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Interview of Bob Hare

Bob Hare

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HARDING COLLEGE LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

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Bob Hare who has been engaged in evangelistic work in Germany and Austria for the last twenty years and who is now more specifically engaged in mission work in the Iron Curtain countries was interviewed by Winfred Wright on June 5, 1970.

Wright: We are happy to have you visiting with us today and appreciate having this opportunity to let you share your experiences with us. I would first like to ask you to give a brief historical outline of the work in Austria that you have been connected with and also of your Iron Curtain work.

Hare: Our history goes back, especially the work in Vienna, to the early 1950's. We had soldiers come into Munich and even into Salzburg, Austria, where I was holding services and they pleaded with me to come to Vienna. Gottfried Reichel, my co-worker at that time in Munich, also helped me. We would go about every six weeks or as often as we could get to these soldiers. They were very dedicated men. There were never more than a dozen in Vienna, but they met until October, 1955, at which time the troops had to pull out. They had saved over \$2000 for someone to come there and establish the church among the Austrian people. They pleaded with me, with tears in their eyes, to come. I didn't really commit myself at that time, but I left Munich, Germany, in 1955 and came back to the States and got my Masters here at Harding by the end of the summer of 1956.

Then I moved to Vienna to begin the work in that city among the Austrian people. This was during the Hungarian Revolution. Actually this was a blessing from God because people didn't know much about the work there and the Hungarian Revolution really put Vienna, Austria, on the map because this is where most of the Hungarians fled. We were able to get off to a good start in Vienna and even behind the Iron Curtain helping these refugees and their families from Hungary.

At first we met in our home until we were able to remodel an old grocery store. It was right behind St. Stephen's Cathedral which is the main center of the Catholic Church in all of Austria. This upset the Catholic Church somewhat, and they persecuted us but the more they tried the greater it helped our work. It wasn't long before we had this little grocery store full and running over so we had to look for larger quarters. We found them, leased them, and we have these quarters today in Schiefmuhlgasse in the fourth district. We had a campaign in 1958 with Otis Gatewood, which I will mention later, but we received quite a bit of persecution from this. It also turned out for our good. We've never had such a wonderful campaign since then. We were able to convert many people and make many good contacts.

In 1958, we were joined by one other family, and in 1961 by seven other families. Not all of them are there now. Most of them have come and gone to different places, but we still have about three families there in Vienna. I will be going back next week to join them in the work not only in Vienna but behind the Iron Curtain.

At one time we had the largest native congregation on the continent of Europe with over 100 members, but we lost 35 by death since the beginning of the work and we had

to withdraw from around 60 because of not following the Bible and not living true to God. We had Biblical reasons for doing this. Of course, we let each one know that we were not severing ties, but we were doing this in hopes that they would awaken and get their hearts and their lives right with God. Some have come back from these that we withdrew from. Presently we have about 70 members and we hope to build this up to over 100 and have again one of the largest congregations on the Continent. This is about the history of the work up until this time.

Wright: Would you summarize briefly for us the religious background of the people with whom you work?

Hare: Most of the people in Vienna are Roman Catholic. In fact, the church is stronger in Vienna than it is in Rome. They made a survey a few years ago about the Catholics and their faithfulness to the church. Vienna came out ahead of Rome by a few percentage points. This, of course, poses a threat to our work. They didn't like it when we first moved there and they tried every way in the world to bother us and our work. They persecuted our campaign in 1958 in such a way that lights had to be turned out several evenings. Some people had to go to jail. Of course, none of our members did, but some of the people got in fights because they did not like the attitude of the Catholic Church and the way they went about persecuting us. As I mentioned before, it worked out for our good. In fact, they finally awakened to the fact that the more they tried to harm us and hinder us the more they would help us, so they quit. We found ourselves really praying for this persecution. Anyway, it worked out for our good and because most of the people are Catholic doesn't mean that we cannot have a strong church there. In fact, I've had more success among Catholics than I've had among other religious bodies having worked in Munich which is also a very strong Catholic city. Most of these people are Roman Catholic so this is their background.

Wright: How about the people behind the Iron Curtain that you deal with?

Hare: It varies because we are working in so many countries. Most of them are Roman Catholic. Of course, the Lutherans and the Reform Church is very strong, especially in Hungary. There are also some Moslems. I suppose next to Catholicism is the Orthodox Church. Of course, we are dealing with Russia, Bulgaria and Rumania and here is where the Orthodox Church is very strong.

