

CHRYSALIS CRUCIBLE

Chapter Sixty-Three

Andy used to chuckle at the Jesus People bumper sticker: “Read your Bible. It will scare the hell out of you!” No longer. If that’s all the Bible was designed to do, then Andy was done with it.

No more “Just sign on the dotted line and get your fire insurance free.” How could one beat such a deal? A dab of belief, and one’s entire hereafter was secured against all odds.

Andy remembered Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s expression, “cheap grace.” Cheap like borscht, like *Brylcream*, like G. E. and like Neal Steinhauer’s Jesus. He pondered the consequent question of whether the Gospel they were spreading was the real *McCoy* or some sick inversion of the same, designed, however unintentionally, only to bind people faster to hell than they were already.

There was a telling ring to those two words, “cheap grace,” that seemed to point a “Thou art the man!” finger at Andy and the sort of Evangelical Christianity he had embraced all his years. No matter how he tried to duck it, it found its mark repeatedly. It established a dybbuk of doubt in Andy’s evangelistic impulses that nothing could shake or remove. Its constant return to his consciousness, like an unpredictable comet, unnerved him beyond his rational ability to control.

Despite these thoughts, Andy participated in the literature distribution routine each day. But he became increasingly detached. He watched the eagerness of many others plying the same waters, pressing the flesh for converts. He admired their zeal. But he could no longer buy into the mission. Not that way. He disliked the booklet. He disliked its author. Worst and above all, he intensely disliked its “god.” He glared at G. E. Just who was the god of this mission after all?

Andy also wrestled with the sheer sea of humanity he encountered daily at the Olympics. He remembered a similar struggling during Expo ‘67 in Montréal. He had taken training the previous winter as a Grade 13 student through Campus Crusade for Christ. It had centred entirely on *The Four Spiritual Laws*. The little booklet was for all intents elevated to Holy Scripture status. The trainees, Andy amongst them, memorized its every word, had it drilled into them not to vary one iota from its time-honoured, field-tested, worldwide cross-cultural success. “Do this and ye shall get them saved,” was the Third Greatest Commandment message of the Campus Crusade trainers.

The dam burst one day when, emerging from his shift at the “Sermons from Science” pavilion, he was struck by the bald impossibility of the evangelistic task. How could God ever establish a personal relationship through Christ with the sheer masses of visitors that streamed around him, much less everyone else in the world? Similar thoughts flooded his consciousness several times at the Olympics.

Yet, Andy countered in his mind, “the fields are white unto harvest.” And they were surely labourers who had responded to the call. He remembered a recent talk from Dr. Evans as part of their training in Switzerland. He had said there were three classic filters in Christian history that prevented people from taking the Bible seriously: *experience*, *tradition*, and *reason*. Evangelicals were supposedly they who set aside all those filters in their faith or repositioned each not to filter but to refract Scripture’s light as in a prism. Surely this “experience” of the huge numbers who likely did not know Christ, and never would, was one such filter. How could he turn it into a prism instead? It bothered him, but he finally decided to let it remain an unresolved, and possibly irresolvable, issue in his faith journey.

A few days into the campaign, the police accosted Andy. They took exception to the sheer volume of green booklets that were being discarded everywhere. It was becoming a genuine litter problem. If they were still

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in good shape, the evangelists agreed to recycle them. Nonetheless, one plainclothes official said they could not even give the literature out in Munich without a city permit. But he was suddenly called away, acting like a member of the Secret Service. Andy never saw him again nor met that same response.

Even so, it became evident from their two weeks at the Olympics that the world was full of petty tyrants who delighted in throwing their lighter-than-air weight around in a bid to establish miniscule petty fiefdoms. Bureaucrats of every description seemed especially prone to this, from Andy's experience. He suspected that most of humanity felt an amazing lightness of being, like billions of helium-filled balloons dotting earth's crust. Perhaps we attempt to anchor ourselves, as it were, to this existence through wilful acts of petty tyranny. Else we all fear floating away into the great nothingness of space and non-being. Faith as anchor, faith as "weight of glory," took on new meaning in that context. "Aim for earth and you'll get hell," C. S. Lewis had observed. "Aim for heaven, and you'll get heaven with earth thrown in." Faith, a paperweight on earth, weight of anti-gravity glory in heaven.

