ The Underground Christian is a follower of Christ, sharing his sufferings and crucifixion. The Bible shows that not even Jesus Christ, in the midst of his sufferings, was thinking systematically:

If a man is crucified with Christ, how can he think systematically? Can there be that kind of thought on a cross? Jesus himself thought unsystematically on the cross. He began with forgiveness; he dreamed of a paradise in which even a robber had a place; then, he despaired that perhaps there might be no place in paradise even for him, the Son of God. He felt himself forsaken. (...) Then he surrendered his spirit into his Father's hand. But there followed no serenity, only a loud cry. (...) Systematic theology of any kind is impossible in Christianity."¹⁴⁵⁹

For Wurmbrand, systematic theology is impossible for Christians in intense sufferings, and theological system fail to express the troubled experience of the persecuted Christians. The extreme existential experiences of incarcerated Christians with their Lord and Savior cannot be encapsulated in a rigid theological system.¹⁴⁶⁰ In his books of sermons, he recorded his thoughts from prison as they were at that time. These thoughts, as he openly admits, were often extreme, bordering on madness, and he no longer agrees with many of them.¹⁴⁶¹ Otherwise, Wurmbrand declares about himself that he is more of a conservative Christian thinker and not an original theological thinker:

I have no original ideas to offer. I am not an original religious thinker. I believe that theology is like wine: the older the better. If you were to ask what I think about one or other religious matter, my answer would in general be that of any average Evangelical pastor, with one of the slight variations which are the beauty and privilege of Protestantism, and the result of the liberty which it has brought. But I could never define, finally and absolutely, what my theology is (...)¹⁴⁶²

The theology of the Underground Church is simple and unsystematic. This, however, does not mean that the belief set of the Underground Church is lacking a sound base.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 186.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. Wurmbrand thinks that he comes close to Kierkegaard's assessment who also denied that a Christian can ever speak academically about Christ.

¹⁴⁶¹ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.83-84.

¹⁴⁶² Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 186.

4.3.2.2. Based on the Sacrificial Paradigm of Jesus Christ

The faith of the Underground Christians is firmly set on the bedrock of biblical teaching. The Underground Church's faith is centred on the person of Jesus Christ, the suffering Savior. His work on earth consisted of preaching the message of the Kingdom of God. Jesus, like John the Baptist, preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near", and he relentlessly confronted the hypocritical ways of the religious authorities of his days.¹⁴⁶³ The Underground Church must follow the example of Jesus and preach, without fear and compromise, the Gospel of Christ¹⁴⁶⁴ even if this leads to the cross. Also, the life of Christ calls the Church to follow the way of Christ. Christ had no earthly possessions, no place He could call His own, and considered the spiritual ties with those who believed in Him and followed Him more important than the direct blood ties of His family. The Underground Church embodied the old Franciscan motto, *Nudus nudum Christum sequi*, naked following the naked Christ:

(...) the Underground Church, the church which fulfills the old Latin saying *Nudus nudum Christi sequi* (naked, follow the naked Christ). In the communist camp, the Son of Man and those who are His have nowhere to lay their heads. Christians there don't build houses for themselves. To what good? They will be confiscated at their first arrest. (...) There you don't bury your father, neither do you say farewell to your family before following Christ. Who is your mother, your brother, your sister? You are, in this respect, like Jesus. Mother and brother are for you only those who fulfill the will of God.¹⁴⁶⁵

In the last day spent with His disciples before His arrest, Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of Matthew 26:18, is fully conscious about the shame and sufferings that will follow. He utters the words, "My time is at hand", signifying a time of suffering that He will gladly suffer for the salvation of humanity.¹⁴⁶⁶ The underground followers of Christ must follow the same path of giving their bodies as a sacrifice to God. This could mean accepting this burden from God, surrendering themselves to mockery and beatings, even until death.¹⁴⁶⁷ Through the cross of Christ, people can acknowledge

¹⁴⁶³ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 78.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 31, Wurmbrand gives the example of fearless preaching of two Underground Romanian Christians who confronted with the Gospel Romanian Prime Minister Gheorghiu Dej. They were imprisoned but according to Wurmbrand's information their sacrifice in the end led to the Prime Ministers conversion to Christianity.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 79. Wurmbrand makes a mistake in citing the Franciscan motto, the correct form is: *Nudus nudum Christum sequi*.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 2615-2618.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

the seriousness of sin and God's immense love toward mankind¹⁴⁶⁸. The sufferings of Christ on the cross have immense value: "The cross is the will of the Father, the honour of the Son, the joy of the Spirit, the jewel of angels, the assurance of the faithful, the glory of Paul".¹⁴⁶⁹

The Underground Christian must bear the cross as Christ did, and more he "has to be more than the bearer of a heavy cross; he shares Christ's crucifixion. The pains of Christ are his, and the pains of all creation".¹⁴⁷⁰ Jesus suffered on the cross both physical and emotional agony. He suffered in the presence of His mother, who suffered a terrible anguish seeing the agonizing death of her son. The Underground Christian must be prepared to suffer all kind of physical and emotional distress, like Christ, because the glory of God is at stake and when the stakes are so high, human sentiment must be secondary.¹⁴⁷¹ The death of Jesus was for the glory of God the Father and Jesus commands to all of His followers to die to sin and if necessary, to be ready to give up their earthly lives in submission to his tenets¹⁴⁷².

Jesus told His disciples that "whosoever will follow"¹⁴⁷³ to "Take up your cross, and follow Me". That is the role of the Christian, to follow the commands of Jesus Christ, to be the "Christ-follower".¹⁴⁷⁴ It is highly unusual to be a Christian and to avoid the cross of Christ. Suffering is unavoidable to be a Christian, means, for Wurmbrand, to become a co-sufferer with Jesus Christ. The more the Christian shares His pain, the more he will receive from His truth.¹⁴⁷⁵

The sight of Jesus Christ on the cross, speaking from a human perspective, was repulsive. His hair was in disorder and His forehead disfigured by bleeding wounds. His eyes were surrounded by dark circles and His face was covered by His blood and

¹⁴⁶⁸ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 40.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., citing with adaptations from the Homily on the Passage (Matt. xxvi. 19), 'Father If It Be Possible Let This Cup Pass from Me,' Etc., and Against Marcionists and Manichæans., see St. Chrysostom, On the Priesthood; Ascetic Treatises; Select Homilies and Letters; Homilies on the Statutes, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. *NPNF 1-09* (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL.), 280.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 186.

¹⁴⁷¹ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹⁴⁷² Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.335-337.

¹⁴⁷³ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Wurmbrand, *From the Lips of Children*, 115., children must see that their parents are cross bearers

¹⁴⁷⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Oracles of God*, loc 688-689.

the spit of the mockers¹⁴⁷⁶. Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:2, that spoke of His appearance, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him". The same is true about persecuted Christians.¹⁴⁷⁷ Their faces mirror one of the faces of God, the face of the suffering Christ, the Man of Sorrows.¹⁴⁷⁸

Still looking from another, a higher perspective, Wurmbrand feels that the sufferings and the cross of Christ crowned the Son of God with a special beauty:

But the beauty of the Son was never more clearly seen than when those very things came to pass. (...) The blood which flowed from His whipped body clothed Him in greater splendor than any robe which His mother, or admiring women, might have woven for Him in earlier days. Hanging on the cross, He revealed the glory of God much better than when He freely walked through the fields and streets of Palestine.¹⁴⁷⁹

The same is true about the followers of Christ in the history of Christianity. The persecuted, the mocked, and rejected Underground Christians, though physically unsightly, still have a special beauty. They prove to be the greatest of men.¹⁴⁸⁰ The Underground Church, faced with the fierce communist persecution, mocked and publicly ridiculed, is spiritually beautiful because she is the bride of Christ and by renouncing earthly things, labours like Christ for the eternal good of humanity.¹⁴⁸¹

The sacrificial life of the persecuted Christian who is prepared to give his blood and even his life for his faith proves that he is a member of a special fellowship. Borrowing words from the theologian and missionary doctor to Africa, Albert Schweitzer, Wurmbrand calls this special fellowship, "the sacred fellowship of those who have the mark of pain".¹⁴⁸² The members of the Underground Church are bound together and, are bound to Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, with the undefeatable bond of love. Wurmbrand sees this special bond expressed in a letter that arrived to him in the west smuggled out from under the Iron Curtain. In this letter, an Underground Christian voices his passionate devotion to Jesus, saying that "We don't pray to be

¹⁴⁷⁶ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 35.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., Wurmbrand describes his own experience in prison. He believes that his unattractive face after years of suffering and deprivations resembles the suffering Christ.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 8.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁸² Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 121.

better Christians, but that we may be the only kind of Christians God means us to be: Christlike Christians, that is, Christians who bear willingly the Cross for Gods glory".¹⁴⁸³ The Underground Christians are men from different layers of society, but they are in a special fellowship because they are all men of sorrows, men who bear the marks of sufferings like Christ their Master.¹⁴⁸⁴

The suffering of the persecuted Christians under communist regimes is allowed by God only for a limited time. The members of the Underground know that the earthly life is a temporary existence, suffering is temporary, and the true life comes after death in Heaven.¹⁴⁸⁵ The Underground Church "worships Christ Crucified, the suffering servant, despised and rejected, who through his agony redeems the world."¹⁴⁸⁶ That is why their scope is not limited by the perspective of the existing problems; they pass on the Gospel message to the following generations looking to the future.¹⁴⁸⁷

Wurmbrand trusts God that the temporary sufferings have a well-defined purpose, "If carrying a heavy cross today did not mean preparation for future glory, our God would not allow us to endure so much suffering".¹⁴⁸⁸ God allows suffering for the benefit of the Christian.¹⁴⁸⁹ Those who become members of the body of Christ have the privilege to receive the good news of the Gospel, to suffer like Christ, to die in pain with Him and things do not stop here:

'Jesus said, "Whosoever lives and believes in me will never die." And I believe these words of Jesus more than the rifles which will be pointed at me tonight. I believe them more than the bullets that will pierce my chest tonight. I believe them more than the open grave which is already waiting for me. I am not my body. I am an eternal spirit. Tonight I shall not die. Jesus is a gentleman; he will keep his word. Tonight, by his grace, I will enter through gates of pearl into the golden city. I will see and hear angels playing on

¹⁴⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 187.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 27.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Richard Madsen, *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 146.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 184.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 94.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Total Blessing*, 46.

their harps. I will be with the saints and the finest men of all the centuries, and above all, I will rest on Jesus' bosom, and there I will wait for my boyfriend to come too.¹⁴⁹⁰

The members of the body of Christ who face obstacles and suffering ascend to spiritual heights.¹⁴⁹¹ They share in the victory of Christ and are also resurrected with Him in glory.¹⁴⁹² There is a strong connection between suffering and greatness in Christianity.¹⁴⁹³ The future is bright for the suffering Christian, even if his life on this earth ends in following the path set by the Suffering Savior.

4.3.2.3. Based on Unity with The Man of Sorrows

The fellowship of suffering men, the Underground Church, for Wurmbrand, is the real authentic Christian Church because she is the body of Christ. She is ready to suffer, and she suffered, under Communist oppression, “as her Master for the glory of God and the good of mankind”.¹⁴⁹⁴ The ultimate reason for the necessity of suffering is shrouded in mystery, known only to God. The modern disciple of Christ must follow Christ’s model of accepting sufferings:

You have to suffer for some hidden purpose of God, about which you know as little as the white corpuscle knows why it has to die. Let it be enough for you that you are suffering for the Kingdom of God. All suffering serves this final cause. Jesus looked on his suffering like this.¹⁴⁹⁵

The suffering Savior and His body, the suffering Church, share a special uniting relationship. The Christian, from his conversion, is called to sacrifice; the notion of sacrifice is implicitly present in his conversion. His conversion is made possible only because someone died for him. By accepting the substitutionary death of the Son of God, the convert receives the privilege to sacrifice himself for the glory of God and for the sake of his equals.¹⁴⁹⁶ This way, the Christian receives the right “to die to sin

¹⁴⁹⁰ Wurmbrand is inspired and strengthened in his convictions by the final words of a Romanian Underground Christian, the young woman Lydia Arsenescou, who on the night of her execution spoke these words to her fellow prisoners, see Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 118.

¹⁴⁹¹ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 59-60.

¹⁴⁹² Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.128-129.

¹⁴⁹³ Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus*, 22.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 10.

¹⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc.129-134.

and to the world and its laws. The reality of a conversion is in becoming one with Him. It is shameful and abominable to accept His substitutionary death otherwise".¹⁴⁹⁷ Wurmbrand believes that the Christian, after his conversion, receives from Jesus, the real calling of becoming one with Him, with His body, and His mission:

Then came the real question, the thing He had had in mind from the beginning. "What if I incorporate your being into Mine, if you become part of My body, if you deny yourself as an independent self, and I will live in you henceforth and you will be 'crucified with me' (Galatians 2:20), 'buried with me' (Romans 6:4), and share the fellowship of My suffering (Philippians 3:10)? People in churches will sing, 'safe in arms of Jesus,' while you will be safe as an arm of Jesus, nailed like His to a cross, but also imparting goodness like His. Do you wish to become My co-worker for the salvation of mankind, alleviating sufferings, filling up 'what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ' (Colossians 1:24), and imparting eternal life to others?"¹⁴⁹⁸

Wurmbrand believes that the unity, the oneness, of the believer with God and Christ is a notion that can be found starting in the Old Testament. Starting in Genesis with the Creation and following with the promises made to Abraham, the patriarch Wurmbrand sees a calling from God to unity with Him:

Each believer who comes to the One does not stop at being a second who obeys and adores the first, but becomes one with the One. God is God Abraham, and Abraham is Abraham God. The notion of oneness in Hebrew differs from that in the European languages. (...) Such is our unity with God. He is God Abraham, God Isaac, God Nina, God Richard, and God you. These are His names.¹⁴⁹⁹

Also, King David prophetically, in Psalm 16, spoke of the union of the faithful with God and about the hope that this unity gave to him:

David sang, "You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life" (Psalm 16:10,11). (...) Why then did David use the first person, not the third, speaking about the Messiah as if He were David himself? This is because believers and the Messiah are not two persons, but one.¹⁵⁰⁰

Furthermore, in Psalm 69, Wurmbrand sees an identification of David and the Savior:

¹⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., loc.112-120.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 1842-1846.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 1213-1228.