Wright: Would you give us a brief summary of the cultural and economic background of the people and how has this effected your work?

Hare: Most of the people are highly cultured in the part of the world where we are working. Their economic situation is very poor. Being highly cultured hasn't really effected our work too much. It has in some ways but not to any degree to talk about. The economic situation, I think, has been a blessing. The average income behind the Iron Curtain is about \$50 a month right now. In Austria it was \$65 when we moved there in 1956, but is up now to about \$175. Not being very rich with material goods has been a blessing to us and the people seem more receptive or willing to accept Christ and His religion than those who are more wealthy in some of the other western countries of Europe.

Wright: You mentioned having a certain amount of persecution. What are some other challenges you've had to overcome in your work?

Hare: I mentioned the opposition from the Roman Catholic Church. This is still very strong. It has weakened in some countries, but we cannot even get an ad for a gospel meeting on the radio in Vienna today because of the opposition from the Roman Catholic Church. This has really hurt our children and young people's work. We have very much difficulty trying to get children. We can get them coming but the Roman Catholic Church puts pressure on the parents and so they quit coming after a short while. This has hurt us especially in our children's work and our young people's work but we are trying to overcome this opposition.

I suppose the second greatest problem would be indifference. The "I don't care" attitude, "every road leads to heaven" and "it doesn't matter what you believe because everybody is going to be saved"--this indifference is really a problem.

Wright: What methods have you found to be especially successful in dealing with the Austrian people?

Hare: Well, you can't beat personal work. I think personal work has been our key to what little success we've had both in Vienna, Austria, and behind the Iron Curtain. We truly believe in doing personal work, going to these people and talking with them eyeball to eyeball. This has proven to be our best method.

Our second best method would be a little paper that we started several years ago. It is called in German Des Feste Fundament which means firm foundation. We have it now in Czeck, Pevny Zaklad, and we just started it in one of the Yugoslavian languages, the Croatin dialect. We are printing it in the Polish language and we hope to go on to Russian and five or six other languages. This little paper has literally brought us thousands of contacts, not only from Austria, but from Germany, Switzerland, and also behind the Iron Curtain in the German language. We have a circulation of 8000 or more in the Czeckish language. Now it is beginning to grow in the Croatian and we hope it will also prove successful in Polish and these other languages also. This little paper which comes out once a month has really brought us thousands of contacts. We haven't gotten around to visiting most of these people but we are trying. As our personnel increases we will have a better chance of getting around to all of them. We hope to visit these people personally and try to do all that we can to lead them to Christ.

Wright: I am sure that through your years of experiences you tried several different methods in an effort to find some that would really be outstanding. Which methods have you abandoned because of their ineffectiveness or because of some ineffective aspect of them?

Hare: Actually, Winfred, I can't think of any that have completely failed. Some have been disappointing and we have had very little results with them. The most disappointing thing is our Bible correspondence course. I don't know why in Germany and Austria. Of course, behind the Iron Curtain, it is very difficult because of censorship of mail and the persecution of the Communists to carry on Bible correspondence work. We have to take in all courses personally to give to these people and then pick them up personally. Of course, this hinders our work in this respect. Even in Austria and Germany where we have freedom and even in Switzerland where we have freedom to send these

through the mail, our response has been very small in comparison to other countries. As I said before, no method has really been a complete failure but our greatest disappointment thus far has been in this Bible correspondence work. We are not giving up. We are still trying to develop something that will really appeal to these people and will really go over and help us to have many contacts.

Wright: What experience have you had with a group method approach to evangelism and with your experience how would you evaluate this approach?

Hare: I imagine we had one of the first groups to try working together in the mission field. This group came over from ACC in 1961 and most of them are still in Austria but they are scattered. I think one reason it wasn't very successful in Vienna where they first came was because we already had an established work there and they tried to work themselves into this established work instead of going off and starting a work on their own as they did in Brazil. This group didn't know which way to go, which way to turn, and, of course, we were all new in this experience with group methods. It didn't work out too well and they scattered.

In another way, it worked out very wonderful for our work behind the Iron Curtain. Even though these young men went to different cities to work, they still helped us in the work behind the Iron Curtain. All of them that are still there are working with us. They will go over maybe one month to Poland and maybe another month to Yugoslavia and another month to Czechoslovakia and help us in the work behind the Iron Curtain. In spite of it not working out as we had hoped there in Vienna, it has worked out for us in our Iron Curtain work.