On Saturday, September 2, several took time out from their evangelistic work to tour Dachau Concentration Camp, a short drive northwest of Munich. The camp had been preserved in perpetuity as a Museum of Horrors by an association of concentration camp survivors.

As Andy walked through the gate, he recalled Martin Niemoeller, an outspoken pastor who criticized the Church after the war for their failure to oppose Nazism, had been jailed there seven long years.

"Dachau was the first and arguably the worst of the Nazi camps," their museum tour guide, a dour woman in her mid-thirties, told them. "Heinrich Himmler established it in March 1933. Under Theodor Eicke, the first camp commandant and later inspector of all the camps, Dachau became the model for a whole new level of mass brutality. It was also 'murder school' for the infamous SS."

Andy was amazed at the guide's outspokenness. Perhaps one of her family members had been interned there.

"The first prisoners were political opponents of the National Socialists," she continued. "Communists, social democrats, and trade unionists. Eventually Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, and some clergy landed there due mainly to their political beliefs. Then after the November 1938 'Crystal Night' anti-Jewish pogroms, over ten thousand Jews were sent to Dachau. Eventually, up to two hundred thousand prisoners from thirty countries were imprisoned there. Thousands became involved in the production of armaments in huge underground factories at subsidiary camps."

She pointed to some horrific pictures on the wall. "Unknown thousands were also transported to Dachau for execution. Some of these were used for medical experiments, as you can see here, dying under horrific conditions. Starvation, sickness, exhaustion, degradation, beating, and torture claimed further untold lives."

She moved on to a scale model of the camp, pointing to the various buildings as she talked. "A gas chamber was built in 1942 but never used on a mass scale. However, a crematorium with four ovens was kept busy processing the enormous number of bodies the camp produced. Once lit, the fires never went out under Nazi rule."

Andy recalled Hans' paper. To get to that point of liberation, in Germany alone more than one million civilians became casualties of American and Allied carpet-bombing campaigns in over forty German cities. Three months before Dachau was freed, the Allies killed between 30,000 and 300,000 civilians in Dresden alone—depending on who did the estimates. This may have surpassed the total number of civilian victims liquidated by the Nazis in all twelve years of Dachau's operation, Andy realized.

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Later, Dan, Andy, and Janys again found themselves walking through the compound together, each lost in reverie.

Andy felt so overwhelmed with revulsion that he took absolutely no photos. It seemed like an act of historical voyeurism to indulge his tourist instincts. Besides, one had to *experience* the place, not see it vicariously on slides. Still, Andy knew that the narrow dimensionality of that encounter was exponentially removed from actually living it. His whole being shivered involuntarily, though it was a perfect summer day. The mind's celluloid alone would record the event, and he knew he would never return for fear that the revulsion would be blunted through familiarity.

He suddenly saw all the post-War movies and TV programs in that light: pro-mass slaughter propaganda campaigns to sanitize the unspeakable. "It was a dirty job, but golly gee, somebody had to do it!"

Ordinary citizens just following orders, who at workday's end embraced their kids and took in a Beethoven Concert or other enriching cultural event. "The origins of all human cultures are a founding murder," René Girard taught, whom Andy had read a smidgeon of in a university anthropology class.

Andy realized the Allies were not all that different from the camp guards. The guards were not necessarily monsters, nor were they unduly sadistic. For them, torturing and killing was all in a day's work, like delivering milk. It made good rational sense. The cancerous cells were being removed from the body politic. The scientific men in white coats at the end of the train lines told them to do so. Just as priests and countless religious leaders throughout human history had ever blessed human sacrifices—and still did!

Andy shuddered again as the full weight of the moral equivalency sank in. His mind was pulled back to a single woman in her sixties and her elderly mother that the team had gotten to know that summer. They attended *Hohenstaufenstraße* assembly. Both sparkled with mischievousness at times and were very encouraging of the team's efforts. A rare exception amongst church folk.

Once, after they had treated the whole Team to a delicious meal of *Rouladen mit Rotkohl*, Andy asked a straightforward conversation stopper. "Yes, but didn't you surely *know*?" Elderly Frau Luzie responded simply, "*Nein*." But her troubled eyes said, "Yes." So did those of her daughter.

How could it have been otherwise? Jewish families disappearing from neighbourhoods all over Germany, Jewish businesses boarded up, Stars of Bethlehem as forced apparel. It was known all right, and by everyone!