David speaks about the Savior using the first person, exactly as the Savior uses the first person when He speaks about me, the sinner for whom He dies. Psalm 69 is also Messianic. It is Christ Himself who speaks through the pen of David: "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (verse 21), and "zeal for Your house has eaten me up" (verse 9).¹⁵⁰¹

The same message of unity with God can also be found in the New Testament in the writings of the apostles John and Paul:

(...) the one true gospel on which Paul and John insisted was this doctrine of oneness with God. Away with the speculations of righteous men about a God outside themselves! These speculations, of narrow-minded bigot or broad-minded liberal, will be false if there is no union with God, in whom problems and divergences disappear. Therefore don't be narrow-minded, and don't be broad-minded either. Don't be! Blessed is the person whose epitaph is like that of a saint of old: 'Hic jacet nemo' (Here lies no one.) Christ is all.¹⁵⁰²

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians, writes that the believers are "of His flesh and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30). Wurmbrand takes the unity between Christ and the Christian literally. In his opinion, a figurative understanding of the unity with Christ cannot fully explain the text from Ephesians 5:30, how figuratively someone can become his flesh and his bones. For Wurmbrand, the figurative interpretation of the oneness with Christ, or the mystical interpretation, cannot express or explain the reality because neither is a biblical category. The relationship of Christ and Christian is a complete identification, a complete union:

It is a common expression that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, but it is not biblical. The words "symbolic" and "mystic" never occur in Scripture. We are called His body, period. (...) It is not Christ's members who suffer or rejoice: it is always Christ Himself. The identification is complete. Christ does not say that He will suffer ignominy for someone else's foolishness and wrongs, but for His own. He has identified with the sinner.¹⁵⁰³

The Christian and Christ become wholly one. The followers of Christ experience the reality of an incredible relationship with their Creator and their Savior:

¹⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰² Wurmbrand, *The Total Blessing*, 34.

¹⁵⁰³ Ibid., 1220-1224.

We lose our 'mindedness' in the holy embrace in which the Eternal and the believer have become one. Here all distinctions between broad-and narrow-mindedness lose their significance, along with the distinction between selfishness and unselfishness?¹⁵⁰⁴

Moreover, Wurmbrand believes that his position on the oneness of Christ and the Christian is vindicated by earlier Christian thought as well. He finds similar ideas in the thinking of Christian thinkers from different ages. Early on in the history of Christianity, St. Ignatius, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, while exhorting Christians to maintain unity, writes that Jesus Christ is “our inseparable life”.¹⁵⁰⁵ The thoughts of St. Thomas Aquinas are another example. In his *Summa Theologica*, explaining how Christ’s passion brought salvation by way of atonement, he addresses the mystical unity between Christ and the Christians, “The head and members are as one mystic person (quasi una persona mystica¹⁵⁰⁶); and therefore, Christ's satisfaction belongs to all the faithful as being His members”.¹⁵⁰⁷

Meister Eckhart, the medieval Dominican mystic, in his mystical sermons, urges the Christian to become one with the Son of God if he wants to know God: “Therefore, if you would know God, you must not merely be like the Son, you must be the Son yourself”.¹⁵⁰⁸ Wurmbrand, inspired by this text about the unity of the believer with God, takes things a little further, believing that God could also be found in suffering Christians under Nazi and communist oppression:

Those who do not seek God in suffering men will not find Him. Meister Eckhart says, “You seek something through God, and you are like somebody who would make out of God a candle to use for its light. Once you have found what you sought, you throw away the candle. (...) But those who love God for Himself, not only for His gifts, love Him also in suffering men. (...) When Joan of Arc was in prison... She was like Christ, utterly forsaken. ...This has been true also in modern times, under the Nazis and the Communists.”¹⁵⁰⁹

¹⁵⁰⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Total Blessing*, 33-34.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 34., citing from Ignatius, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians,” in ANF01, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL), 141.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Volume 2: Spiritual Master (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1996), 148.

¹⁵⁰⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL), III.q.48, a.2, ro.2, 5154. Cited in Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 34.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 117.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc. 766-774. Wurmbrand cites from the 14th sermon of Meister Eckhart, see Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, 117.

St. Catherine of Siena, the 14th century Christian mystic, revealed to her confessors that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her while she was meditating and told her: “Do you know, daughter, who you are, and who I am? If you know these two things, you will be blest. You are she who is not; whereas I am He who is”.¹⁵¹⁰ These words, for Wurmbrand, mean another way of expressing identification with God:

To come to God is another way of saying to come to know your true self, to know the One whose image and likeness you bear, to know the only real “I.” St. Catherine of Siena dreamed that Jesus said to her, “I am He who is, you are she who is not.”¹⁵¹¹

In the theology of Martin Luther, a similar idea can be found when he explains the special relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ. Christ appropriates the sins of mankind, and Luther, in his *Commentary on Galatians*, makes it clear that faith unites the Christian intimately with Christ, and the two become one,¹⁵¹² “The Christian is Christ”.¹⁵¹³ Wurmbrand holds that turning the phrase the other way around is also valid: “By the same token, we could say, “Christ is the Christian.” Identified with Him, we must share His fate”.¹⁵¹⁴

Furthermore, Wurmbrand comes across the idea of a special fellowship between the Christian and Christ in the thoughts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as well. In one of his prison poems, *Christians and Pagans*, written in July 1944, he illustrates the difference between a Christian and a pagan. What differentiates a Christian from a pagan is that “Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving”.¹⁵¹⁵ The relationship, the unity between Christ and Christian implies sharing the sufferings: “It seems that Bonhoeffer was right when he said in one of his prison poems that we are involved not so much with a Savior to whom we can appeal for our needs, but one whose sufferings we have to share”.¹⁵¹⁶

¹⁵¹⁰ Bl. Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena: The Classic on Her Life and Accomplishments as Recorded by Her Spiritual Director* (TAN Books, 2009), 62.

¹⁵¹¹ Wurmbrand, *Victorious Faith*, loc.86-88.

¹⁵¹² Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: CCEL, 1999), 48.

¹⁵¹³ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 34.

¹⁵¹⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Total Blessing*, 34.

¹⁵¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*, 167.

¹⁵¹⁶ Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus*, 37.

Finally, the Chinese church leader Watchman Nee, imprisoned by the communist regime for being considered an “anti-revolutionary”¹⁵¹⁷ in his book *The Release of the Spirit*, urges Christians to attain a constant relationship, a constant unbroken connection with God.¹⁵¹⁸ Watchman Nee’s teaching strengthens Wurmbrand’s conviction about the identification of Christ and the Christian, about the unity that can exist between the two:

In his book, *The Release of the Spirit*, Watchman Nee, who died in a Chinese jail, took this thought the furthest when he wrote, “If we have to remember to pray, this shows that our outer man has not been broken; for if it were, unceasing communion with the Lord would exist.” Christians do not have a Lord, because this implies one other than them. Christians are one with the Lord, a part of His mystical body. Having nothing of our own, but being one with the compassionate Lord, we look with His eyes upon this troubled world.¹⁵¹⁹

Convinced that the unity of the Christian with Christ is biblical and has the backing of Christian thinkers over the ages, Wurmbrand boldly declares that he rejects any kind of religion that does not accept this. The only religion worth accepting is one that celebrates this union: “I don’t accept as my religion anything apart from union between bride and bridegroom. All other religion is fornication, idolatry. I will soar where the Truth, which sages on earth call by different names, is one”¹⁵²⁰ In the Christian, nothing else but only Christ, the Great Sufferer, the man of Sorrows, must live.¹⁵²¹

Wurmbrand takes this idea to the extreme in his *My Correspondence with Jesus*. In his imaginary letters addressed to Jesus in prison, when talking about mystical unity, he goes as far as alluding even to non-Christian mystical ideas like those found in the poetry of Sufite poet Gilt Al-Halladah:

I saw my Lord with the eyes of my heart
And said, ‘Who are you?’ He answered, ‘You.’
I am the one whom I desire lovingly,

¹⁵¹⁷ Wang Yi, *Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 130.

¹⁵¹⁸ Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers Inc., 2000), 32.

¹⁵¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 1064-1068.

¹⁵²⁰ Wurmbrand, *Alone With God*, 61.

¹⁵²¹ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

And the One whom I desire lovingly is I.¹⁵²²

In the light of the Sufite poem, Wurmbrand seems to wonder whether there is still a distinction between himself and Christ:

“Could it be that these are not even my letters to you, but letters that you write to yourself on the tablet of my mind? If so, then you are the one who will never have a reply. Perhaps there is no ‘you and I’. A chasm opens before me – or it is before you? My thoughts blur.”¹⁵²³

This special kind of unity with Christ bears fruit for the Christian. The fruit of steadfastness in the faith and suffering along with Jesus Christ is a special kind of fellowship taking place on two levels: unity amongst Christians and unity with Christ. First, Christians, by enlarging their own selves, can become one in heart and soul with such individuals who suffered for their faith in the countries of the Iron Curtain. Second, the suffering individuals are, “one in heart and soul with Christ. Union with such saints is also union with God”.¹⁵²⁴

Furthermore, the identification of the Christian with his suffering Savior bears the fruit of joy. This is, in itself, not an entirely new idea. According to the words of St. John Chrysostom, the cross, amongst other things, is also the “the joy of the Spirit”.¹⁵²⁵ Wurmbrand experienced firsthand, while he was imprisoned, the fruit of the sufferings for Christ. Meditating in prison on the teaching of St. Francis of Assisi, he agrees with him that perfect joy can only be found in suffering for Christ:

Francis answered: "None of these things can give perfect joy. We shall know such joy only if, when we reach St. Mary of the Angels, soaked with rain, hungry and shivering with cold, the doorkeeper drives us out, mocking us with cruel words as beggars and rogues. We shall know perfect joy if we remain hungry outside the walls of the monastery, enduring the rain and the mud, and if we endure this with gladness and patience and thankfulness. The cross is the only tree on which the flower of perfect joy will grow".¹⁵²⁶

¹⁵²² Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus*, 64-65.

¹⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁵²⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc.1325-1327.

¹⁵²⁵ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 40. Citing from the Homily on the Passage (Matt. xxvi. 19), 'Father If It Be Possible Let This Cup Pass from Me,' Etc., and Against Marcionists and Manichæans., see St. Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood; Ascetic Treatises; Select Homilies and Letters; Homilies on the Statutes*, 280.

¹⁵²⁶ Wurmbrand, *Sermons in Solitary Confinement*, 79. Citing with adaptations from Brother Ugolino, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi* (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL), 24-25.

The sobering reality is that in communist countries, thousands upon thousands of Christians experienced persecution and suffering. But instead of lamentation and despondency, the spirit of Wurmbrand soars to higher spiritual realms. He personally accepted the call to be a cross-bearer, like his King, Jesus Christ. The years of imprisonment brought joy for him:

I have accepted this proposal. Christians are meant to have the same vocation as their King, that of cross-bearers. It is this consciousness of a high calling and of partnership with Jesus which brings gladness in tribulation, which makes Christians enter prisons for their faith with the joy of a bridegroom entering the bridal room.¹⁵²⁷

That is why, even if it may seem strange, Wurmbrand, instead of speaking ill of his tormentors, blesses the communist who unwillingly created the opportunity for persecuted Christians to experience unspeakable joy in the midst of suffering:

“O, blessed communists, who gave us hours of delicious intimacy with our heavenly Bridegroom, an overview of heavenly realities unknown to us until then and victories of faith, not only in difficult external circumstances, but even amongst some interior tempests.”¹⁵²⁸

Christians can enjoy communion with Jesus Christ not only in the times of freedom and not only in favourable conditions. The joy of communion with Christ can also be experienced in persecution and in prison cells. Wurmbrand is convinced of this truth through his personal experiences and he also illustrates his opinion with a letter received from a Soviet Underground Christian who suffered prolonged imprisonment for his faith:

A Soviet prisoner wrote: (...) The mocking words gave me courage. Forgetting how I looked, I told them I indeed represented heaven, for which the atheists imprisoned me. While preaching to those despising sinners, the sermon affected me too. I wanted to embrace them for having reminded me of my high calling. Many fear suffering. In the past I, too, feared. But the presence of the Lord in jail has given me so many happy experiences that I would not have changed them for years of easy living in freedom.¹⁵²⁹

Wurmbrand's inference from the words of this underground Christian is that men, like this soviet Christian, truly experienced communion with Jesus Christ, “the

¹⁵²⁷ Wurmbrand, *100 Prison Meditations*, loc. 112-120.

¹⁵²⁸ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 176.

¹⁵²⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 75.

discreet embraces of Jesus not in a house of cedar wood, but in a Communist prison cell".¹⁵³⁰

The union of the Underground Christian with the Suffering Savior is identification with a victorious hero. Jesus came to planet Earth like a divine hero. He left behind the comfort of heaven and made the decision that every hero made in human history: "To win or to perish, but never to yield".¹⁵³¹ Jesus suffered all that He had to suffer after the everlasting plan of His Father and in the end, He fulfilled His mission. His enemies thought that everything was finished when He was dying on the cross. Everything was taken from Him, even His clothes. His disciples left Him.¹⁵³² When His enemies thought that Jesus was finally defeated, forsaken by everyone, stripped of everything, in the final great moment when the spirit leaves the body¹⁵³³ He called out to His Father, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". Jesus Christ was victorious because He fulfilled His mission, and His enemies failed because they had no power over His spirit.