Wright: What is your present attitude toward the training of converts and the development of training schools in Europe?

Hare: I am really sold on this. We've had such schools and we've had such classes for training new converts. We've had three schools for the people behind the Iron Curtain. Of course, we were hindered in our last one by the Russians and their pressure. At least 50 were turned back at the borders of the country where they were trying to get out. They had permission to come, but the Russians clamped down and wouldn't let them out. This hurt our last school, but we have had two previous ones and they proved very successful.

We are getting ready in September to start one on a six months basis and we are getting ready to recruit in these different countries behind the Iron Curtain like Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia. All of these people will not be able to get permission but enough will be able to come out and we will be able to train them. We go in and train them even in their homes there in the Iron Curtain countries but we find it very successful to invite them to a neutral country like Austria and a city like Vienna and then have a place where we can meet. We have quarters like that there in Vienna and we are getting ready to have it on a six months basis now. I am really sold on this. I think it is going to be one of our greatest works.

Wright: How do you feel about support for these people that you train for full time work?

Hare: I've helped to find support for some of the German workers. After moving to Vienna, I've changed my mind on this. I find it is not good at all to put these men

on American support. I would say there are exceptional cases, but overall I think it is a very bad thing to do because most of them that were put on support several years ago are still being supported. They are not being supported by the natives and I think this has been a hindrance rather than a blessing.

We have one family that we are supporting just among the workers in Vienna. Of course, we are all there on a foreign field and we give to the Lord but we are using our support to support a family named Leo Blaha. He devotes most of his time to personal work. We started this about six months ago. This young man has already been instrumental in leading at least four people to Christ directly. He is sowing a lot of good seed, visiting many of these contacts that we do not have time to visit. Different ones of us go with him as he visits these people. We are fully supporting him and the Austrians have a small part in it themselves, but we hope the day will come when they can fully take him over. Of course, I am only for supporting a person like this on a temporary basis with the idea of trying to get him supported by the natives in the years and months that lie ahead. When it is a long term thing, I am against it.

Wright: Do you think he would need to know in advance that this was to be temporary?

Hare: Yes, I think that when you have a talk with him you ought to make him see that it is not good to be always supported by American funds but to maybe set a goal, say a year or two years, and maybe cut off ten percent and let the natives take that on. Then in a few months or a year, cut off some more until the natives can completely take it over.

Wright: In thinking about American missionaries or American preachers who would go to Europe for mission work, what would you suggest they need in the line of training and cultural orientation?

Hare: I think the situation here at Harding is good--the mission seminar and also this program with Joe Cannon and Keith Robinson. I think these are good programs. I think this is a solution, but it is not the complete solution.

As you know, it is very difficult to learn a language in a country where it is not spoken. We have an institute called the Goethe Institute in Germany and Austria. Most of our workers that have come over lately have gone to this institute. They literally saturate these young men and women in the few months that they are there, and they really come out speaking the language. Of course, they live in the country where it is spoken. They see the customs. This all ties in together in a beautiful way, but, as I said, the situation here with your missions seminar and the training that Joe Cannon gave last year and Keith Robinson is giving this year is really good. I think this helps out quite a bit. I think all of these things together are very successful and will prove to do much good for these people that are training to be missionaries in a foreign country.

Wright: What is your greatest problem in gaining and keeping financial support?

Hare: I suppose the greatest problem is just getting a hearing. Once, I get it I have no trouble selling the goods and getting the people to back the work. In fact,

I have been very happy about the reception that I have received since coming home last September. The greatest problem is getting a hearing. A lot of the churches are afraid that we are going to cut in on their budget or hurt their work at home. Actually it is not this way at all. It is just the opposite. It will bless their work. Just getting a hearing is my greatest problem. Once I get it, I have no trouble getting them to help us in our work.

Wright: We've all been happy and excited to hear about the distribution of Bibles in Czechoslovakia. Can you give us a brief summary of the developments that relate to the purchase of these Bibles?

Hare: Yes, I can. Last year there wasn't a Bible or New Testament to be had in the Czeck language. We worked through Czeck Bible Society, the American Bible Society and these other Bible societies of Europe and they helped us to get a hearing with the government in Prague. We sold the government in Prague on the idea of letting us print 20,000 New Testaments in the Czeck language. One reason for their letting us do it was because they needed money from the West, and we promised that we would furnish the money for the paper which would amount to \$7000 for these New Testaments to be printed. We worked out a deal on this. Jimmy Lovell and his "Miss-A-Meal" Program with his paper Action furnished the \$7000. We have the money to pay when the New Testaments are ready. These New Testaments have been slow in being printed. They are not quite ready but we are supposed to pick them up any day.

