

## **PRISON MEMORIES**

In these ten years after the second World War the echo of the name communism has been spread all over the world and has become so general and vulgar that among many people it is not fazed, it makes no impression, like the common terms: man, animal, earth, sun, etc.

This theoretical knowledge is quite small and by no means superficial, and leads in no way to understanding what communism is. In order to know it well, it is necessary to witness the communists in practice, meaning to say what actions and deeds they carry out when they are in charge, when they come to have in their hands the supreme government of a state. From their rewards they are well known.

This unfortunate faction in the beginning appears and insinuates itself in marvelous ways, with pretentious phrases, attractive promises, and all in a special way addressing the poor, the common people, the peasants, that class of men who possesses nothing; to the proletarians, promising them seas and mountains, freedom, brotherhood and equality of substances and rights, finally, every material happiness, and every well-being in any faction of human life, in short; promises an earthly paradise.

All this is done to flatter the credulous people to join the Communist party, and such actions continue until they become absolute masters, that is, until they hold the government reins. At this point, it proceeds and shows itself to be gracious, a mild lamb, a wise and merciful provider who is all intent on remedying the miseries and needs of the people, to raise them to a superlative happiness, but when it finds itself in a position of utter confidence without danger of being moved or removed by opposing forces, sheds all its clothing and appears as a rapacious wolf, a ferocious beast and no longer a reasonable man.

These expressions will seem too exalted and fantastic but when you hear the deeds carried out by the Communists in my homeland that is Albania, you will be persuaded by reality and you will tell me: you are right and we believe and we are persuaded.

While the Soviet-Albanian communists were advancing and fighting against the occupiers, they expressed themselves as I reported above, but when they occupied the whole of Albania and took the reins of the government into their hands on November 29, 1944, they shed their outer layer and appeared wearing those of their leader Stalin, since the time had come to pervade in the blood of whom? of their Albanian brothers, following the example of the great master

Stalin and company, who for thirty years washed themselves in the blood of thirty million of their Russian brothers.

Not even a month went by when 10 prefectures and 46 sub-prefectures of Albania became crowded with prisoners from every category of people. In Shkoder, for example, there were 5 prisons with more than three thousand prisoners, and much more in Tirana, and in all prisons the total sum of 35 thousand arrived and all this before the end of the first month of occupation. From these prisons they chose 10 or more people every week, and after having tortured them for several days, they led them to special ditches and tied their hands and feet and the whole group together was put on the edge of the ditch, they shot them and they all fell inside together, and while still alive they were covered with dirt. And that went on more or less for ten years. The people who carried out these operations personally, after some time, went to prison and recounted these misdeeds to all the prisoners in my presence.

This kind of torture is one of the many points of the program that the communists carried out in Albania, and we will present some points here briefly but not all them as they are infinite in quantity and in quality.

From the prisoners were seized all their belongings, leaving them with empty houses and the family to die of hunger; they freed 100 prisoners and put in 200 or 300 new ones under a minimum pretext, as they did the first and so continuously in every city and sub-prefecture.

The agricultural products of the farmers after the harvest were measured. The family was left with 10 kg. per person for three months. The government took the rest. For these which it took it paid 5 lek (equivalent to 15 Italian liras) per kg. When these products were consumed the people must resort to buying from the peoples' cooperatives, where the consumer must pay 20 lek per kg. i.e. four times that of the delivery. However, the disbursement cannot exceed 8 kg per person per month. To the families who have someone in prison or interned or escaped nothing more is given. They have to live by buying on the black market until their personal items last, which they have to sell hand-to-foot not to starve.

They confiscated all the merchandise from the shopkeepers and the gold and silver coins, and the disobedient would be put in jail and for weeks and months received nothing but little bread and water and were forced to sleep on the cold cement until they surrendered to the requests.

All civil and religious schools closed.

The Pontifical College was closed and some of the Franciscan Clerics were put in jail while the others confined to their homes. A number of priests and Jesuit and

Franciscan teachers were shot to death, while others died from torture; the rest are still in prison.

They seized five bishops' residences, three bishops were killed and one died before being captured of a heart attack.

Forty Sisters of Charity who were in Shkoder were expelled from their convent and found themselves wandering and lost, begging from the poor people who are in the same conditions and many families worse off than them. They were not allowed to take anything other than the habit they were wearing. They occupied the convent and confiscated everything they found there.

The priests who were in 80 parishes of the six Dioceses of Albania; sixty were massacred or shot or killed by torture, and seventy went to prison or forced labor. All their assets seized, and all the inventory of their churches and residences disappeared. Six young priests, who ended their sentence, were immediately sent to forced labor camps and not to their parishes or their families.

Today the people of 60 Parishes are certainly devoid of priests. But always observe that all the expressions of this manifesto are detailed by an Albanian priest who is today 77 years old, who for six continuous years lived in prison in Shkoder with the referenced persons and all was seen and heard by him. But except for death, he submitted to and experienced on his frail body, the sad, bitter and horrible reality of communist oppression and who is still alive today and for a little over two years is in Rome.