The union of the Christian with Christ is a union, not with a defeated Jesus, but with a Jesus who is a victorious hero. Everything can be taken away from the Underground Christians. The Church of Christ can be trampled under the feet of the enemy. But in the end, one thing remains that the enemies cannot reach and cannot take that is the victory that Christ has won. Wurmbrand is jubilant because the enemies of Christ cannot take away: "The throne on which Christ sits. Therefore, let the storm rage and let Christ's awful enemies boil. Christ will triumph! He is forever triumphant!"¹⁵³⁴ The Church of God is called to follow her heroic leader; called in Isaiah 9:6 "Heroic God". The Christians are called to a heroic Christian life instead of a quiet, dull existence.¹⁵³⁵

¹⁵³⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵³¹ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc. 5270-5271.

¹⁵³² Wurmbrand, *Cele Șapte Cuvinte de Pe Cruce*, 71.

¹⁵³³ Ibid.

¹⁵³⁴ Ibid. 72.

¹⁵³⁵ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 341-342.

4.3.2.4. Based on the Model of The Early Church

The faith of the Underground Church, as seen above, in Wurmbrand's opinion, is essentially based on the sacrificial paradigm of Jesus Christ and on the unity of the Church with the Man of Sorrows. Related to this is another crucial aspect of this Church' faith, i.e. to pursue the model of the early Church that followed the example of Christ regardless of the costs. The Underground Church, from the time of Wurmbrand, looked back to the beginnings of the church in the biblical times of the first century and the following centuries marked by persecutions and martyrdoms. Wurmbrand speaks in broad terms. Early Church, for him, is a general term that refers to the Christian Church from the first three centuries after Christ. These times were marked by severe persecutions, a time that can be called as, the "age of the martyrs",¹⁵³⁶ according to Church historian Hugo Rahner.

The Underground Church used these narratives as a hermeneutical key in an attempt to better understand her predicament and to cope with the shocking situations that she experienced under communist domination. In the countries of the Iron Curtain, "the drama, bravery and martyrdom of the Early Church are happening all over again".¹⁵³⁷ The underground Christians, with no help from the western Christians, "are waging the greatest, most courageous battle of the twentieth century, equal to the heroism, bravery and dedication of the Early Church".¹⁵³⁸ They were ready to pay the price of their boldness, and many did pay the price with their own blood.

Therefore, the Underground Church acted not only in the clandestine assemblies and covert activities but also openly in brave proclamation of the Gospel in communist-controlled countries, on the streets of communist cities and sometimes directly to communist leaders.¹⁵³⁹ However, these meetings were illegal, strictly forbidden, given their proselytizing propensity.¹⁵⁴⁰ The open-air meetings of the

¹⁵³⁶ Hugo Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 24.

¹⁵³⁷ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 139.

¹⁵³⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵³⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵⁴⁰ Aleksandra Đurić Milovanović, "Hidden Religious Landscapes': Religious Minorities and Religious Renewal Movements in the Borderlands of the Serbian and Romanian Banat," *Balkanica*, no. 52 (2021): 205. <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC2152193D> visited on 19.03.2023.

Underground Church, the call to follow Christ, the numerous conversions and the impromptu baptisms all seem to point back to first century biblical times.

Wurmbrand gives such an example of a baptism service that happened in the Caucasus in 1966:

On November 7, 1966, in Suhumi (Caucasus), the Underground Church held a great meeting under the open skies. (...) After the altar-call, forty-seven young people accepted Christ and were baptized on the spot in the Black Sea, just as in Biblical times. There was no period of instruction before.¹⁵⁴¹

If something like this, baptism without catechism, does not usually happen, it was not unheard of in biblical times. Philip, the deacon, in the book of Acts chapter 8, does something similar with the Ethiopian eunuch lead by the Holy Spirit:

But neither was Philip, the deacon. And when a eunuch, with whom he had spoken perhaps only for an hour, asked him, "See, here is water, what hinders me to be baptized?" Philip said "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." So they immediately went down to the water and the convert was baptized. (Acts 8:36-38) There is water enough in the Black Sea, and the Underground Church has begun again the practices of the Biblical time.¹⁵⁴²

In the beginnings of the Church the Christians with a Jewish background had a major role. The apostles of Jesus Christ who took the good news of the Gospel to the nations were Jewish. The majority of the first Christians converted to Christianity from Judaism. The Jews through many tribulations were prepared by God to play a major role in the establishing of the Kingdom of God.¹⁵⁴³

While many Jews rejected Christ the Messiah, according to the apostle Paul, this does not mean that God rejected his chosen people¹⁵⁴⁴: "Has God rejected his people?" asked Paul the Apostle. 'By no means' (Rom. 11:1, R.S.V.). The Apostle prophesied the return to Christ of a remnant of the Jews before the return of our Lord. And he was sure that this would mean great riches for the Gentiles".¹⁵⁴⁵

¹⁵⁴¹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 110.

¹⁵⁴² Ibid.

¹⁵⁴³ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 94.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 185.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

Furthermore, in Romans 12:15¹⁵⁴⁶ Paul writes that the acceptance of Jesus by the Jews will be “life from death”.

The Jewish converts to Christianity had a special place in the economy of God’s plan in the first centuries. They were persecuted and many shed their blood as martyrs for Christ.¹⁵⁴⁷ For Wurmbrand, the Jews still have a special place in the Underground Church:

In Russia and Rumania, Jewish believers play a most important role in the leadership of the Underground Church, and they number among the martyrs as in times of old. In the documents presented in this book we have come across the names of Grunvald, Hartfeld and others. These are Protestants. The Orthodox elements of the Underground movement are led entirely by elements of the Jewish race, among them the priests, Eshliman and Yakunin, and the professor, Levitin. (...) In Rumania a Protestant pastor of Jewish origin, Milan Haimovici was one of the most respected sufferers for Christ. He spent many years in prison and under torture—but he was not broken!¹⁵⁴⁸

The first Christian community from Jerusalem, according to the Acts 4:32, 35, “had all things common . . . distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”¹⁵⁴⁹. The love of the first Christians and the concern for others was very attractive, so it is not surprising that this community grew very fast, “the Lord adds to their number 'daily' (Acts 2:47)”.¹⁵⁵⁰ The same things happened in the Underground Church as well, where an incredible sense of unity prevailed, they were like the Church from Acts, “one soul and one heart”.¹⁵⁵¹ The leaders, the pastors of this church, did not teach doctrine to their members and youth because the leaders lacked thorough theological training. Instead, they taught from a life of experience, “of the cross and of its victory in their daily lives”.¹⁵⁵² The people were won by expressions of the love of Christ, not by rational arguments and by paying attention to their needs:

It is indeed true that 'the leaders of the Baptist sect pay special attention to people who find themselves in a difficult situation or plight'. In the Communist countries, many

¹⁵⁴⁶ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 94.

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 185.

¹⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵¹ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 48.

¹⁵⁵² Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 13.

people are in great need. The Communists may propagate a doctrine of equality, but while their leaders live in luxury, the simple worker or farmer who is a party worker is very little cared for. In Russia the real community of goods is practiced by the Christians rather than the Communists.¹⁵⁵³

In the Underground church, God worked like in the 1st century A.D., and amazing things happened. Persecutors of the church of Christ could become pastors who worked for Christ in fulfilling their callings. In Acts 9, Ananias, a Christian disciple from Damascus, is instructed by Jesus in a vision to meet with Saul of Tarsus, who was chosen by Jesus to become the Apostle of the Gentiles: “Meet Saul of Tarsus. He will be My underground pastor, My underground worker.” That is what St. Paul was – a pastor of an Underground Church”.¹⁵⁵⁴ In extreme situations of persecution the Underground Christians learned to look at their tormentors with love and hope. The communist torturers by the grace of God could become the next apostle Paul, or the next jailer from Philippi who was converted to Christianity, and some did:

But looking at men like this—not as they are, but as they will be—I could discover also in persecutors like Saul of Tarsus future St. Pauls. And some have already become so. Officers of the secret police to whom we witnessed became Christians themselves and were happy to suffer afterward in prison for having found our Christ. (...) It was in prison that we found hope for the communists, that they will be saved. It was there that we developed a sense of responsibility toward them. It was in being tortured by them that we learned to love them.¹⁵⁵⁵

These new converts must be taught from the beginning that following Christ means often suffering for the sake of Christ. Jesus, through Ananias, from the beginning, taught the former torturer Saul, the new apostle Paul, the price of following Jesus:

When, after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Lord appeared to Ananias, He told him how to teach a new convert: “I will show him how many things he must suffer for my Name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).¹⁵⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 60.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc.4660.

Jesus started a crash course for this underground pastor. He started it with the words, "I will show (him) how great things he must suffer..." Preparation for underground work begins by studying sufferology, martyrology.¹⁵⁵⁷

In the Underground Church, the duty of the experienced Christians is to teach the new convert from the beginning, in Wurmbrand's words, "the main religious science, sufferology".¹⁵⁵⁸ Sufferings took many forms for Christians under the communism "Here we could present lists of sadistic scalping, beating to death, amputation of limbs and then bleeding to death and drowning of bishops, priests and church activists."¹⁵⁵⁹

The apostle Paul, being inducted into "sufferology" by Ananias, from the beginning of his Christian journey instructs the Christians from Rome, in Romans (12:1): "My brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to Him: a living sacrifice dedicated and fit for His acceptance".¹⁵⁶⁰

The extreme conditions under which the Underground function takes us back to the first centuries. The apostles of Christ, who turned the world upside down with the message of Christ, were not seminary trained pastors and theologians. Not all of them knew how to read. They did not have the full text of the Scriptures, like today's Christians, but God and Jesus Christ spoke to them. The Christian church, in the beginning, did not have cathedrals and priestly robes and all the religious paraphernalia, but they often gathered in secret.¹⁵⁶¹ Likewise, the Underground Church exists and works under very difficult conditions faced with the forces of atheistic communists in the totalitarian states. The leaders have no theological training and no proper ordination:

The underground ministers in Russia have had no theological training. There are pastors who have never read a whole Bible. I will tell you how many have been ordained. We met a young Russian who was a secret minister. I asked him who ordained him. He answered, "We had no real bishop to ordain us. The official bishop would ordain nobody who is not approved by the Communist Party. So ten of us young Christians went to the tomb of a bishop who died as a martyr. Two of us put our hands on his gravestone. The others

¹⁵⁵⁷ Wurmbrand, *Preparing for the Underground Church*.

¹⁵⁵⁸ Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc.4660.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Pospelovsky, "The Survival of the Russian Orthodox Church in Her Millennial Century: Faith as Martyria in an Atheistic State," 275.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Wurmbrand, *In God's Underground*, loc. 2618-2623.

¹⁵⁶¹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 90.

formed a circle around us and we asked the Holy Spirit to ordain us. We are sure that we were ordained by the pierced hands of Jesus." For me, this young man's ordination is valid before God! Men with such ordination, and who have never had any theological training, and who very often know little of the Bible, carry on the work of Christ.¹⁵⁶²

The Underground Church in Russia and in the countries under the Iron Curtain had no cathedrals, no priestly robes, and no religious paraphernalia but still had unspeakable beauty in her secret meetings:

We of the Underground Church have no cathedrals. But is any cathedral more beautiful than the sky of heaven to which we looked when we gathered secretly in forests? The chirping of birds took the place of the organ. The fragrance of flowers was our incense. And the shabby suit of a martyr recently freed from prison was much more impressive than priestly robes. We had the moon and stars as candles. The angels were our acolytes who lit them. I can never describe the beauty of this Church! Often, after a secret service, Christians are caught and sent to prison.¹⁵⁶³

However, in the face of all the adversity, the Underground Church proved to be very versatile and resilient.¹⁵⁶⁴ She adapted to the existing situation, "the Underground Church with its devices, nicknames, passwords, meetings in the wood, non-submission to state laws, infiltration into Communist ranks".¹⁵⁶⁵ To avoid capture by the secret police, underground Christians employed creative methods "not only of avoiding arrest, foiling agents and uncover informers, but also to establish resilient, viable and meaningful life worlds beyond the strictures and confines of officially prescribed lives in the factory or on the collective farm".¹⁵⁶⁶

This, for Wurmbrand, is not a sign that the Church lost her way but a sign that she follows, in an updated way, the example of the Early Church "It is the Church of the catacombs adjusted to conditions of the twentieth century, which has perfected police, but also a perfected conspiratorial technique".¹⁵⁶⁷ The communist secret police had specially trained units to deal with this kind of religious dissent "to counter the activities of enemies labelled as "clerical reactionary forces," "spies" or "saboteurs" and to prevent the pernicious influence on socialist society of superstition, religious

¹⁵⁶² Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁵⁶³ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Tomka, 12.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 119.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Kapaló and Povedák, 2.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 119.

charlatanry (...) the so-called religious underground.”¹⁵⁶⁸ The secretive strategies of organization were adopted by the Underground Church in order to maintain the Christian fellowship and to avoid being imprisoned by the communist secret police.

4.3.2.5. Based on Lives of Saints and Martyrs

Ultimately, persecutions, sufferings, and martyrdoms from all times, have meaning because the example of the brave Christian Church, that does not buckle under the strain of oppressive regimes, also has a pedagogic function for the Christian church until its final victory. The lives of the saints and martyrs from Church History can serve as a guide for the Christian. According to Wurmbrand, only the biographies of saints and martyrs are worth studying from the tumultuous pages of Church history. These can be guiding lights for the Christian in the midst of confusion caused by Christian bickering and factionalism.¹⁵⁶⁹

The early church understood this quite well. While the books of the New Testament were written, being finished only at the end of the first century, the Early Christian church was inspired by the example of the martyrs. They did not read the New Testament because it was not yet finished instead, they read another book: “This book was the living example of men like St. Stephens, and St. James, and many others who died as martyrs for Christ. Their examples were taught in churches”.¹⁵⁷⁰ The examples of the bold Christian martyrs had a powerful motivating effect on the Early Church, they: “inflamed the hearts of younger Christians. Their example made the Church to flourish”.¹⁵⁷¹

The first three centuries of the Christian Church were times of outstanding bravery and martyrdom in the face of ruthless persecution. Wurmbrand points out that numerous Roman emperors fought to eliminate the Christian faith, not shying away from unimaginable methods of torture:

¹⁵⁶⁸ Kapaló and Povedák, 1.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Wurmbrand, *My Correspondence with Jesus*, 72.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 157.