Yet, in another way, the matriarch was not lying. The average citizen didn't know the true extent of the horror. Then, with a shock of insight, *because they didn't want to know!* Because that knowledge would demand commitment or induce moral dissolution. Because such knowledge, "a little learning," is ever a dangerous thing, as Alexander Pope pointed out.

Was it any different today? Were they, in the comfortable bubble of the West, likewise knowingly ignorant, deliberately uninformed? Until recently, Andy had been wilfully ignorant about Vietnam. What else was going on in the world that benefited him at his end of the market continuum but was sheer terror at the other? Had it ever been any different? Frankly, in that moment *he didn't want to know!*

He was struck by another bolt of sickening insight: Why was the Allied Holocaust never taught in school just like the Nazi one? The answer came with a similar dreadfulness of understanding: Because Holocaust is okay as long as the "Good Guys" perpetrate it. He imagined all those brave Allied airmen embracing their wives and kids after returning from a day's bombing. The moral equivalency was exact. "You have

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defeated us Nazis. But the spirit of Nazism has arisen like a phoenix amongst you,” so said one of the Nazi war criminals, Andy could not remember who. Why had no one ever taught *that* in all his schooling? He felt angry. Why did his mind make such associations?

His mind turning to the Vietnam War, Andy recalled how Ho Chi Minh initially had believed the United States would back North Vietnam’s bid for “freedom,” because they were simply aspiring to the same stirrings for freedom that had motivated Americans in their War of Independence. They couldn’t have been more wrong.

Andy recalled what he had read in Hans’s essay about the Bay of Tonkin ruse that launched the Vietnam War in 1964. The claimed attack by the North Vietnamese was complete American fabrication. The first casualty of war is truth. Millions of others, on all sides, are civilians. Andy wondered about Pearl Harbour and what else the American Empire might fabricate in the future to fight a “just war” for Manifest Destiny to... What? Rule the world? Andy thought of the verse in Job that his dad often quoted: “Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” If “violence” were inserted for “trouble,” it would be just as true, he was sure.

Janys and Dan had not waited for Andy. He moved on alone into the. The door to each of the ovens stood ajar. He read the specifications: the actual size of each oven, the number of bodies incinerated at one time, the total number of bodies consumed by the four Molochs. Andy closed his eyes, as at Salzburg, and heard the noises, gagged at the reek. As he did, he recalled that the crews of the last American bombers over Tokyo that slaughtered 100,000 innocent civilians in March 1945, had to be fitted with gas masks, because the stench of burning flesh in the consequent holocaust was so overwhelming even at great height.

In his mind, Andy followed the oven-stokers home. Saw them with their wives and kids, accompanied them to family barbecues. A great time was had by all! He flew back to the base with the B-29 bombers, took in the evening movie with them, watched them write love letters to their wives and girlfriends, felt the tenderness of missing their kids, leaders all of next generation America...

Then a realization blasted into his consciousness like the imagined sudden blistering heat of those ovens at full burn: *Dachau is Christendom’s most perfect human picture of hell!*

The parallels overwhelmed. *God is Hitler. The ovens are God’s specially built chambers of eternal conscious torment*, to which human victims by the billions are fed because they refused to take the hand of the feudal lord’s son in marriage. Jesus the Jilted Lover, whose cry of wrath echoed throughout the Corrupted Cosmos. Only unlike Daniel and his companions in Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace, these victims would experience the full suffering of the oven for ever and ever, God be praised, amen! For there even the worm “dieth not.” This was Christendom’s “god.” This was Evangelical’s hell. This was what Billy Graham warned his listeners about, what G. E. holds onto in his evangelistic vision of deity. This was the deep dark open secret about Neal Steinhauer’s, Bill Bright’s, Evangelicals’ “God who loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”

“*Nein!*” Christendom, Evangelicals, Christians, Billy declare. But their eyes betray them. Deep down, they all say, “Yes!” This was the fundamental, fundamentalist, Evangelical footnote theology of John 3:16. This was the truth about their god: God is the Ultimate Sadist of the Universe, whom tomorrow, with a smile, they would invite Olympic-goers to meet through a personal relationship with Christ.

“Open House at Adolf Hitler’s from 1:00-3:00 today. Come get to know him, whom to know is to love,” the personal invitations all read, with Neal Steinhauer’s signature at the bottom. The small print read, “But we’re constrained to say: If you turn down the invitation today, tomorrow it’s into the ovens. Sorry.”

