Thank You For the BEATING

By
Dr. Josef Tson

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Six senior officers sat behind a long table that first day back in October 1974, their uniforms spotless and their faces grave. They wanted to carry out a most serious ceremony: My indictment for creating "propaganda that endangers the security of the state." Actually, what I had done was write a paper entitled *The Place of a Christian in a Socialist State*. I had analyzed how Communism in my beloved nation, Romania, had failed to produce the "new man" so predicted by Marxism. Thirty years of trying . . . and still we had so many problems. The alternative, I said in the end, was Christ; He alone could change human nature.

The communist authorities did not appreciate that, and so my house was searched and my entire library confiscated. Now I sat on a chair before the secret police tribunal. A colonel began a speech. He reminded me that I could face up to 15 years in prison.

"What about Romans 13?" he asked with a flourish. "Isn't it written there that the authorities are ordained by God?"

I couldn't keep silent. "Sir," I interrupted, "would you let me explain how I see Romans 13 in this situation?" He smiled ever so slightly; maybe he was curious. "All right, go on."

"What is taking place here is not an encounter between you and me," I began. "This is an encounter between my God and me." His expression grew puzzled.

"My God is teaching me a lesson. I do not know what it is. Maybe he wants to teach me several lessons. I only know, sir, that you will do to me only what He wants you to do – and you will not go one inch further – because you are simply an instrument of my God."

He did not like that interpretation of Romans 13, but I did! To see those six pompous men as my Father's puppets! They immediately consigned me to six months of interrogation, five days a week, sometimes up to 10 hours a day. But in the end, I was right: I learned a great deal. First I must stop and explain

Two Kinds of Tools

what a police interrogator does. His main job is to break the person into submission and slavery. He is trying to get as much information as he can, but he is also trying to crush the person's spirit through abusive language and threats . . . so he can finally win him over as a collaborator, a secret informer.

The interrogator has his special tools: arrogance, mockery, threats, guile, lies and force. I went into my questioning believing those were Satan's tools, and I should not use the weapons of my adversary. Instead, I had my Master's tools: trust in God, love, joy, truth, and self-sacrifice.

One evening, after about 10 hours of interrogation, the captain said, "Now you go home, and tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock, be back on the barricade."

I stared at him. "Mr. Captain," I said, "why do you use the language of war? I must tell you something: Every morning before I come here, I pray for you, for your salvation. I could hardly come back here tomorrow with a warlike attitude toward the person for whom I had just prayed." His eyes became very big, and he could not speak. Finally, he said, "All right, just go home and be back tomorrow morning at 8."

A psychiatrist who knew about police tactics told me during this time, "You know, if you are unbroken at the end of these questionings, then he will be broken instead. This is a battle between two souls, and one has to break down."

By the end of six months, I had found many chances to tell my interrogator about the Lord. I do not know how deeply he was touched. But he always listened to me very quietly. On the last day, he made a telling remark. "Now it is all over," he said. "You can go free and we shall not see each other again. I cannot comment on these meetings but I want to tell you one thing: *I'll miss you, Mr. Tson*." The weapons of my Master had conquered. Actually, we saw each other again, four years later, when he was once again

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assigned to work on me for six weeks. At the end of that series, he said, "Whenever I interrogate someone, I feel the person hates me for what I am doing. But with you, it is different."

A Holy Time to Suffer

My second lesson came at the beginning of this six-week stretch, on the opening Monday. Two officers were interrogating me when, about midday, a general came into the room. He signaled with his hand for them to leave. He began to curse me and hit me, slapping my face and hitting my head with his fist, finally knocking my head against the wall. I screamed – intentionally. I shouted so the other detainees in nearby rooms would hear me. What the general was doing was clearly illegal. That, of course, was why he had ordered the two officers out of the room; he wanted no witnesses at my trial. He kept on for a while, then left without another word. The two officers came back and resumed the interrogation as if nothing had happened.

On Thursday afternoon, the general returned. Again he motioned with his hand for the two to leave. I braced myself for a second round of beating. But the man sat down behind the desk and said, "Don't worry. This time I am calm. I have come to talk to you."