¹⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

Fifteen Roman emperors strove to eradicate the Christian faith from the world, using torture to intimidate the believers. Tender maidens and children received atrocious treatment. Saint Agnes and Saint Priscilla, both thirteen years old, were torn by metal hooks, roasted on grills and crowned with red-hot helmets.¹⁵⁷²

Wurmbrand calls attention to the great persecution of Christians from the time of Emperor Diocletian, starting in 303 A.D.. Diocletian, during his reign, sought to restore the former glory of Rome. Christians were required to worship according to the traditional Roman religious practices, to bring sacrifices to idols under pain of death. Thousands of Christians were affected by these measures, thousands died as martyrs: "But the extent of the slaughter did not bring panic to those Christians who survived, because they had the comfort of the vineyards of En-Gedi, just as persecuted David had. Amidst the torment they retained their joy and their calm (...).¹⁵⁷³ An example of bravery from these times is the martyrdom of Saint Tiburtius, who refused to obey the imperial edict:

Among the Christians was a fifteen-year-old young aristocrat called Tiburtius. He went to the Bishop and said: 'Is it not the first fruits that God asked from the Israelites? If some older folk take your advice and leave Rome, I will stay and offer God the flower of my youth.' Tiburtius stayed in Rome, and he got the martyr's crown.¹⁵⁷⁴

According to Wurmbrand, behind the Iron Curtain, the Underground Church experienced again the valiant days of the first centuries of persecutions. The Underground Church shows time and again the qualities of love, courage, and heroism that have immense magnetic power. There are youth in Russia who, like Saint Agnes, Saint Priscilla, and Saint Tiburtius, do not shy away from whatever sacrifice is required from them: "in Russia today there are young people who are of the same breed as Tiburtius. These are youths prepared to resist openly the Communists, sacrificing their parental home, their careers, their liberties and their lives"¹⁵⁷⁵.

Another example of unwavering commitment to the faith in Jesus Christ from the fourth century persecution is the martyrdom of the forty legionaries from Sebaste

¹⁵⁷² Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 69-70.

¹⁵⁷³ Ibid., 70.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 183.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

(Armenia) who died on the frozen river of Kisil-Irmak.¹⁵⁷⁶ Wurmbrand finds a comparable example in the 20th century under the persecution unleashed by Stalin in the Soviet Union. The account, in his opinion, is valid because it is described by Eugenia Ginzburg, a communist eyewitness, also a victim caught in the purges directed by Stalin. Mrs. Ginzburg, in *Journey into the Whirlwind*, in her account of the time spent in the communist Gulag, tells the story of brave Christian women who, disregarding any consequences, confronted communist henchmen refusing to work on Easter Sunday:¹⁵⁷⁷

They were punished by being made to stand barefoot on the ice. And the Communist writer adds, 'Not one of them fell sick.'...The sisters in Siberia did not die. But neither was there even one to recant. This is the Underground Church as described by a Communist writer.¹⁵⁷⁸

Anne Applebaum, as well, mentions in her book dedicated to the Soviet Gulag, religious women groups who manifested extraordinary examples of faith and perseverance in the face of communist persecution.¹⁵⁷⁹

Faced with the unleashed might of the oppressive communist regimes, the Underground Church did not succumb to the enduring and unrelenting pressure. The communists did not understand that persecution strengthens, instead of weakens, the Christian church. Wurmbrand experienced firsthand the truth of the words of Tertullian, the Church Father. The more the Christians are “mowed down”¹⁵⁸⁰ by persecutions the more they will grow in numbers. Truly, the sacrifice of the Christian martyrs for the cause of Christ brings fruit:

I have brought you on to most holy ground. You have now lived scenes of the Underground Church oppressed by the Communists. Poor Communists. They do not know the words of Tertullian, 'To kill us means to multiply us. The blood of martyrs is the seed for new Christians.' (...) Neither do the Communists know the words of St. Hilarius, 'The Church triumphs when it is oppressed and progresses when it is despised.'¹⁵⁸¹

¹⁵⁷⁶ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 413.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁷⁹ Applebaum, 305.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Tertullian, “Apologetic,” in *ANF03. Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL), 108.

¹⁵⁸¹ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 24.

The persecuted Christians from the first centuries and the persecuted Christians of the Underground Church endured all sufferings. In the midst of persecution and martyrdom, they did not lose their serenity or boldness; they felt that they were not alone in their sufferings.¹⁵⁸² The Christian martyrs, in Augustine's words, were extraordinary people, "Every one of them seemed to be two people-one, somebody who suffers greatly, and also somebody who speaks words of gladness, of wisdom and of praising the Lord".¹⁵⁸³ This is why the Christian church always grew under persecution.

During church history, the Church Fathers recognised the important role of the persecutions and tribulations. The persecutions worked for the good of the Church, strengthening the Christian church. Gregory of Nazianzus, in the fourth century, after the persecution subsided, lamented that: "We have lost the greatness and the strength we had during our persecution and troubles".¹⁵⁸⁴ St. Jerome, in the same time, in one of his treatises, *The Life of Malchus*, speaks about the greatness achieved by the Christian church under persecution, greatness lost after when the Church became officially accepted:¹⁵⁸⁵

Jerome wrote in similar terms: "(...) the congregation of Christ, after being born and growing, became great during its persecutions and was crowned with martyrdom. But since the Christians have become strong, this congregation has in truth increased because of its tradition and wealth, but has decreased in virtue."¹⁵⁸⁶

In addition, Wurmbrand refers to the words of Johann Neander, the German theologian and Church historian, who also spoke about the meaning of persecution. Neander, like Gregory and Jerome, decries the weak condition of the church of his time and points to the strength of the church under persecutions, extolling the bravery of the persecuted Christians: "Oh, what soft-minded and weak witnesses, with what cold feelings, we are, (...) We must feel ashamed when we remember the days of Ignatius and Polycarp [Christian martyrs of the second century who were

¹⁵⁸² Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 72.

¹⁵⁸³ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 94.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Jerome, *NPNF2-06. Jerome: The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids MI: CCEL), 270.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Wurmbrand, *Christ on the Jewish Road*, 94.

devoured by lions] and others, and we shall wish that we had died a thousand times for Christ."¹⁵⁸⁷

The lives of saints and martyrs had an important part in shaping the life and thought of Wurmbrand. After his conversion to Christianity, Wurmbrand was advised by a missionary to integrate into his devotional life besides Scripture, daily readings from the lives of saints and martyrs, but he really understood more of their experiences only after he went through similar experiences in communist prison:

I knew the story of the charming and convincing smile of Bernadette de Soubiroux of Lourdes. I had known several Christians on earth who had heavenly smiles (one of whom is my wife Sabina). But now I saw such smiles in conditions of utter suffering. I have seen them many times, in many jails. (...) All the great smilers became one for me, fusing into the smile of Jesus. (...) Men with such a smile do not die. They surround us after death as well, encouraging and helping us. Romania has just such a cloud of witnesses above it.¹⁵⁸⁸

After his release from communist prison and the establishment of his mission in the United States, Wurmbrand became a man with a mission. He laboured through his writings and through his messages to bring before the Christian Church the example of the modern saints and martyrs. These saints and martyrs were the suffering members of the Underground Church who were trapped behind the Iron or Bamboo Curtain. For example, in China, underground bishops and pastors manifested a great zeal in defence of their faith, a zeal that led sometimes to martyrdom.¹⁵⁸⁹

For Wurmbrand, the Christian Church must learn from the example of Christian sacrificial bravery and must not forget those who sacrificed their lives for Christ. Otherwise, the Church becomes "purposeless and surely harmless, as far as the atheists are concerned".¹⁵⁹⁰ Wurmbrand struggled to educate and motivate the Church from the West by making them aware of a dimension of the Church often ignored in the West: "Wurmbrand provided the church with a dimension which was

¹⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 95.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Wurmbrand, *From Suffering to Triumph*, 123.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Kindopp, 99.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 2529-2535.

necessary ... a great moving sense of the presence of Christ in the modern confessors and martyrs".¹⁵⁹¹

The communists understood the pedagogic value of the example of sacrificial Christian lives, which is why they forbade their mentioning in communist countries. Consequently, an important part of Wurmbrand's mission was to point "to the example of martyrs in order to open hearts to the communion of angels and Christ".¹⁵⁹² Christian leaders write Church history¹⁵⁹³ by remembering and preserving the narratives of the Christian saints and martyrs, old and new. The Underground Christians take heart from the examples of saints and martyrs; Jesus Christ feeds His flock, the Christian Church, upon such magnificent examples of faithfulness.¹⁵⁹⁴

4.3.3. Organization

The corpus of beliefs, the theology of the Underground Church, is followed, in Wurmbrand's thoughts, by discussions about structure and organization. First, we can observe that the Underground Church is mostly a secretive organization. Second, the Underground Church is not centralized but still has a structure. And last, Wurmbrand has certain thoughts about how she should organize herself to function proficiently in the hostile environment of communist regimes.

It must be clear from the beginning that the Underground Church is a secretive organization. The reason for this stems from the nature of the communist countries. Communists reject religion and faith, atheism being the "state religion"¹⁵⁹⁵ in all communist countries. The communists were on a crusade to stamp out religion and belief in God with any available means.¹⁵⁹⁶ The persecution unleashed on religion in communist countries through the imprisonment of countless Christians made secrecy

¹⁵⁹¹ Ibid., Wurmbrand and his mission was complimented with these words during a session of the Anglican Synod in London by Canon Stephens.

¹⁵⁹² Ibid.

¹⁵⁹³ Ibid., 2540-2542., Wurmbrand mentions Giorgi Vins, a persecuted soviet Christian, who's book *The Family Chronicle* smuggled out from Russia contained a series of lives of modern martyrs, beginning with his own parents and relatives.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 118.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 89.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., Communist use radio, television, cinema, theatre, press and publishing houses to spread communist propaganda and eradicate religion and faith in God.

and illegal existence¹⁵⁹⁷ an imperative. In some instances, the Underground Church meant only the meeting of a group of friends in an informal manner, which is why these kinds of religious settings were “much less controlled and manipulated by the state than the big systems of traditional churches”.¹⁵⁹⁸ The smaller denominations that had a history of being mistreated were better equipped to suffer the communist persecution because they had “more experience in self-determination and in preserving and using their independence from the public power”¹⁵⁹⁹.

Therefore, the Underground Church, compared to any Church functioning under normal circumstances, had no church building, no cathedrals, and gathered in hidden places or in forests under the open sky. At these meetings, the Underground Christian knew that if they were caught, they risked imprisonment.¹⁶⁰⁰ Sometimes, Underground Christians took major risks by having public open-air meetings in forests or meadows, even open-air baptisms on a public beach.¹⁶⁰¹ Such events were carrying a high risk of discovery and were often marked by the intervention of the communist police.¹⁶⁰²

With very few exceptions, the activities of the Underground Church under the Iron and the Bamboo Curtain, in the Soviet Union and China, were secret because of their illegal nature. The Churches that made up the Underground Church, from case to case, had few to no Bibles or religious materials.¹⁶⁰³ They were also forbidden to have biblical instruction for children and theological training for the youth who wanted to prepare for Christian ministry. There was little or no catechetical training for new converts.¹⁶⁰⁴ Consequently, the Underground Church organized, in secret, to fulfil these dire needs of the church. Illegal printing presses¹⁶⁰⁵ printed Bibles, New

¹⁵⁹⁷ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 119.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Tomka, 12.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 90.

¹⁶⁰¹ Kapaló and Povedák, 9.

¹⁶⁰² Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 110. Wurmbrand mentions an open-air meeting that took place in Suhumi in the Caucasus on November 7, 1966 where new converts were baptized in the Black Sea.

¹⁶⁰³ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 39.

¹⁶⁰⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 110.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 31.

Testaments, and Christian literature, and the distribution of these materials were organized.¹⁶⁰⁶ Children were taught in secret Sunday school meetings.¹⁶⁰⁷ The Underground Church also organized secret seminaries¹⁶⁰⁸ and secret ordinations for her ministers.¹⁶⁰⁹ The training attempts, in some cases, were overseen by Western Christian Churches. The Vatican issued secret instructions to the persecuted Catholics in Eastern Europe and China to ensure the continuity of the Catholic community. Underground Catholic bishops “were given permission to choose and consecrate other bishops without going through the normal vetting by the Vatican bureaucracy and to ordain priests who had not had the normal Vatican approved seminary training.”¹⁶¹⁰ At other times, also in China, secret theological training sessions were organized with the help of foreign missionaries.¹⁶¹¹

Addressing the matter of structure in the Underground Church, given her secretive nature, the Underground Church is not centralized like the historical Christian churches.¹⁶¹² In China, Underground Christians met in small cell groups to avoid the scrutiny of the communist state.¹⁶¹³ Wurmbrand, in general, detected three categories, three large groups of people¹⁶¹⁴ in the church. The first category or group is made up of thousands of pastors and ministers removed from their offices by the communist authorities and imprisoned because of their refusal to cooperate with these:

The first group is the thousands upon thousands of former pastors and ministers who have been turned out of their churches and removed from their flocks because they would not compromise the Gospel. Many such former pastors and ministers have been imprisoned for years and tortured for their faith.¹⁶¹⁵

¹⁶⁰⁶ Tomka, 107.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 797., also see Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 32. and Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, loc. 2989.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 30.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 90.

¹⁶¹⁰ Kindopp, 98 refers to the Holy See, Propaganda Fide, “Faculties and Privileges Granted to Clergy and Laymen Who Reside in China Under Difficult Circumstances,” Latin text in Kim-Kwong Chan, *Towards a Contextual Ecclesiology: The Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China (1979–1983)—Its Life and Theological Implications* (Hong Kong: Photek Systems, 1987), pp. 438–42.

