



R U S S I A N C L E R G Y
I N A L A B O R C A M P .

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During the Second World War, I was living in occupied Belgium, and I had the opportunity to meet Soviet Citizens who were sent to work in Belgian coal mines. One of them told me that he was a priest, but he wanted to stay away from the Russian Emigree Church; he had been imprisoned in Siberia Labor camps, and he told me his story.

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I was a young priest and I worked in the Bishop's office accounting. We thought that we were safe in this little Ukrainian town when the Communists started the Church persecution. Our bishop and so many of the clergymen were arrested and sent to Siberia. Not all arrested were clergymen, some were rich peasants but six Bishops, one Archbishop and many priests were arrested. I was one of the

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youngest.

At the arrival in some remote Siberian station we were met by the Camp Commander who welcomed us with a speech. He said that we have come here not for punishment but for work. We have been useless people and now we would learn how to be useful to the society. He said that he would encourage every effort and every initiative and we could apply to him for help.

We walked ten miles to a barbed wire enclosure and wooden shacks. Inside were wooden cots for our bedding.

I was given a job as a teamster. Two horses and a cart were used to carry goods from the station to the camp. Some loads were heavy, such as two hundred pound sacks for the baker. I had to do it myself and of course I rode in a convoy with guards.

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The camp was very big, several thousands and there was an employment Office at the camp and the city. When I arrived I registered my trade as accountant, I could have advantages in food and lodging by working in an office. I went several times to the office, but there was no opening.

One day, entering the office I overheard a conversation. A commissar needed an accountant and he was angry for not being given one. I stepped forward and said that I was an accountant registered at this office. The man got angrier and scolded the office girl. She said that I was a priest and she has orders not to give white collar jobs to the priests. The man went to see the Camp commander and I got an accountant job with all the advantages.

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There were so many clergymen in this Labor Camp and none of us were allowed to officiate. We were allowed to go to church and pray though. There was a mission church near the camp and a native priest serving Eucharist every Sunday which we were allowed to go to. The church was filled, but we remained silent. That was the rule; Native priest and native choir were heard.

Spring came and Easter approached. Easter is the highest of all Orthodox feasts. The church was crowded for the midnight mass when it was discovered that the native priest was drunk. Some Atheists pulled a joke on the congregation and induced the priest to get drunk.

The high clergy was confused. The Archbishop proposed to go himself and beg the Commander for a permit but he was advised not to as he could not walk through the camp

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at night because he could be shot by a guard.

I walked to the altar and started to chant, the choir of natives answered and we sung the whole service undisturbed.

The high clergy thanked and congratulated me at the end of the service. Everyone will pray for martyrdom.

Early the next morning the Commander came to arrest me. He was in a joyful mood and congratulated me on my performance. "You did exactly what I wanted you to do - you discredited that bunch of inflated blimps" as he referred to the high clergy. "These cowards did not dare and left you, to pay the bill. I have to punish you and I will, but don't worry you will be better off than before."

They sneaked me out of the camp and sent me far North to a gold mine where I

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got an office job with all privileges. I could not correspond, I never saw my prison companions again.

At the end of the term I was discharged, sent back to Russia and got an office job again. I kept my seniority but I was not a priest. Fortunately, the people with whom I lived were believers. Each Sunday night I could officiate the Holy Eucharist - five of us present. I baptized babies, prayed for the dead and once or twice I married a young couple, otherwise I was assisting an accountant.

Then the war started and the Germans came, not many had time to flee.

The Germans opened the Cathedral and there was a new clergy who came with the enemy troops. I went to church on Sundays and was shocked by the sermons which were

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hateful towards Russia. This foreign clergy harmed our Orthodox Faith in the hearts of true Russian believers. They were preaching in favor of the Nazis.

I did not join them and went into hiding, I decided that I would never be a priest in Russia because the Russian people would hate us.

I decided to emigrate to Belgium where the Germans were hiring miners to work in the coal mines. I did not want to mingle with the emigree church but thought that maybe there was an Orthodox church which was not Nazi?

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This man was ignorant of many things in the world. Yes, there was a Russian church in Paris which had no Nazi connections. The Bishop and his secretary of the church in Brussels were arrested by

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the Germans and sent to Germany. If he could get to Paris he could find friends, so I gave him an address and some money. I did not meet him again.

What a tragedy of the Russian Clergy between the persecution of the atheists and the love of it's own Nation.