

## 60 YEARS IN MISSIONS

This year Rev. Bill Bathman, the Chairman of the Board of Frontline Fellowship celebrates 60 years in missions. Some time ago we published this interview in JOY! Magazine. If you have been blessed by Rev. Bill Bathman's dynamic ministry please write to us some message, or details of your testimony that we can compile in a special publication to mark this milestone. If you have any photographs or recordings of Rev. Bill Bathman ministering in your area or church, please send those to us as well. All you can share will help us compile a comprehensive account of God's gracious provision, protection and blessing through His servant Rev. Bill Bathman.

### **BILL BATHMAN – MISSIONARY TO THE PERSECUTED**

**You've been involved in missions for over 55 years. Please tell us something about your background and how you got involved in missions to the persecuted church.**

Thank you Peter for this opportunity. Yes, my wife and I have been missionaries ever since I graduated from University in 1952. We spent 22 years in Europe, without a furlough, serving our Lord Jesus Christ primarily in evangelism. At the beginning we worked among refugees in Berlin who had escaped from behind the Iron Curtain. Then I worked in Spain, which before Vatican II was closed to the Gospel. This was a training ground for me to work in restricted-access countries.

In 1961, Trans World Radio, asked me to go to Yugoslavia and pick up some tape recorded sermons by Dr. Josif Horak in Serbo-Croatian. TWR wanted to broadcast those messages all across Yugoslavia.

In a wonderful way, the Lord led us to Dr. Horak's home. He was overjoyed to see us and said, "You must come back! Even if the door is closed – try it, to see if it's locked!" That was like a commission from the Lord. I knew from that moment on that we were called to minister to persecuted Christians wherever the Lord led us.

**In Brother Andrew's *God's Smuggler* he refers to a phone call with a missionary brother with whom he agreed to race towards Prague to meet the invading Russians with Bible distribution. I believe that you are that person he referred to. Please tell us something about that mission to Czechoslovakia in 1968.**

Yes, it was my privilege to work on several occasions with Brother Andrew. We made a number of trips together and he often spoke at our training school in Austria. When five of the Warsaw Pact nations, led by the USSR, invaded Czechoslovakia on the night of August 21, 1968 we were very concerned for our many friends there. I phoned Andrew and asked what his plans were. He said, "I'm leaving within an hour for Prague." We agreed to meet there. Later, we stood shoulder to shoulder giving tracts and Gospels to the thousands of people thronging Wenceslas Square.

We had been working in Czechoslovakia for four years before the Russians invaded. We traveled widely in the country during that first week of intense military activity. The Christians were very glad to see us and to know that we cared enough to come during their time of trouble.

**I believe you worked together with Richard Wurmbbrand on a number of occasions. Please tell us something of what he suffered at the hands of the Marxists and some projects you were involved in with him:**

We worked very closely with Richard and Sabina following his release from 14 years in various communist prisons in Romania. He literally bore in his body “the marks of the Lord Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17).

When he testified before the United States Congress he had 18 stab wounds in his body, any one of which could have been fatal. The communists sold Wurmbrand for \$10,000. Christians in Norway paid his ransom. The Romanian government thought they were selling a “dead man,” but he lived another 30 years, founded Voice of the Martyrs and raised several million dollars to aid suffering, persecuted Christians worldwide.

We were couriers for Wurmbrand. He had a tremendous burden for fellow Christians who were persecuted. Over the years we took tens of thousands of dollars which Richard had raised in the US to aid the suffering Church in Eastern Europe – primarily in Romania. Many of them were men who had been in prison with him, like Moldavano the great hymn writer. Others were widows or close family members of fellow prisoners. Financial aid could not be sent by mail or bank transfers. It had to be taken in personally. We were Wurmbrand’s postmen. Every penny he sent we were able to deliver safely, by the grace of God, and get the best rate of exchange into local currency.

**Smuggling Bibles behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War must have been dangerous. Can you relate some of the answers to Prayer and interventions by the Lord that you have experienced?**

When I was loading up for a trip to Czechoslovakia once, I had the distinct impression from the Lord that I should put the Bibles on the back seat, not out-of-sight in the boot. I reluctantly obeyed. I casually tossed my raincoat over the Bibles on the seat and set off for the Austro-Czech border. Like Brother Andrew, we prayed that God would make “seeing eyes” blind momentarily while we were going through customs inspection.