¹⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁶¹² Wurmbrand, *If That Were Christ, Would You Give Him Your Blanket?*, 48.

¹⁶¹³ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 61. Also see Wurmbrand, *The Overcomers*, loc. 1104.

¹⁶¹⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 104.

¹⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Those who survived the long years of imprisonment in inhumane conditions and were released afterwards did not stop their Christian ministry. The ministers from this category, of this calibre, resumed their duties secretly undeterred by the fact that they were forbidden to minister, or by the fact that communists closed their churches or replaced them with more flexible pastors. Their work continued efficiently in secret, "in underground meetings in barns, attics, basements, hay fields at night—or anywhere believers gather secretly. These men are "living martyrs" who will not cease their ministry and who risk more torture and re-arrest"¹⁶¹⁶.

The second group is the largest in the Underground Church. It is made up by the vast numbers of devoted Christians which are idealized by Wurmbrand in his description:¹⁶¹⁷

(...) the vast army of dedicated laymen and laywomen. It must be understood that there are no nominal, halfhearted, lukewarm Christians in Russia or China. (...) Communist persecution has backfired and produced serious, dedicated Christians such as are rarely seen in free lands. These people cannot understand how anyone can be a Christian and not want to win every soul they meet.¹⁶¹⁸

These dedicated Christians are not inactive Christians. In Wurmbrand's opinion, there is no such thing. One is active for God or active for the devil, there is no middle ground.¹⁶¹⁹ In the case of the Russian Orthodox church in the 1920's, where the membership before communism was nominal "an automatic attribute of being Russian (...) the national church began to revert to the status of her first decades on the Russian soil-to being again a church of converts."¹⁶²⁰

If they are not wanted by the secret police, the lay members of the Underground church can sometimes be found in the Official church, where they maintain a level of healthiness of the church.¹⁶²¹ These people have an outstanding Christian witness through the exemplary lives they live. They are respected and loved by the people who live close to them because of their readiness to show their love towards people

¹⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶¹⁹ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 11.

¹⁶²⁰ Pospelovsky, 274.

¹⁶²¹ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 95.

in a practical way, helping and caring for those who need help. They “live their Christianity—and when they begin to witness for Christ the people listen and believe—because they have seen Christ in their lives”.¹⁶²² The dedicated laymen form a formidable missionary force; working for Christ, they: “witness and minister in market places, at the village water pumps—anywhere they go. The vast body of laymen and laywomen are a very powerful, effective, soul-winning missionary force already in every communist land”.¹⁶²³

In Wurmbrand’s personal experience, the dedicated Christians never ceased to work for the salvation of lost souls, not even prison could deter them from their task:

I remember in Rumania that I only had to sit quietly in my home, and things would happen. One after another, members of my Underground Church would appear with some new soul they had 'caught in their net', perhaps as the result of a chance meeting in the queue for bread or potatoes. (...) Even when Christians were put in prison their zeal to win souls for Christ continued. In solitary confinement they learned to tap the Gospel in Morse, code against their cell walls. They witnessed to their jailors who had whips in their hands.¹⁶²⁴

The third group is composed by the large numbers of pastors and ministers from the Official Church. People who minister in churches that function openly under the scrutiny of the communists but are still faithful Christians: “The third vital part of the Underground Church is the large body of faithful pastors in the official, but bridled and silenced "churches"”.¹⁶²⁵ These pastors and ministers, risking their freedom, have a double ministry, one official and one underground that exceeds by far the limitations imposed on them by the communists.¹⁶²⁶

In many communist lands, such as Yugoslavia, Poland and Hungary, many of the pastors of the official churches secretly work in the Underground Church. In some countries there is an interweaving between the two. (...) Very often these pastors, faced with controls which make mockery of "freedom of religion," courageously risk their liberty by carrying on a parallel secret ministry(...) These pastors carry on secret ministry to children and youth. They evangelize secretly in Christian homes and basements. They secretly receive and distribute Christian literature to hungry souls. (...) Many such men as these were

¹⁶²² Ibid., 105.

¹⁶²³ Ibid., 106.

¹⁶²⁴ Wurmbrand, *The Soviet Saints*, 11.

¹⁶²⁵ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 106.

¹⁶²⁶ Ibid., 93.

recently discovered and arrested in Russia. They received several years of imprisonment.¹⁶²⁷

Wurmbrand, after looking closely at the way the Underground Church functioned in the countries of the Iron Curtain, has some thoughts about how she should organize herself to function more efficiently, and about how things could be improved from an organisational perspective. Wurmbrand foretold in 1972, in his *If Prison Walls Could Speak*, the foreclosure or the imposing of severe limitations upon the activity of the Official Church.¹⁶²⁸ In his opinion, the Christian church cannot accept the forbidding status quo. The activity of the church must continue in secret. Secret Christian work is not a novelty, this kind of activity reaches back to biblical times.¹⁶²⁹ The church must fight to fulfil her mission of preaching a whole Gospel. To accomplish her mission, the church must organize, like the Christian church of the catacombs from the second and third century, after Christ and more because she must circumvent the modern surveillance equipment and modern organisation of the communist police.¹⁶³⁰

While the example of the Underground Church from Russia, with her faithfulness and her martyrs, is inspiring, Wurmbrand would not adopt exactly the same model. The best Underground Church is not the one that gives the most martyrs but the one that “has the least number of martyrs, like the best intelligence organization is the one that remains secret forever”.¹⁶³¹ The Underground Church does not need martyrs, all she needs is the triumph of the Gospel.

The Underground Church must be very careful with damage control. She must be careful with the new converts who are introduced into the secrets of the organization. The secret meeting places and the location of pastors, wanted by the communist police,¹⁶³² must be carefully guarded information. The new converts must be taught from the beginning to be prepared for suffering, beatings, and torture. Like

¹⁶²⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁶²⁸ Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 100.

¹⁶²⁹ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Wurmbrand Letters*, 28., Wurmbrand sees evidence of activity of the disciples of Jesus related to secret work in the Gospel of John 18:15.

¹⁶³⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *Dacă Zidurile Ar Putea Vorbi*, 100.

¹⁶³¹ Ibid., 101.

¹⁶³² Ibid.

in the case of the apostle Paul in Acts 9:16, right after baptism, they must be told all that they will have to suffer for the name of Christ.¹⁶³³ This way, they will be at least partially ready to face interrogations and will cause minimum damage to the organization.¹⁶³⁴

The Underground Church cannot function based on the principles of modern secular democracy. Christianity is not of this world and accordingly, the principle of free initiative does not apply to the Underground Church.¹⁶³⁵ This principle must be replaced with others like organization, hierarchy, and obedience. The Christian must live in obedience towards God and his elder brothers in the faith, according to Hebrews 13:7.¹⁶³⁶ Christians are not carefree individuals; “they are soldiers who belong to an army. They have superiors whom they must obey. Christ himself “gave some, apostles...pastors and teachers””. Like in any army, the soldier is under a hierarchy, under different degrees of authority, under sergeants, captains, and generals. Likewise, the Christian submits to the authority of Christ, his supreme commander, by first submitting himself to the authority of his immediate superior,¹⁶³⁷ who is the pastor of the church. Every Underground Christian “must obey his conscience and his pastor more than the state authorities. The pastor must be obeyed as strictly as a superior in the military”.¹⁶³⁸ In this way, the Underground Church will be a powerful, well-organised and well lead secret organisation.¹⁶³⁹

After fifty years of communist domination and persecution, Wurmbrand saw that the Underground Church was unbroken. She remained faithful to God and she was triumphant, although she passed through terrible hardships.¹⁶⁴⁰ The trials united the Underground Church in an incredible way, no matter what number of believers gathered in secret meetings; once they came together, they were one.¹⁶⁴¹ This church is beautiful, full of the spirit of sacrifice and is for Wurmbrand “the Church which

¹⁶³³ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹⁶³⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶³⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁶³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 124.

¹⁶⁴¹ Wurmbrand, *Where Christ Still Suffers*, 48.

has come back to the first love".¹⁶⁴² The persecuted Christian Church from Communist countries produced rich crops for the glory of God.¹⁶⁴³ The Underground Church will not be destroyed; in the face of every hardship she grew, she endured, and she will see the defeat and end of communism.¹⁶⁴⁴

4.4. PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter was to offer an answer to the relevant sub-question: How did the Christian church adapt to the communist regimes and how should the church survive the challenges of Marxist communism according to Wurmbrand? Wurmbrand, after his release from the Romanian communist prisons and emigration, reflected in America, in an already existing anti-communist setting, on the Christian Church's experience under communism through the filter of his personal experience. His theological examination revealed to him the existence of a multi-faceted entity which found coping mechanism under the pressure of communist authoritarian regimes.

The Official Church, in Wurmbrand's mind, was the first adaptation of the Christian Church to the overabundance of challenges brought about by the communist regimes. The Official Church encompassed, for Wurmbrand, all the existing, officially recognised Christian churches and denominations all around the world, which had to deal in their respective countries with the ascendance to power of communist regimes.

The Official Church was the heir of many historical problems. Wurmbrand is correct in recognizing that the Official Church had historical baggage that often facilitated its subversion by the communists. Researcher Zoe Knox, in her *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia After Communism*, is of the opinion that the Russian Orthodox Church's dealing with state authority was for centuries moulded after the Byzantine Symphonia model.¹⁶⁴⁵ Although the communist regime

¹⁶⁴² Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 47.

¹⁶⁴³ Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, 200.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 107.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Knox, 106.

rejected this model and assumed total control over it, this Byzantine mentality was the reason why Eastern Orthodox Churches were predisposed to state control.

In her dealing with Communism, the Official church wallowed in the swamp of compromise and accommodation, according to Wurmbrand. The blame for this rested mostly on the shoulders of the church leadership. In contemporary research, we can find many proofs that back Wurmbrand's claim. For example, Professor Vasilios Makrides, in *Orthodox Christianity and State/Politics Today: Factors to Take into Account*, speaks about the infamous declaration of unconditional loyalty to the Bolsheviks, in 1928, of the future Russian Orthodox Patriarch Sergius.¹⁶⁴⁶ Zoe Knox speaks about this Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet Motherland as well.¹⁶⁴⁷ Historian Dennis Deletant, in *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*, speaks about how, in Romania, the election of Orthodox bishops came under state control and how the state abused this prerogative.¹⁶⁴⁸ Professors Lucian Turcescu and Lavinia Stan, in *Churches, Memory and Justice in Post-Communism*, addressed the Romanian Orthodox leaders collaboration. Patriarchs Justinian and later Patriarch Teoctist were active supporters of communist policies.¹⁶⁴⁹ The late Reverend Marian S. Mazgaj, in *Church and State in Communist Poland: A History, 1944-1989*, adds to the list of infamy names from the Polish catholic church, individuals who willingly collaborated in order to gain something.¹⁶⁵⁰ Researcher Beliakova exemplified how the leadership of Soviet Evangelicals, in order to please Soviet communist officials, fought to discredit Wurmbrand's perspective about the Soviet Underground Churches in the international community.¹⁶⁵¹ These are just a few examples, this list is a long one if we take into account the scale of church high official collaboration with the different communist regimes.

Nevertheless, in spite of these clearly regretful examples, Wurmbrand treated the Official Church with a lot of lenience and understanding. We have to recognize, as

¹⁶⁴⁶ Makrides, 244.

¹⁶⁴⁷ Knox, 45.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Deletant, 67.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Turcescu and Stan, 95-99.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Mazgaj, 34.

¹⁶⁵¹ Nadezhda Beliakova, "Anti-Communism and Soviet Evangelicals - Metamorphoses during the Cold War," SZRKG/RSHRC/RSSRC, no. 115 (2021): 77, <https://doi.org/10.24894/2673-3641.00082>.

Wurmbrand knew from his experience, that things were very complex and the motives that led to compromise were diverse. Of course, as Wurmbrand states, on one hand, many cooperated to gain status, wealth, and other benefits. On the other hand, some were motivated by the need to fight for the survival of the Christian Church, and others cracked under the intense pressure of the communist repressive system. Wurmbrand correctly acknowledged that there was still need of this church. In spite of all her ailments, the Official Church continued to be used by God because the worship in this church directed people toward God and ensured continuity.

The Underground Church was another way the Christian Church adapted to the constraints and persecutions brought about by the communist regimes. The Underground Church was a reality that emerged when the Official Christian church was subjected to tremendous institutional and physical pressure from the communist authoritarian state. Wurmbrand reflections on the Underground Church were based on his personal experience and on the information that he received from persecuted Christian churches and groups while he was in the West.

The Underground Church, which refused complacency, complicity, and accommodation with the oppressive communist regime was, for Wurmbrand, the correct response of the Church faced with the challenges of communism. Because of its unyielding nature, this Church was perceived, by the communists as a serious threat and they did everything in their power to eliminate this threat. Knox correctly describes the nature of the religious dissent as explicit or implicit challenge of the existing relationship between institutional religion and the communist state.¹⁶⁵²

The Underground Church is not an original idea in Wurmbrand's thinking. Amongst others, researchers James A. Kapaló and Kinga Povedák, in their work *The Secret Police and the Religious Underground in Communist and Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, also speak about the religious underground that appeared before the Bolshevik Revolution. In Tsarist Russia, Orthodox dissenters had their secret communities.¹⁶⁵³ In pre-communist Romania, under the right-wing nationalist

¹⁶⁵² Knox, 52.

¹⁶⁵³ Kapaló and Povedák, 5.

government and later Marshall Antonescu's military regime when religious minorities were persecuted, Wurmbrand personally participated in the religious underground. The two churches, the Official and the Underground, are not necessarily separated. The late sociologist of religion, Miklós Tomka, in *Church, State, And Society in Eastern Europe*, is of a similar opinion as Wurmbrand. For Tomka, the Official Church was complemented and corrected by the Underground Church.¹⁶⁵⁴

Wurmbrand infers that the Underground Church, because of her extraordinary circumstances, does not have a well-defined body of teachings nor well-structured systematic theology; instead, the Underground church adopted a simple, powerful biblical faith. This is, for Wurmbrand, a positive feature, a badge of honour that validates.