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‘His mercy lasts for a moment (two hours to be exact), but his wrath is everlasting.’ Have a nice day and a bright forever—though it may not be quite the kind of ‘brightness’ you imagined...”

Andy was startled from his reverie by Dan Moore’s voice. “I suppose they’re really all on a continuum...”

“What?” replied Andy, shaken by where his train of thought had taken him.

“War, concentration camps, armies, prisons, police,” Dan said.

“What do you mean, Dan?” Andy asked.

Jack and Fiona happened to walk up to them at the same time, barely acknowledged by either Andy or Dan.

“I mean, isn’t something like this really just a question of degree? Sure, we all deplore it. But what was the Six-Day War, if not a mini-Holocaust, with all the Christians cheering on the Israelis, figuring Jesus was coming right behind? Does what happened here make it right for Jews to do the same thing to the Palestinians? We all deplore others’ violence, but *never* our own.”

No comment from the others or from Andy. He thought of that ambiguous passage where Jesus said the Pharisees erected monuments to prophets in the past, letting on *they* would never have treated them as their ancestors had.

“There are two images I cannot put together,” Dan continued, “God telling the Old Testament Jews it’s all-out genocide at times, and Jesus and Paul saying not to resist evil with evil.

“I read that the early Christian Church was largely pacifist until Emperor Constantine gave ‘em a huge embrace by declaring Christian worship legal and hiring Christians to lower court postings. Pretty soon, word got out that to be a Christian was good for your career, and eventually, the only path to success. Thousands of opportunists flooded the churches to get baptized. But who really baptized whom?

“‘Do you betray me with a kiss?’ takes on new meaning when Constantine arguably won over the Church to the exact opposite ethics of Jesus. Without a shot fired or a spear thrust, he turned the Church inside out on all ethical levels: love of enemy, the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, faithfulness, forgiveness toward all, especially ‘the least of these’...

“So, argues this one guy I read, the Church quickly moved to ‘do unto others as had been done unto them,’ baptizing violence against all outsiders—including Jews and pagans, just as they had been violated by these groups not so long before. So Jews and pagans began to experience the same kind of alienation and persecution at the hands of the Christians as the early Christians had at the hands of the pagans, as Jesus at the hands of the Jews as... Violence endlessly recycled! This was formalized centuries later into the Inquisition, which demonized the Church’s domestic enemies as ‘religious heretics,’ and the Crusades, which set out to convert or kill the accursed ‘infidel,’ the Church’s foreign enemies.”

“But they were not all real Christians,” Fiona spoke up.

“Unlike the Evangelicals in Texas, Fiona?” Dan shot back, scorn tainting his voice.

Jack leapt to her defence, as usual. “Evangelicals would be totally against this sort of thing!” he said, waving his arms to take in the ovens.

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“So,” Dan took a breath, “these ‘Christians’ *weren’t* the real thing? Did you know that it is precisely conservative Evangelicals in America who most support nuclear armaments and harsh punishments, including the death penalty? In spite of Jesus’ constant emphasis upon ‘love of neighbour’ and ‘love of enemies,’ Evangelicals prove to be the *least* loving of all identifiable religious or secular groups in society.

“Last century, when one converted to Christianity, one understood that ‘loving God’ automatically threw one into some kind of social action on behalf of others, to take up causes such as anti-slavery, rights for women, prison reform. Though even then conservatives quoted their Bibles loud and long to prove the God-given superiority of whites and men.

“Evangelicals bless the current wholesale slaughter of the Viet Cong; napalming entire villages of men, women and children; the enormous destruction of the environment through the use of Agent Orange on countless acres of lush jungle; the dropping of multiplied millions of land mines that destroy or maim anyone stepping on them. But, of course, we must ‘contain the Communist threat,’ and ‘God and country’ as ever soar to the top of the charts. With all due respect: *BULLSHIT!*”

Andy recoiled at the vehemence, then remembered his own.

“I wish, Dan, you’d be more respectful of Fiona,” Jack said, his words edged with steel.

Dan snorted and wandered off on his own.

“There’s something eating Dan,” Jack said.

“And there shouldn’t be?” Andy replied, as much to Fiona as to Jack. Just then he saw Janys and called her over.

“Have you seen enough?” he asked. She had, so all four wandered back toward the entrance even though Andy had not completed the tour.

Something else felt “done” though.