On arrival at the frontier we had the most thorough vehicle search ever, especially in the boot! Then the customs officer opened the back door, reached in and lifted my raincoat. I was standing right next to him and I could see the Bibles. My heart almost stopped. He put my coat down, looked under the front seat and on the back shelf, then turned to me and said, “You may go now. Have a nice trip.” We did!

**Ministering behind the Iron Curtain during those dark years of persecution, you must have met some extraordinary Christians. Could you introduce us to some of these Heroes of the Faith?**

I remember Emily in Bulgaria. She and Peter, her husband, distributed the Bibles we delivered among their Pentecostal friends. They had two sons ages 10 and 12. The communists had forbidden all children to attend Church. One evening, while Emily was preparing dinner in her tiny kitchen, the door burst open and two very tall policemen came in. “Your sons go with you to Church on Sunday!” they accused. “Yes,” she replied. “It is forbidden for children under 18 years to go to Church. You must stop them,” they demanded.

Now Emily was only about 5’2” [1m 54cm], but she stood up very straight and looked the communist policeman right in the eye. “We want our boys to go to Church,” she said with determined conviction. “If you don’t want them to go, then you stand at the door of the Church and forbid them to come in, but don’t ask me to do your dirty work.”

The policeman left without another word and the boys never missed a Sunday. She was brave.

I remember waiting in Josef Tson's tiny apartment above the Baptist Church in Ploesti, Romania. It was 1974. He had been interrogated by the Secret Police for many days. When he arrived we sat together at a small table with a solitary candle. He spoke softly as he told me his story.

They had threatened him with imprisonment; torture and death. He responded by saying that he understood that they had the power to kill him. It was their ultimate weapon. "But I also have an ultimate weapon," he affirmed, "and my ultimate weapon is greater than yours, but will only come into effect when you use your weapon."

"What is your ultimate weapon?" they mockingly demanded.

"Sacrifice," he said. "My death will validate every sermon I have ever preached and every book I have written." Then Josef looked across the table, smiled confidently and said, "Brother Bill, we are God's Army of lambs."

### **What has kept you going over all these many years?**

The absolute unshakable assurance that God has called me into His ministry and it won't be finished until He calls me Home.

**The fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of Communist dictatorships throughout Eastern Europe and the 1989 Christmas Revolution in Romania must have been tremendous events for you to experience after so many years of working behind the Iron Curtain.**

They were indeed! As the various countries opened up to the Gospel we could travel freely and take all kinds of aid to those still in need. Harriett, my wife, inaugurated a medical program and organized surgical teams of American doctors to visit Romania, Bulgaria and Poland. You were with me Peter on my first trip into Albania and we met a Christian doctor there. He invited us to preach the Gospel in each of the wards of his hospital in Tirana.

### **Is there still a need for ministries to the persecuted church?**

Yes. I suppose there will always be persecution of true Believers. It comes with the territory. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the great threat was communism. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is, and will continue to be, Islam. Jesus said, "*In this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*" John 16:33. And of course there is still widespread persecution of Christians in China and other communist countries, not to mention the horrendous conditions current in the Islamic world.

### **In what ways do Christians still face persecution in the world today?**

It comes in different forms. In places like China it is hard-core persecution with prison time and torture. In America and Western Europe it takes a more subtle aspect of ridicule, mocking, ostracism or indifference. Apathy is a notorious enemy.

### **What would you recommend to someone who feels burdened for serving the persecuted?**

First of all, pray. Ask the Lord if there is some particular place or people whom He would have you minister to. Then put feet to your prayers. Tell your Pastor. Get involved. Contact a mission organization that specializes in ministry to the persecuted – like [Frontline Fellowship](#).

## **What can we do to make our churches more missionary minded?**

Start a prayer group with a mission focus. Use [Operation World](#) material to pray around the world. Read mission publications and biographies, talk with your Pastor. Ask him to invite missionaries to visit the Church and present their work to the congregation. Make the Church aware of the Great Commission.

## **What are some of the most important lessons that you have learned during the last 55 years in missionary service?**

By far the most important, as well as the most difficult, task is to keep on keeping on. There are so many temptations to give up and give in. Keep your eyes firmly on the Lord Jesus. Keep His call on your life ever before you. Never doubt Him. Discouragements will come but Jesus is the Victor!

Rev. Bill Bathman is the Chairman of Frontline Fellowship and the Author of [\*\*Going Through – Even if the Door is Closed.\*\*](#)

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