The faith of the Underground Church, Wurmbrand concludes, clings to the sacrificial paradigm of Jesus Christ she strives for unity with the Man of Sorrows and takes the model of the early Church that followed the example of Christ, regardless of the costs. Pastor Wang Yi, a contemporary voice from the persecuted Chinese churches, in *Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement*, arrived to a similar conclusion like Wurmbrand. For him, the cross of Christ, His crucifixion, sufferings, death, and resurrection, are central to human history and to the persecuted churches from China.¹⁶⁵⁵ Professor Richard Madsen, in *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society*, speaks as well about the importance of the cross for the Underground Church. The Chinese Underground Catholic Christians, in humility, worship the Suffering Savior praying the Stations of the Cross prayers.¹⁶⁵⁶

In his writings, Wurmbrand presented this Church as very similar to the Early Christian Church of the Apostles and, after that, the Church from the Age of Martyrs. For him, these persecuted Underground Christians were on the same spiritual level, if not higher, than the persecuted Christians and martyrs from the first three centuries A.D. Our opinion is that this perspective is too simplistic because the

¹⁶⁵⁴ Tomka, 14.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Yi, 341.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Madsen, 146.

religious underground was a much more complex phenomenon with many different manifestations given its extensive geography. However, contemporary researchers agreed with the increase in the spirituality of the persecuted churches. For example, Dimitry Pospelovsky, in *Church, State, And Society in Eastern Europe*, states that the Russian Orthodox church from a church of nominal Christians, because of the intense persecution by 1920, started again to become a church of converts.¹⁶⁵⁷ Pospelovsky's account supports Wurmbrand's claim that the Underground Church is a church of martyrs, the ways of martyrdom almost as varied as in the first centuries of Christian history.¹⁶⁵⁸

Lastly, Wurmbrand reflected on the organisation of the Underground Church. In his opinion, it must be an extraordinary organisation to function efficiently in a hostile environment. Thinking back to his secret communist and religious activities in pre-communist and communist Romania, for Wurmbrand, this church must function as a secretive organisation. Therefore, she had to follow the rules of secrecy and conspiracy, possibly resembling Wurmbrand's illegal communist activity from his youth. The Underground Church did not have a centralised model of leadership, but still, she had to have a structure. Wurmbrand believed that in order for the Underground Church to function efficiently in the antagonistic context of communist regimes, she must not function on the principles of modern secular democracy.

Wurmbrand envisions an Underground Church where the hierarchy is very clear. On the first level, Christians must live in total obedience toward God, submitting to the authority of Christ. On the second level, they must obey their pastors, their elder brothers in the faith, like a soldier in the army obeys his superiors. This strategy, according to Wurmbrand, will help the Underground Church to be a powerful and efficient organization.

After fifty years of communism, Wurmbrand saw that the Underground Church was unbroken, and his belief was that the Underground Church would eventually overcome communism. Knox found a similar outcome as Wurmbrand. Looking back

¹⁶⁵⁷ Pospelovsky 275.

¹⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

at the religious persecutions in the Soviet Union, he concluded that the communist regime failed to silence dissidents and eliminate religious dissention.¹⁶⁵⁹ The attempts to silence the Underground Church were not successful, and the Underground Christian Church survived the communist regimes.

In our opinion, some aspects of the Underground Church are presented by Wurmbrand in his writings in an idealized manner. First, Wurmbrand presented the Underground Church with an idealized faith, a simple faith which transcended the lack or scarcity of Bibles and religious literature. But Wurmbrand looks only to half the picture because this can also be a negative feature as well. The lack of Bibles, Christian literature, or theologically well-trained clergy can lead to the propagation of unbiblical teachings. Thus, as mentioned by Tomka, the Underground Church was accused of heterodoxy and we can accept that because of the isolation of different religious groups, the danger of heterodoxy was a real one.¹⁶⁶⁰

Secondly, in order to establish the spiritual authority of this church, he labours to avoid the long-beleaguered history of Christianity by connecting this church directly to the Early Christian Church of the Apostles and, after that, the Church from the Age of Martyrs. However, this may have good resonance as a radio or TV slogan, it can have mobilizing propensity for the Western Christians who read Wurmbrand's account, but in reality, there is a significant difference of context. The Early Christians represented a minority in the Roman world, and Christianity was a new, alien religion. The 20th Century persecuted Christians in Eastern Europe were a majority, with a history steeped in Christianity for centuries until the advent of the alien atheistic Communism. Communists fought hard to make Christians a manageable minority and failed in the end.

Thirdly, in our opinion, Wurmbrand's vision and strategy for the organization of the Underground Church is too idealistic. In reality, according to Tomka, the Underground Church as he experienced it in Communist Eastern Europe, represented a shift from a centralised form of organisation to a decentralised one,

¹⁶⁵⁹ Knox, 57.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Tomka, 107.

from a formal organisation to an informal one. The highly institutionalised setting was creatively supplanted by newly invented forms of organisation. The clergy centred hierarchy was replaced by a more democratic church management.¹⁶⁶¹

Wurmbrand's hierarchical, militaristic ideal may sound good in theory, especially from the perspective of the leader, but this kind of hierarchy is also open to abuse. If the communist secret police infiltrate an underground religious group, as they often did, a militaristic top to bottom organisation can very well lead to the dissolution of the cell, or to the subversion of it to serve the purpose of the communists. A democratic setting may be less decisive, and slower to act, but it can also mitigate abuse from the leadership level.

¹⁶⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The attempt to discover what Richard Wurmbrand was thinking at a certain time about a certain topic is a complex undertaking to say the least. His existence was formed, shaped and reshaped by a complex set of factors, and the endeavour to untangle this intricate web can be challenging. His theological thinking represents a particular theological contribution to the field of Church and State relationships. To this day, there is a lack of scientific research in examining the politico-theological contribution of Wurmbrand to the expanding field of Church and State relationships. My aim was to fill this gap in our knowledge.

His thoughts on how the Christian Church and Christian individual should relate to the oppressive, secular state gives us valuable information when dealing with similar situations that can still be found in the present, in different areas of the world. Therefore, the objective of this work was to answer the research question of: How did Richard Wurmbrand approach and manage the tension between Christianity and Communism, against the background of his Romanian experiences in the Communist era?

This present research began with a vague idea about who Wurmbrand was and what his beliefs were. Wurmbrand's visit to Romania after 1989, after the demise of communism in the country, brought with it a wider circulation of his life's story. The opening of a Romanian branch of his organisation, the creation of the Stephanus printing company and the opening of the Stephanus bookshop and video store in Bucharest made available for a wider audience his ideas through the materials, books, sermons, and videos created by Wurmbrand. This gave rise, in Romanian Christian circles, mostly amongst newer evangelicals to whom the present researcher belongs, to an image of Wurmbrand as a gifted preacher, storyteller, living martyr, a hero of the Christian faith who opposed the communist regime, who, along with his family, survived many years of communist prisons and dedicated his life to helping persecuted Christians.

This outstanding image, with an almost saintly aura, came under the microscope of the researcher. The focalization upon his person revealed interesting details. On the negative side, we discovered a proud person with a fierce temper, very aware of his strengths, quick to lambast his opponents, and possibly too sure of himself and his beliefs. On the positive side, we discovered a person who openly talked in his writings about his problems and shortcomings, about his wasteful life in his youth, his troubled communist youth, his marital conflicts, his extreme experiences bordering on mental illness in prison, and about his many times problematic unorthodox beliefs. We also discovered a person who fought fiercely for his Christian beliefs, disregarding the costs to his personal and familial life, bending but not breaking under the communist onslaught. Yes, the findings point to the fact that he was a gifted preacher, an unusual hero of the Christian faith, but a more down-to-earth one with shortcomings and flaws and often strange ideas.

Concerning his theology, we cannot talk about systematic theology, but thoughts and ideas born out of a powerful inner struggle between his Jewishness and his conversion to Christianity. Also, what he perceived as his Christian mission, to spread the Gospel of Christ, was energised by an inherited communist activism from his youth, and structured by communist conspiratorial *modus operandi*. All this was reforged in the fires of communist prisons through hunger, torture, and drugging. Coupled with this was his perceived mission to warn the West about the danger of communism and stop the spreading of communism to America, his new home after his emigration.

Therefore, we laboured to find the answer to the question of: How did Wurmbrand approach and manage the tension between Christianity and Communism, against the background of his Romanian experiences in the Communist era? The ideas related to this theme are dispersed in his writings, sprinkled here and there amongst autobiographical material, devotionals, meditations, sermons, and apologetical writings.

An oversimplified answer to this question, that still encapsulates the essence of his political theology, can be, using his mission's motto, "Hate the evil systems

(communism), but love your persecutors (communists). Love their souls, and try to win them for Christ."¹⁶⁶² This work attempted the expansion and explanation of this motto of the hate and love relationship. Why did Wurmbrand hate communism as a political ideology and a political system and still loved the communists?

To understand this hate, this visceral revulsion, we need a context for it. To understand what Wurmbrand thought about Church-State relationships, we must consider the personal, historical, geographical, political, and religious context of the time. We have to explore the way the relationship between Church and State evolved in Wurmbrand's Romania until Wurmbrand's time and also during his life.

The rapport between Church and State in Romania, was basically the history of an uneven, unhealthy, coercive relationship of the communist regime with the religious domain. Still, the communists must not be exclusively credited for this, because they inherited and exploited age-old vulnerabilities in this area. The state in Romania had a long history of using the religious sphere, the Orthodox Church and the other minoritarian churches and denominations, to further its purposes. Starting with the reign of Cuza, and though the times of the Romanian kings, augmented with times of dictatorship, the Romanian heads of state used an old vulnerability of the Orthodox church's understanding of Church and state rapport fashioned after the Byzantine symphony principle i.e., the principle of harmony between the state and the church.

The Romanian communists used this as an important stepping stone in their agenda. They sought, to gradually limit the influence of the Churches upon the Romanian society and finally to totally eradicate it by coercion, communist propaganda, and by secularist atheistic re-education. To achieve this purpose the Romanian communist adopted a step-by-step strategy. At first, in the first decades (1944-1965), after a period of dissimulated friendship, they begun the eradication of all religious anti-communists. The communists brought into existence, after the soviet model, a far-reaching police state, who through widespread surveillance, sought to identify and eliminate all possible threats to the communist agenda. In this

¹⁶⁶² Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 9.

period dissenting voices from the religious sphere, clerics, religious militants and layman were labelled dangerous elements, subversive agents of foreign powers and were sent to communist prisons and concentration camps.

After the communist subjected the Churches to their agenda, they recognized the political value of the existence of a totally obedient Church. Thus, instead of totally eliminating religion from the Romanian society, they fought hard to maintain a façade of religious tolerance mostly for the benefit on the international community. The Romanian totalitarian communists eliminated all oppositions from the religious realm and treated kindly interested supporters for its religious policy, from the hierarchy of the different churches, who cooperated in different degrees with the regime.

Another important dimension of Wurmbrand's background was his Jewishness. This aspect must also be taken into account in order to understand his thoughts. The history of Romanian Jews and their relationship with the Romanian State followed a sinuous path, pendulating between recognition and persecution. At first, it was the story of the fight for official acknowledgement, achieved in 1928, when the Jews finally received legal citizen status. After the period of official recognition also came hard times for the Romanian Jews in the interwar period. The heights of antisemitism were reached under the National Legionary State (under General Antonescu and the Iron Guard) and later under the military dictatorship of Marshall Antonescu. In 1940 the Jews were stripped of their legal status by the state under the popular antisemitic drive of the Romanian legionary movement coupled with Hitler's pressure upon his allies, Romania amongst them, to eliminate the Jews. Romania had her own infamous share of the Shoah (Holocaust). The Jewish population from Romania, suffered terribly under the onslaught of state sanctioned pogroms, deportations and property appropriations. The result was that at the end of the Second World War, the Romanian Jewish population more than halved, it shrunk from around 800.000 (before WWII) to approximately 370.000.

The decline of the Jewish population in Romania continued under communist management, leading to the paltry figure of 19000 in 1989. This was caused by

several factors. The Jews became more and more impoverished after the ordeals suffered during the Second World War, and after their properties were seized. The communists further marginalized the Jews, distrusting them, labelling them foreign Zionist elements or branding them as enemies of the communist economy. These factors made life impossible for the Romanian Jews, and forced them emigrate to Israel and other Western countries. Sadly, the Romanian State instead of recognizing this ethnic group as an asset, a positive factor of diversity, mostly distrusted and alienated its inhabitants of Jewish origin.

The powerful emotions of love and hate, love for the communists as persons and hate for communism as an ideology and a political regime, must be also traced through Wurmbrand's biography. His long years of incarceration by the Romanian communist regime, and after, his emigration to the West with a determined Christian anti-communist mission, were arguably the main events of his life, events that made him a publicly known figure, with a certain direction and purpose.

But his journey to Christianity and anti-communism was a sinuous one, especially him being Jewish. His life was marked by hardship from the beginning. He experienced poverty and the loss of his father, these things leading him to doubt the existence of God. His spiritual scepticism accentuated by readings from Voltaire, along with his unruly nature, led him paradoxically, to enrol in the communist party in his teenage years. Communist activism gave him meaning for a decade, him being totally loyal to the cause. His break with communism was a very painful separation from his youthful ideals. This was caused by the betrayal by his communist colleagues when he was twenty-five years old. The resulting imprisonment and torture, his reluctant cooperation with the *Siguranța* secret police and the following exclusion from the Communist Party drove him away from the communists.

His ideological bewilderment, coupled with tuberculosis, at that time a scary medical verdict, led him on a profound search for meaning and spiritual direction, despite being a self-proclaimed atheistic Jew. The newly found Christian belief alleviated his spiritual turmoil, and after he processed his inner conflicts given his Jewishness, he found again purpose in life. He became involved in different areas of

Christian ministry, his contribution growing constantly in spite of the opposition of political regimes.