### **But there is still more to recount.**

Let's come closer to the particulars of the qualities of torture and cruel torments that the cruel beasts, insatiable for blood, applied in the government sections, turning them into diabolical antechambers of hell.

They tied up the prisoners and hung them on a tree that was in the yard, a meter above the earth, and where there were no trees, on special structures specifically for this purpose and left them hanging for 5 and 8 days without bread and without water, whatever the season, in the cold winter or in the scorching summer. And so they did with hundreds of prisoners.

Others were locked in small rooms of one square meter, a number of six people, barefoot and wearing only their underpants, and from time to time they threw water at them which had nowhere to drain, without planks and were forced to always stand in the water under in the stressful place, and they had to remain like this whatever the season, for a hundred hours, and if they felt a natural need, they had to do it there and live with it. Many times the guards closed the dormitories to the prisoners for 24 hours, they did not allow anyone to go out to

relieve themselves of their natural need, either large nor small and then the poor prisoners were necessarily forced to relieve themselves in the containers in which they ate and if someone dared to go without permission of the guard, they were left in the privy for 30 hours of penitence, without bread and without water.

To me, who is writing these unpleasant but factual stories, so happened that after three times that I asked permission on the fourth time I was allowed on the condition that when I was finished I had to stay in the "comfortable place", which naturally was very uncomfortable. I accepted the conditional permission and was left in the privy for 12 hours. Another time 56 people in the room, before going to bed, went out against the ban, I was one of them and when we finished our business they did not allow us to go to sleep but left us in the courtyard standing for 5 hours during a very icy period in January. Similar penances and punishments were common for the clergy and the general prisoners, they were ordinary things and for the guards punishments of minor importance, lighter but more or less daily, but for the prisoners they were truly unbearable and very nauseating.

### **But listen again!**

Others were forced to stay on the pure cement for days and nights and for 10 days were fed half the ration in a 24 hour period, and this torture was the same for all prisoners, men and women. To others, men and women, they put under the armpits two scolding boiled eggs and tied the arms tightly to the body and the poor prisoner had to remain motionless.

Still to others, male and female, they tied the trousers at the ankle, separately, and put a cat inside the wide trousers, then belted the trousers to the patients' waist so that the cat could not escape; then with a strong whip they beat the cat, and finding no exit, he scratched all the flesh of the poor bound prisoner, from whose feet streamed blood incessantly.

To others they laid them with their backs on the ground, they put a long board from the neck to the feet, they tied the whole body tightly to the board, leaving only the palms of the hands and the feet free, they thinned pine splinters at least a palm long and they thrust them into the wretched prisoner, between the nails and the flesh, in all the fingers and toes, they lit the splinters and the flame was not long in reaching the fingers and toes, which would burn and no one would put out the fire, until it extinguished itself; after it extinguished they untied the prisoner and from this torture almost all either died or were soon to die or a few days later would die from convulsions.

Still to others they tore the flesh of the legs from the knees to the heels in four or five places, and in the cracks they put fists of salt, and with strong cloths

wrapped their feet tight so that the salt would not fall on the ground. This torture was also given to the Bishop of Sappa, Monsignor Volai, but he survived.

To my bishop, Monsignor Francesco Gjini, who was also Vice-Apostolic Delegate, they scraped both legs all around from the knees downwards with long-toothed combs, and filled the wounds with salt, binding them tightly with long strips of cloth to stop the salt from falling to the ground.

This bishop and the one previously referred, along with the Provincial of the Franciscans and with other priests and friars, in all 17 people, were shot on April 2, 1947. It is certain that not all of the 17 died and the Communist police immediately covered them with dirt and leveled the grave.

At the shooting of the 17, Monsignor Gjini's sister, named Tina-Antonietta, and my niece Dava-Davidica were hidden witnesses. The bishop's sister died of heartbreak in Tirana after some time. My niece, still alive, had kept in mind the last words of Monsignor Gjini pronounced at the edge of the tomb a few moments before the shot, and they are the following: *"Rrofte Kristhi Mbret! Rrofte feja and Krishtit-Katolikizmi-e poshte Komunizmi! bini bre hora! "Long live Christ the King! Long live the Faith of Christ, Catholicism! Down with communism! Shoot you rascals!"* Followed by the shot and everyone in bulk fell into the bottom of the pit.

With these people shot or dead, or tortured, and with the communist cannibals who never satiated themselves from shedding human blood, I unfortunately lived for six years. What a wretched life, a dog's life, but I am still alive!

And where are the high-sounding phrases, and the emphatic promises of freedom, brotherhood and equality, of rights and life that the communists preached to the world with the intention of leading them to the height of progress in every branch of human knowledge? Surely they are not nor will ever be other than those you have heard in this truly painful manifestation, but truthful; promises that will always be pure simulations, lies and falsehoods.