We needed Bibles in a very bad way and God knew this. Through our little paper, Penvy Zaklad, we had thousands of contacts and so we needed Bibles in a very bad way in order for these people to read the Bible and to prove the things that were written in this little paper. So God worked in a miraculous way in causing one of the directors of the printing press to print 12,500 Bibles on the Russian controlled printing press. They put the seal of the Russian printing press which means "truth" in this Bible. When Russia found out about this, she was very much infuriated. This man was called to Moscow last summer and was really put on the spot. They tried to punish him but thus far they have been unsuccessful. He still has his job. Anyway he put these Bibles in a warehouse in Czechoslovakia to have them protected and then sent two men to Vienna in December of last year to work out a deal with us having heard that we were able to get money from the West and that we had an interest in these Bibles. So, thanks to Jimmy Lovell we had \$7000 on hand for the New Testaments that are not ready yet. They wanted \$5000 down and the rest of the money in payments over a period of months. We paid the \$5000 down. It was raised here in the States and paid back to the fund for the New Testaments and the additional money. The amount, all totaled was \$29,500--8,000 hardback at \$2 apiece and 4,500 leatherback at \$3.

Most of these Bibles are now out of hiding, out of the warehouse and they are into the hands of the people, but it has not been easy. Some of our brethren had these Bibles in their homes, they were visited by the police, taken to jail, questioned but they were released because we are doing this through legal channels. We are actually doing it through the government. We got these Bibles through the government, but this has really hurt Russia and has made her very angry because we were able to do this. Anyway, I can only explain this through God's providence. I think this is truly a miracle in the 20th century. We thank God for letting us have these thousands of Bibles. We have been able to make many people happy through the printing of these Bibles.

Wright: I guess we will not have time for you to comment specifically concerning the church in Poland. You have been in contact with the church there on numerous occasions. Could you summarize your feeling for the work behind the Iron Curtain in general. What does the future hold?

Hare: The future looks real bright in spite of the Russian pressure. Many people thought when Russia invaded and took over Czechoslovakia, August 21, 1968, that this would hinder our work in Czechoslovakia. It has proven to be just the opposite. Since the Russians have invaded and since they have put the pressure on us and on them, they are trying everyway in the world to keep us out of there. Actually, God has blessed us in Czechoslovakia more than in any other. We literally have thousands of contacts. We have thousands of people pleading and praying for us to come. We are still getting into this country in spite of the Russians. We are still getting Bibles in. We are still getting mail through. I think the future will continue to be bright as long as we have faith in God. I think all the success we will have will depend upon how much we are willing to trust in God. I honestly believe that all things are possible with God. I believe with God that we can overcome all of these problems, that God is greater than Russia, that God has more power and that through Him we can accomplish the impossible. I think the future looks very bright and what will be accomplished will depend upon us and our faith. The more faith we have in God, the more we are going to accomplish. This is the way it has worked thus far. I believe it will continue to work this way. I believe this is the way God wants it to work.

Wright: What do you see as your greatest needs that we in America and we at Harding College can help to supply?

Hare: I think here at Harding College, of course, the greatest contribution you can make is to continue to train, to inspire, and to encourage young people to come over and help us or go any place in the world where they are needed. Of course, you know there are 80 nations today where no one has gone. The need is great. We have just begun to touch the hem of the garment in these countries behind the Iron Curtain. There are only a few of us, a handful right now, and 200,000,000 people in this area. We are short of man power. America can help by providing Bibles. We need Bibles. We literally need them by the millions. We need Bible courses. We need more papers like the one I mentioned, Des Feste Fundament and Peny Zadlag. We need it in other languages. We need tracts by the millions. We are working among millions of people, so we need literature by the millions. Of course, we need more workers, but the greatest thing I think Harding can do would be continue to train young people, inspire them and help them get out of the United States and to see the need in other parts of the world.

Wright: Thank you Brother Hare for being with us today and taking the time to share with us your ideas concerning mission work and for telling us about your work in Austria and behind the Iron Curtain.

Hare: I really appreciate being here and appreciate so much this opportunity of making this tape.