From communism to Christianity and from Christianity to communist prisons, this was the path followed by him. The long years of prison experiences marked him for life. The inhuman treatment, the physical and psychological torture, the years of solitary confinement deepened his Christian faith and convinced him to denounce the communist regime, when the opportunity would present itself.

When finally, he was released by the communist regime, he laboured to become in the West, a voice for the voiceless with a strong anti-communist stance. He endeavoured to acquaint the world outside the Iron Curtain countries with the predicament of persecuted Christians, with the purpose of helping them.

Wurmbrand dedicated his years in America to this enterprise, creating a worldwide mission, aiding thousands of persecuted Christians and spreading the message of love for the communists as individuals and hate for communism as an ideology.

Wurmbrand hated communism as a political system because of its devastating impact on Romania, his home country, and because of the devastating effect it had upon his family's life. His immigration to the West and, afterwards, his arrival to the United States opened opportunities for him to theologially process all of his traumatic experiences from communist prisons, then to take the fight to the communists, by unveiling the danger he thought they represented, and by helping those still persecuted. He was free after his emigration to the West, but his heart was left in communist prisons. Much of his life in the West is a series of remembering, always thinking of those who remained in communist prisons. His personal tragedy and the heartbreak others experienced around him in communist prisons were forever seared in his memory. His writings in the West are part of a process of memorialization of the experienced tragedy. His grief often warps his historical lens, his remembering is put in the service of his mission i.e., to unmask communism and to help those persecuted by the communists.

Wurmbrand was convinced that all of his past experiences, all the suffering, were not in vain, but they all served a purpose, that is, to help him in the understanding of the times. Wurmbrand thought that he had a privileged, prophetic perspective of history. Therefore, his vocation, in his perception, was to educate people in the West and to warn them of the dangers that lurked in the shadows of present history. People in the West, complacent in their wealth and leisure, were ignorant of the fact that totalitarian communism represented the primary threat for their way of being. Wurmbrand assumed that it was his mission to warn the West, that communism was on the offensive, striving to enslave the free world.

Why was communism a danger and a theological problem from Wurmbrand's Christian perspective? Communism, for Wurmbrand, had profound metaphysical issues. He arrived at this conclusion after examining the lives of the Communist elite from a spiritual angle. His scrutiny of the lives and writings of Karl Marx, Moses Hess, Friedrich Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Bukharin, Mao and Andropov led him to the conclusion that these communist icons were secretly Satanists, under Satanic influence in the biblical sense. This conclusion, Wurmbrand was aware, could be viewed with suspicion because his arguments were not irrefutable.

His dreadful prison experience, his permanent physical and psychological scars, understandably drove him to adopt an extreme anti-communist stance. That is why instead of being based on rigorous research, his conclusions stem from a search for arguments in favour of his already established views. He is looking to justify his presuppositions. His so-called evidences, that prove for him that the communist icons were Satan worshippers, or that they belonged to an actual satanic church, fail to convince once you go through the writings of his communist opponents.

Still, Wurmbrand's ideas are not totally without merit. We can argue, supported by other authors, that at the origin of totalitarian ideologies, which had a terrible impact upon the world in modern times, evil was present. For example, Eric Voegelin in his book, *The Political Religions* similarly points out that at the basis of totalitarian political ideologies, at the root of German National Socialism and Marxist Communism, satanic evil was present. Also, Wurmbrand is not the only author who

wrote about a dark side of the communist leaders. Hints to similar ideas can be found amongst others in the biographies written by Franz Mehring,¹⁶⁶³ Robert Payne,¹⁶⁶⁴ Paul Kengor,¹⁶⁶⁵ and histories of Alexander Yakovlev¹⁶⁶⁶ and Leszek Kolakowski.¹⁶⁶⁷ The authors of these biographical and historical works also hinted at or outright denounced, what they perceived as a sinister side of the communist leaders.

Wurmbrand was also concerned, that the basic metaphysical issue of communism naturally affected its ideology as well. Communist dogma, according to Wurmbrand was anti-theistic, spreading revolt against God. The ideology spread by communist leaders, given their satanic agenda, became in Wurmbrand's understanding a political religion, intolerant, invasive, warping that which was good in the beginning. Wurmbrand was only partially correct in designating communism a political religion, Marxism being only a caricature of religion, because "it presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system", and this is not a general characteristic of religious belief according to Kolakowski.¹⁶⁶⁸ Communism as a political religion, could not tolerate other sources of meaning and purpose for the human life.¹⁶⁶⁹

Wurmbrand was correct in identifying similarities between communism as a political religion and Christianity. Communism did assume accoutrements of traditional religions, like a scripture (Marx's *Das Kapital*), a Pope (Marx himself), sacraments (the oaths give to the Party), confessions (communist self-critique), excommunication (elimination from the Party) and a cult of martyrs (communist dead for the cause). Wurmbrand pointed out that fundamental Christian concepts: love, holiness, support for each other, concern for social issues, importance of labour, sharing things, were also borrowed by communism to make its ideology more

¹⁶⁶³ Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), 2, 4, 12.

¹⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism's Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration* (Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2020) Kindle edition.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 155.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Breakdown* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 80-84.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Kolakowski, 526.

¹⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

palatable. Political religions are known to adopt these techniques according to Gentile.¹⁶⁷⁰

Wurmbrand held that communists, given their materialistic perspective about the world, could not have appropriate answers for the ultimate realities of human existence that transcend matter. Their ideology is not compatible with the authentic human nature, that is why lacking fundamental answers, communist live unhappy lives, marked by depression and excess, seeking relief from their troubled consciences in alcohol or even suicide. Humanity is much more than only chemical elements. People since immemorable times were aware that there was a higher reality in the world and that they were created by this higher reality, or divinity. Their inner voice, the voice of conscience, also proves the existence of God according to Wurmbrand. Voegelin, had similar ideas, believing that men, in their inner soul, have a feeling of dependence upon the supernatural, and humanity struggles to “rediscover themselves and God” .¹⁶⁷¹

Wurmbrand hated communism because, despite its ideological appeal, its application in real life produced disastrous results. In the countries under the Iron Curtain where communist ideology was put in practice, it brought disaster for the general population. Whole societies were enveloped in a network of lies and deceit with the single purpose of acquiring absolute power. Once communists achieved their goal, all those who resisted were persecuted, detained, and finally tortured. The disastrous communist rule was also seen and felt in the economy. Instead of the promised wealth and economic stability, communist management brought negative economic results and disillusionment for the general population. The much-advertised communist golden era, the promise of poverty eradication and general wellbeing, proved to be a blatant lie. Wurmbrand held that these disastrous results proved without a doubt that communism is evil. People under communist management in the agriculture and industry sectors, experienced suppression,

¹⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., xviii.

¹⁶⁷¹ Voegelin, 31.

deficient agriculture, shortages of food, underpayment, general poverty, poor management, and economic privation.

How could Wurmbrand hate communism as a political system and still love the communists and endeavour to win them for Christ? The answer to this question lies in Wurmbrand's reflection on the Christian Church. Only in this context love for the communist persecutors could exist. The Christian church had to adapt to the communist regimes in order to survive. After his release from the Romanian communist prisons and his emigration, Wurmbrand reflected, in America, in an already existing anti-communist setting, on the Christian Church's experience under communism through the filter of his personal experience. His theological examination revealed to him the existence of a multi-faceted entity which found coping mechanism under the pressure of communist authoritarian regimes.

When dealing with the Christian Church, Wurmbrand first approached the so-called Official Church. This church developed under the pressure of the communist regimes. Wurmbrand, included under this wide umbrella all the current officially recognized Christian churches and denominations from around the globe, which experienced the ascendance to power of communist regimes, and had to adapt to this new reality that developed in their countries.

The Official Church was weighted down, according to Wurmbrand, by complicated historical baggage. These old problems, Wurmbrand correctly observed, helped the communist in their endeavour to subjugate this entity. Other researchers, like Knox, observed in the case of Russia that old inherited historical mentality was a vulnerability that helped communists to bring this church under their control. The Russian Orthodox Church, for centuries used the Byzantine Symphonia model as a model in dealing with the state.¹⁶⁷²

Furthermore, contemporary research can also back up Wurmbrand's claim that the Official Church was riddled by the disease of co-operation and compromise with the communist regime. The higher echelons of church leadership had to shoulder the

¹⁶⁷² Knox, 106.

lion's share of the blame for this situation. For example, Makrides wrote about the future Russian Orthodox Patriarch Sergius and his dishonourable declaration of absolute loyalty to the Bolsheviks, in 1928.¹⁶⁷³ Knox also mentioned this Declaration of Loyalty to the Soviet Motherland.¹⁶⁷⁴ Historian Deletant detailed how in Romania, the state managed to assume the power to elect Orthodox bishops and how the Romanian communists abused this privilege.¹⁶⁷⁵ Professors Stan and Turcescu spoke about how the Romanian Orthodox leaders cooperated with the domestic communist regime.¹⁶⁷⁶ Reverend Mazgaj, studying the case of the Polish Catholic Church, identified personalities from the Polish catholic church, who join forces with local communists to gain privileges.¹⁶⁷⁷ And the infamous list of officials from church hierarchy who associated with the different communist regimes does not stop here.

However, it is interesting to notice, that Wurmbrand acknowledged all the historical baggage and shameful cooperation of the Official Church with the communist regimes, and still manifested compassion and consideration toward it. Wurmbrand was not naïve, he knew from bitter personal experience that behind the compromise often motivations and driving forces were complex. Some were moved by petty motivations, like material gains, of status gains, or other privileges. Others, according to Wurmbrand, were motivated by other reasons, some simply succumbed to the intense communist pressure, while others cooperated thinking that in this way the Christian Church will endure. For example, researcher Beliakova points out, in the case of Soviet Evangelicals, specifically the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists, denounced Wurmbrand's vocal anti-communist stance on the international scene, and his idea of an Underground Church.¹⁶⁷⁸ They used this first to please the communists. But also, it was a good pretext for them, because the communist in order to combat Wurmbrand, allowed these Evangelicals to extend

¹⁶⁷³ Makrides, 244.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Knox, 45.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Deletant, 67.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Turcescu and Stan, 95-99.

¹⁶⁷⁷ Mazgaj, 34.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Beliakova, 77.

their network of contacts with the Western Christian world and facilitated the opening of more Soviet Churches to Western visitors.¹⁶⁷⁹

Wurmbrand's conclusion was that the Official Church cannot be discarded out of hand, this church had its place in the grand scheme of things. Despite all her shortcomings, the Official Church continued to be used by God, continued to be a beacon of light in dark communist times, because it ensured the continuity of the Christian Church and her worship, her liturgy, directed people toward God.

The Christian Church besides the Official Church found another way to adapt to the coercive regime of the communists, thus emerged the Underground Church. This facet of the Christian Church also came under Wurmbrand's scrutiny. He knew aspects of this Church from personal experience, and while he was in the West, through his contacts from the Iron Curtain churches and religious groups, he received fresh information, new evidence of persecutions.

In Wurmbrand's opinion, the Underground Church, was the correct way the Christian Church should respond to oppressive regimes. Lack of complacency, denial of collaboration and co-operation with the communist regime, were for Wurmbrand, necessary characteristics of this Church. Knox observed that the religious dissent, manifested by the Underground Church, challenged directly the relationship between the communist state and the institutional religion.¹⁶⁸⁰ Therefore, the communists clearly understood this Church, as a very real threat of the status quo and fought hard to remove this danger.

The Underground Church is also mentioned by researchers who study the church and state relationship in communist lands, thus is not Wurmbrand's original idea. Kapaló and Povedák also researched the Orthodox dissenters who already existed in Tsarist times before the Bolshevik revolution and organized in secret underground communities.¹⁶⁸¹ Tomka thought, in some way similar to Wurmbrand, that the Underground Church complemented and corrected the Official Church.¹⁶⁸² In

¹⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Knox, 52.

¹⁶⁸¹ Kapaló and Povedák, 5.

¹⁶⁸² Tomka, 14.

Wurmbrand's personal experience, in pre-communist and later communist Romania he found that the Underground and the Official church existed side by side, as two facets of a coin.

When dealing with the creed of the Underground Church, Wurmbrand concluded, that this church had a simple, biblical faith. The Underground Church had not the time, nor the necessary context to develop a comprehensive systematic theology. Instead, this church adopted the sacrificial model of Jesus Christ, she wanted to be one with the Man of Sorrows. Similarly, she followed after Christ, the sacrificial paradigm of the early Church. Wang Yi, a present-day voice from the Chinese Church, believe like Wurmbrand, that the cross of Christ, his death and resurrection, was fundamental to human history and to the persecuted Chinese Church.¹⁶⁸³ A further indication of this truth can be found in the writings of Madsen, who describes how Chinese Underground Catholic Christians recited the Stations of the Cross prayers in worship of their Suffering Savior.¹⁶⁸⁴

The Underground Church, according to Wurmbrand, can be comparable with the Church of the Apostles from the first century, and the one from the Age of Martyrs. It is even possible that the modern-day persecuted Christians have achieved higher spiritual levels than their forefathers. Pospelovsky, a contemporary researcher, used similar language, which supports Wurmbrand's claim, that the Underground Church became a church of martyrs, the means of martyrdom being virtually as diverse as in the first centuries.¹⁶⁸⁵ Pospelovsky also wrote that persecution increased the spiritual level of the persecuted Church. The Russian Orthodox church, according to Pospelovsky, given the intense persecution by 1920, from a church of nominal Christians started again to become a church of converts.¹⁶⁸⁶

The organizational paradigm of the Underground Church was also an important topic for Wurmbrand, because she had to function in an extremely hostile environment. Drawing inspiration from his secret, illegal, communist activities from

¹⁶⁸³ Yi, 341.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Madsen, 146.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Pospelovsky 275.

his youth and his later clandestine religious activities from Romania, Wurmbrand believed that the Underground Church had to adopt the model of secretive organizations. The rules of secrecy and conspiracy, also used by the communist cells, had to be followed.