Now the Lord has promised that when His people are questioned, the Holy Spirit within them will do the talking. I can testify to this truth. I myself was surprised as I said, "Mr. General, because you came to talk to me, I want first of all to apologize for what happened Monday." He was very surprised. "Let me explain what I mean," I said. "On Tuesday, I was kept here the whole day without being interrogated. I had plenty of time to think. All of a sudden it dawned on me that this is Holy Week. "Well, sir, for a Christian, nothing is more beautiful than to suffer during the time his Savior and Lord suffered. When you beat me, you did me a great honor. I am sorry for shouting at you. I should have thanked you for the most beautiful gift you could ever have given me. Since Tuesday I have been praying for you and your family."

I saw the man choking. He tried hard to swallow. Then, somehow, he said, "Well, I shouldn't have done it. I am sorry – let's talk." We talked many days after that. Eventually he said, "Would you put on a paper all you have said to me? I want the president of the country to read it."

To Die Is Gain

When I was being examined in the capital city of Bucharest, an order came down to take me to the minister of the interior, who heads up the Romanian secret police. He sat down in front of his desk and immediately began to unleash the most violent language I had ever heard. He called me "leper," "scum," "dog" and a number of other names. Then he announced, "You're going

to be shot – but first I want you tortured so you will curse all that you hold sacred and holy." He ordered two officers in the room to take me back to the interrogation building. There, in the familiar room where I had spent so many days answering questions, a major, whom I knew well, was waiting.

"You see, Mr. Tson," he began in a soft and friendly voice, "your situation is very serious. I think they will shoot you. But . . . why don't you do something to avoid that? If somehow they only sentenced you to a long prison term instead, there might be an amnesty someday, and you could go free. If they shoot you, however, that's the end!"

"And what do I have to do to avoid being shot?"

"Well," he said hesitantly, "you know I do not speak as an official. I can only tell you my opinion. I think that if you write a statement confessing that all those papers of yours were written at the command of your masters in the West, and if you ask for forgiveness and promise not to do it again, they will spare your life."

Clearly, he was part of the plot. I smiled and said, "What you offer me is spiritual suicide. I would much rather accept a physical death. To tell you the truth, I don't see any reason to save my own life. Go on, shoot me."

I cannot fully describe that man's fury at that moment. He

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"You're going to be SHOT but first I want you TORTURED so you will curse all that you hold sacred and holy."

To Every Tribe

Jesus is worth it

suddenly realized the whole plan to break me had failed. They did *not* torture me then. In fact, I found out later they already had a presidential order that day to set me free, thanks to pressure from abroad. They only wanted to see if one last threat would make me their slave.

Why did I say I did not need to save my life? Here is why. During an earlier interrogation at Ploiesti I had told another officer who threatened to kill me, "Sir, let me explain how I see this issue. **Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying.** Here is how it works. You know that my sermons on tape have spread all over the country. If you kill me, those sermons will be sprinkled with my blood. Everyone will know I died for my preaching. And everyone who has a tape will pick it up and say, 'I'd better listen again to what this man preached, because he really meant it: he sealed it with his life.' So, sir, my sermons will speak 10 times louder than before. I will actually rejoice in this supreme victory if you kill me."

He sent me home.

Another officer who was interrogating a pastor friend of mine told him, "We know that Mr. Tson would love to be a martyr, but we are not that foolish to fulfill his wish."

I stopped to consider the meaning of that statement. I remembered how for many years, I had been afraid of dying. I had kept a low profile. Because I wanted badly to live, I had wasted my life in inactivity. But now that I had placed my life on the altar and decided I was ready to die for the gospel, they were telling me they would not kill me! I could go wherever I wanted in the country and preach whatever I wanted, knowing I was safe. As long as I tried to save my life, I was losing it. **Now that I was willing to lose it, I found it.**

I was right that first day of interrogation: The Lord had taught me many lessons during those trying hours. Meanwhile, the secret police heard the gospel and got to see the love of Christ in action. We both came out better as a result.

Jesus taught us long ago: With Him, the road down leads upward. With Him, the path of suffering ends in victory. The road to Calvary does not stop until resurrection.

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