God in the framework of His Providence allows the cruelty of the executioners against the innocent and also allows the lie of the falsifiers against the truth. But God, however, is the innocence of the innocent, and the real existence of the truth does not always let him perish in oblivion, so he finds the way to triumph in the treasure of His infinite wisdom and justice, and this triumph makes it so luminous that it is obvious and manifests in the eyes of the whole world. These assertions of mine are confirmed by an event which occurred in Shkoder, Albania towards the end of the year 1945 where I had been in prison for some time, a strange event, diabolical and evil. Listen!

Albania was occupied by the Communists on November 29, 1944, the Catholic clergy kept themselves very reserved and careful not to give them a reason as at first they had shot two priests and a few prisoners. But even so the greed of the Communists was not satisfied, they longed to apply their program in a blow to the whole mass of the Clergy, which was a bundle of thorns too pungent in their eyes. For such an undertaking, however, an ingenious means was required, which in public opinion assumed the form of wholly plausible reason, and which in the face of the people the entire Clergy of Shkoder and consequently of all the other Dioceses around it, should be guilty of a great fraud that the clergy was preparing against the new government. They found a way and listen to what it was.

They filled trucks with weapons and ammunition and covered them, they called a good Catholic driver and went to the Church and the Franciscan Schools at night, there they hid them in ready made closets and the driver had to help them, forcing him into silence with the threat of being shot if he showed anyone.

In the concave of the statue of St. Anthony they hid thousands of gold and silver coins and a considerable quantity of earrings, bracelets, buckles, etc. all of gold. A few days later, they searched the churches, schools, convents and colleges, and in their search they found weapons, ammunition, coins, etc., where they had hidden them, so the enterprise against the clergy was very successful. They dissolved the Pontifical College, the Franciscan College, imprisoned a large quantity of the clerical personnel, the others were expelled from their homes and dispersed, occupying and confiscating all their movable and immovable property, they did whatever they wanted to, fully applying their program. The driver, whom they used for their purposes, fell out of favor with the Communists and was put in prison.

They did not delay in calling him to trial, which was done in public in the presence of thousands of people, who through radios heard all the words of the judges and the accused prisoners. He was accused of hiding with his priests and Jesuits weapons, ammunition, coins, etc., which they had found in churches and schools, to use them when a revolution was to be raised against the government and therefore imprisoned him. The driver asked the judges in the presence of the people: "Why do you condemn me?" They replied, "Because you helped the priests hide weapons and ammunition to make war on us." "Nothing is true" the driver added, "you brought the weapons and ammunition and hid them and I helped you. You did everything and I worked with you, not the priests as you say." Immediately the driver was sentenced to life and the trial for that day was abruptly dissolved.

All the people understood very well the innocence of the clergy as well as what the true foundation of these deeds were, to malign the priests and with these maneuvers they reached their intent. The courageous driver, who before his judges and in the presence of thousands of people, dared to give such a solemn testimony of the innocence of the clergy and the diabolical plan of the communists, fled from prison, smuggled his wife and son who were in Shkoder, slipped into Yugoslavia and today is unharmed and glorious in Italy.

The detailed expression of the sad and iniquitous work of the communists as you have heard in this manifesto, I am convinced has given you to understand well what communism is and what its lasting program strives for. To better illustrate this understanding it is enough to know that all the instructions and advice are received from the pulpit of the plague which Moscow, teachings that are always false and subversive of peace and the social order, and continually they dare to defend the daring recklessness against all evidence and reality.

The stories herewith narrated in this proclamation are more than sufficient to unmask the lies and blatant acclamation that the Italian communist parliamentarians, who last autumn came from Albania, spread everywhere from Rome and throughout Italy through their infamous newspaper "New Albania". That the Catholic Religion in Albania enjoys peace and perfect freedom, etc. For these ruthless subversives, destruction, peace and progress, tyranny and slavery are perfect freedom, the shedding of blood and the extinction of life of tens of thousands of innocent men and women are great bravura and excellent victories for them.

Perhaps exalted and clouded by the fanatical victories obtained by their communist Soviet-Albanian brothers over the clergy and people of my country, they supposed that no one was now a survivor who could pronounce the word TRUTH any more. But the wicked simpletons were fooled!

The Albanian clergy has not completely disappeared, there will always be a few brave men who will raise the banner in defense of the truth for the overwhelmed Albanian people and clergy, to give denial to the reckless falseness of communist relations, which propose to the naive and credulous, incapable of further discernment by witnessed falsity and at the height of their wickedness daring to defend a lost cause with the very facts of their deeds, which are considered to be at the edge of reason.

This is communism, the gigantic tree that with its specious flowers and lush leaves fascinates a large part of the demented humanity; but whoever had or will have the misfortune of tasting the fruits, is tantamount to swallowing the poison

that infallibly brings a tragic death. Many millions of people have been unlucky enough to taste the fruits of this deadly tree called COMMUNISM.

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