In order for the Underground Church to function efficiently she must have a structure. The hierarchy must be very clear, the model of modern democracies cannot apply in this instance. The ultimate authority for the Underground Church must be God, that is why Christians must live in total obedience of Him, they must defer to the authority of Christ the Son of God. After this first level of authority, on the second level Christians must acknowledge the authority of their pastors, superiors in the faith, based on the military model of obeying superiors. Wurmbrand believed that a clearly delineated structure like this, will make from the Underground Church a strong, competent and lasting organization.

Half a century of communist rule could not annihilate the Underground Church. Wurmbrand envisioned that ultimately this Church would be victorious over communism. Knox, like Wurmbrand, thinking again about the religious persecutions from the Soviet Union, concluded that the communists, in spite of their tremendous efforts, ultimately failed to quiet dissenters and to eradicate religious dissent.¹⁶⁸⁷ The communist concerted efforts to brake, silence and eradicate the Underground Church were futile, and the Underground Christian Church outlived her tormentors.

Looking back at Wurmbrand's way of presenting the Underground Church, our opinion is that his view was too simplistic, presenting a more unified entity than it was the case. Wurmbrand's theological perspective, as historian Gerhard Simon observed, can be accused of naïveté, at a first reading one can form the opinion that the Underground Church was a more cohesive entity.¹⁶⁸⁸ In reality, the Christian underground movements, were spread out, scattered, all over the countries of the Iron Curtain, and thus very diverse in their manifestations and organization. Therefore, the centralized model of organization proposed by Wurmbrand for the

¹⁶⁸⁷ Knox, 57.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Gerhard Simon, *Church, State, and Opposition in the U.S.S.R.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 177–79.

Underground Church did not really fit the existing reality. Tomka stressed that the Underground Church from the Communist Eastern Europe, was not centralized and formal, but by necessity decentralized and informal. The Underground Church was forced to adopt new methods of a more democratic nature.¹⁶⁸⁹ This way, these groups were harder to penetrate by the secret police, and were less prone to abuse from the outside than the centralized militaristic model proposed by Wurmbrand.

Besides simplifying, we can observe, that Wurmbrand idealized the Underground Church and was eager to overlook her shortcomings. In spite of the scarcity of Christian religious literature, this church is presented by Wurmbrand as having a strong but simple faith. Wurmbrand disregarded the fact that the pressure from the communist coercive regime, which caused lack of theologically trained clergy and lack of religious material, also led to the propagation of poor maybe even unbiblical teachings in these circles. So, looking back at the geographical diversity, to the isolation of some of the illegal religious groups, it is understandable why Tomka remarks, that the Underground Church was sometimes accused of heterodoxy.¹⁶⁹⁰

Another facet of the idealization of the Underground Church, can be recognised in the way Wurmbrand endeavoured to establish the spiritual authority of this church. Wurmbrand tried to extricate the Underground Church from under the burden of centuries of historical problems, and claimed her direct connection to the Church of Apostles and Martyrs. In the end, we cannot forget, that the Underground Church emerged from the Official church, and cannot be totally free of her historical heritage and religious bias. We can agree with Wurmbrand, that there were similarities between the persecution suffered by the Early Church from the first centuries and the modern Christian Church under communist persecution, but still the two contexts differed greatly. The historical heritage of the Christian Church, easily put aside by Wurmbrand, was in the end a great asset for the persecuted Christian churches or Christian groups. Millennia of Christian faith, ingrained in the collective conscience,

¹⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁹⁰ Tomka, 107.

could not be easily erased in one generation. Nevertheless, the communist regimes put in the effort to achieve this, but were unsuccessful in the end.

We can conclude, that there are still areas of Wurmbrand's biography and theological thinking that were not investigated enough, and the present work is only a first step in bringing colour to these grey areas. Even if the present work has a biographical chapter, we do not have a well-researched stand-alone Wurmbrand biography. A future work in this direction must answer questions like, the validity of his claimed ancestry from the Magid (Preacher) of Mezritsh, the Rabbi Dov Ber ben Avraham of Mezritsh (1704-1772). The same thing can be said about his initial eight years of schooling in Istanbul; did he start school very early, to finish eight years of schooling by the age of twelve, or were his memories faulty? Given his Jewishness, it is worth researching the conflict between his ethnicity and conversion to Christianity. How did he solve this inner conflict and how did he live with the two sides of his existence?

Additionally, further analysis is needed to decipher his *modus operandi*. The fully committed activist mentality and the illegal conspirative techniques ingrained in him from his communist period, informed his missions' strategy in the future. One can wonder if he used a particular book from the communist propaganda arsenal, for his illegal conspirative techniques in his underground Christian activities?

The American government during the Cold War, thought the CIA, conducted book mailing and distribution programs, together with radio broadcasts directed toward the Iron Curtain countries.¹⁶⁹¹ Further investigation is needed, to see how much Wurmbrand was part of this ideological, political, cultural and psychological warfare waged by the United States against the Soviet Union. Further research is needed to understand Wurmbrand's relationship with American governmental agencies. His firm anti-communist stance brought him to the attention of the American political regime, who recognized the anti-communist propaganda value of his experience and initially popularized his story. This begs the question if

¹⁶⁹¹ Alfred A. Reisch, *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-Funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program Behind the Iron Curtain* (Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2013), 525.

Wurmbrand, while focused on his aid ministry, was used or not as a pawn by the religious counter communist propaganda war conducted by American governmental agencies?¹⁶⁹² Was he a willing part, of the instrumentalization of Evangelical Christians in American foreign policy? We attempted to clarify these question and others relevant to the present research by contacting his son, namely Mihai Wurmbrand, but he refused to comment.

Further research is needed, to examine Wurmbrand's perspective of the Western society, particularly to examine the way he understood the western Church as spiritually weak and complacent. Also, in this context it is worth researching his thought on liberation theology. Can Christianity and communism coexist, is a fusion between the Christian faith and Marxist ideology possible?

Further research is needed, to examine the impact of Wurmbrand's vocal international anti-communist activity upon communist regimes, and upon the churches from the Iron Curtain countries. What was more exactly Wurmbrand's contribution to the downfall of the communist regime from Romania, if any? Because according to historian Paul E. Michelson, he was part of the Romanian evangelicals who contributed in part to the undermining of the Ceausescu regime.¹⁶⁹³ What measures were used by Soviet communists, to counter Wurmbrand's popular condemning message, and how did they enlist church officials from mainline and Evangelical churches in the fight to discredit Wurmbrand?

As mentioned before, the essence of Wurmbrand's political theology, the answer to the tension between Christianity and Communism (Communist state) can be encapsulated in his mission's motto, "Hate the evil systems (communism), but love your persecutors (communists). Love their souls, and try to win them for Christ." This work attempted to explain this hate and love relationship more on a theoretical level, but the scale leans more to the side of the reasons for hate. Further research is

¹⁶⁹² See how the American governmental agencies used religion as another weapon in their counter-communist arsenal, in Dianne Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 6.

¹⁶⁹³ Paul E. Michelson, "The History of Romanian Evangelicals, 1918-1989: A Bibliographical Excursus," *Archiva Moldaviae* 9 (2017): 232, https://pmichelson.com/michelson_RO%20evan%20bibliog2017.pdf. Accessed on 11.11.2023

needed to explore Wurmbrand's ethics. This is necessary because along with the love for the communists, Wurmbrand proposes actions to the Christian Church in her dealing with communism that are challenging or outright radical, on the borderlines of Christian orthodoxy or outright out of its bounds. So, as a continuation of this work, further research is needed to examine the active measures that Wurmbrand proposes to Western Christians, in helping oppressed Christians. The ethical implications of the extraordinary actions that he proposes to persecuted Christians, in order to survive and gain the upper hand in the confrontation with communist states, must also come under the scrutiny of the researcher.

SUMMARY

This thesis is about the political theology of Richard Wurmbrand. It begins with a first chapter that prepared the ground for the examination of the theological contribution of Wurmbrand to the field of Church and State relationships. To comprehend what he was thinking about the complex relationship between religion, churches, Christian individuals, and the state, one must first follow the evolution of this relationship in Romania, his native country, from 1866 to and through the time of his life.

Romania during the first half of the 20th century went through extensive geopolitical, ideological and societal transformations. These alterations reshaped the Romanian political and religious landscape and influenced the life of Wurmbrand. This chapter follows these important events from the beginning of the 20th century to 1965, the year that Wurmbrand left Romania. The evolution of the relationship between the state and the religious sphere can be divided in two major time periods: the Romania of the first half of the 20th century, the Pre-communist Romania, and the Romania under the Communist totalitarian regime.

The first part of this first chapter follows the historical and political path taken by the Romanian state through times of constitutional monarchy, dictatorship and its relationship with the religious realm. The second and third part of this chapter touches the history of the period from 1944 to 1965 with the profound transformations brought about by the installation of the communist regime in Romania.

The communist regime, from its first years, endeavoured to impose an all-encompassing control over all the aspects of society. They worked tirelessly to exercise their control over the political, the ideological and the religious realm. By all available means, the communists wanted to transform the whole society to fit their utopia of a Socialist state. This section analyses how, through the Soviet influence, coercion, propaganda, and new legislation, they influenced all aspects of the state, society, the historical churches, and religious minorities. This chapter also takes into account the ethnicity of Wurmbrand and endeavours to familiarize the reader with

an understanding of the “Jewish problem”, the complex relationship of the Romanian state with its inhabitants of Jewish origin. The general presentation of this rapport enables the reader to understand another dimension of Wurmbrand’s life that gave his existence and thought more colour and distinctiveness.

In the second chapter of this work, the reader encountered a biography of Wurmbrand that familiarized him with his personal history. He lived a complex life fashioned by prodigious events, leaving profound marks on him and on his family. This chapter follows the course of his life, starting with the years of Wurmbrand’s childhood, the years 1909 to 1924. His childhood, marked by the loss of his father and subsequent poverty, leads him to troubled teenage years. The second section follows the life of the teenager and young adult from 1924 to 1937, through years of illegal communist activity and after his capture years of reluctant secret police asset.

The next section depicts the major shift in the course of Wurmbrand’s life. He converted to Christianity in 1937, and from this year, he engaged in Christian activism as a layman until 1941, when he became an ordained minister. Afterward, the years 1941-1948 meant, for Wurmbrand, an intense activity and notoriety as a Christian pastor in times of war and antisemitism. The following two sections document the span of the two terms, the years 1948-1956 and 1959-1964, spent by Wurmbrand in communist prisons after the end of the Second World War and the inauguration of the Communist regime in Romania.

The last section of the short biography chronicles the years after Wurmbrand was released from the Romanian communist gulag and emigrated with his family to the West. The years 1965-2001, almost to the end of his life, were years of intense activity for him and his family. Once established in the United States, Wurmbrand, with the help of his wife and son, he built an international aid ministry, earning him world renown. Wurmbrand, until the last years of his long life when old age and illness prevented him, endeavoured to be the voice of the persecuted Christians in the West, speaking against persecution, demasking the oppressive authoritarian regimes and materially helping the families of persecuted and imprisoned Christian worldwide.

The third chapter takes the reader a step closer to the heart of the matter. This chapter, which analyses the political theology of Communism from Wurmbrand's perspective, is divided into two main sections. The first one presents Wurmbrand's concept of his time and his personal philosophy of history because it is a major factor that influences his theological stance toward communism. The struggles of his early life, and especially the years spent in Communist prisons, left a profound mark on the way he understood history, himself and his role as Christ's follower in the world. He believed that the long years of horrible experiences of incarceration and, after this, his emigration to the West gave him a true understanding of his times and prepared him for a special vocation. Wurmbrand believed that it was his holy mission to warn everybody, especially the West, that communism represents a very serious threat to all the Western world.

The second section of this chapter details why Communism is viewed as such a threat, and such a theological problem. Wurmbrand investigated possible problems in the metaphysical nature of communism. He looked closely at the spiritual allegiances of the Communist elite, believing that something dark was afoot. The problematic spiritual allegiances of the communist leaders influenced their thinking, leading them to elaborate problematic communist doctrine. On top of this, Wurmbrand also looked at the real-life results produced by Communist leadership and Communist doctrine.

The fourth chapter takes the reader into the heart of the matter, i.e., the political theology of the variegated Christian church. This subject is central to the political and theological thinking of Wurmbrand. He reflected, in an existing American anti-communist setting, on the Christian church through the filter of his personal pastoral and missionary experience before his imprisonment and through his prison experience. He thought about how the Christian church adapted to the plethora of challenges brought about by communist regimes, and he also thought on strategies that could help the Church to survive communism.

Wurmbrand's political ecclesiology is multi-faceted. In the first subsection, we take into account the American context in which he became an important actor.

Following, the second subsection, we looked at the existence of the Official church as the first adaptation of the Christian Church to the overabundance of challenges brought about by the communist regimes. The Official Church, heir to many historical problems, was further tainted by compromise of higher clergy with the communists. In spite of all her ailments, Wurmbrand treated her with lenience and understanding because he thought that she continued to be used by God because the worship in this church directed people toward God and ensured continuity for Christianity. In the third subsection, we saw that the Underground Church was another way the Christian Church adapted to the constraints and persecutions of communist regimes. This Church, which refused complacency, complicity and accommodation with the oppressive communist regime was, for Wurmbrand, the correct response of the Church faced with the communist scourge. The Underground Church had a simple faith, according to Wurmbrand. She clings to the sacrificial paradigm of Jesus Christ, she strives for unity with the Man of Sorrows, and takes as a model the early Church that followed the example of Christ regardless of the costs. Also, Wurmbrand believed that this Church needed a militaristic organization in order to survive and thrive. On the first level, Christians must live in total obedience towards God, submitting to the authority of Christ. On the second level, they must obey their pastors, like a soldier in the army obeys his superiors. This strategy, according to Wurmbrand, will help the Underground Church to be a powerful and efficient organization.

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