

Perspective

By Jamie Buckingham

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~~Several weeks ago~~ ^{Recently} I sat in the simple, unpretentious apartment of one of Canada's leading cardiologists. Dr. E. A. Pereszlenyi, a small, friendly man of 50, spent the afternoon telling me how he was able to escape from behind the iron curtain to live and practice medicine in the free world.

A native of Hungary, Dr. Pereszlenyi watched in horror as his war-torn nation was handed over to Communist Russia following the Yalta treaty. "Like a helpless maiden," he said, "she was thrust into the cell of the political rapist where she was ravaged again and again until every shred of dignity, respect, and hope was wrung from her."

As an evangelical Christian the young doctor was under extreme pressure to renounce his faith and join the Communist cause. When he refused he was followed, harassed, threatened and even jailed for his religious beliefs. "To have been caught reading my Bible would have meant deportation to the work camps in Red China," he said. Thus he found strength in meeting with small groups of Christians in underground settings for the purpose of prayer and Bible study.

"Sometimes we would sneak out at midnight and gather in someone's cellar until dawn—studying, praying, and worshipping," he recalled.

The year before he escaped he translated Billy Graham's "Peace With God" into Hungarian, writing it out in tedious longhand. Other Christians were able to make 14 copies (all in longhand) which were passed out among the underground Christians in Hungary.

Since his escape to the free world Dr. Pereszlenyi has experienced another kind of frustration, however. "No one seems to take their faith in God seriously," he said, shaking his head in dismay. "When we tried to get a prayer meeting started in our home the people said, 'Back in Hungary prayer was necessary because you were under oppression. But here we are free. You don't need to gather for prayer and Bible study in your home. Here we get dressed up and go to church on Sunday and that is enough. There is no need for more.'"

I sat across the living room ^{in Toronto} and watched as the doctor reached out and took the hand of his wife. It had been five years after he escaped before she had been able to follow him. Only God knows the unspeakable hell she went through during that time. On the coffee table lay his Hungarian Bible, its pages dog-eared and tear stained. It almost smelled of blood.

"We are more lonely for Christian fellowship here in the land of the free than we were under Communist oppression," he said. "Here we go to church and hear the preachers say the Bible isn't true and see the people making a mockery of God. Behind the iron curtain at least the people knew what it cost to be a Christian. We cannot understand this sense of flippancy about God."

I left, sharing his frustration. I can't understand it either.