

OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark.

Brother Andrew: God's Smuggler

1928 - 2022

GOD'S SMUGGLER: A LIFE WELL LIVED

Why tiptoe through life to arrive at death safely?

Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors, certainly didn't tiptoe. Instead, he dared to trust God and follow Jesus into danger. He leaves a powerful legacy of vision, faith and everlasting hope for the persecuted believers he dedicated his life to serve. Open Doors celebrates and gives thanks for his inspirational life.

Andrew Van der Bilj was 20 years old when his platoon was ambushed and he fell on a sweltering battlefield in the Dutch East Indies. Fresh bullet holes pierced his boot. His ankle was shattered. Life, as he had known it so far, had ended.

"I had never considered this possibility," he said. "I had always seen myself going out in a blaze of contempt for the whole human farce. But to live – and crippled – was the meanest fate of all. Worse, I was 20 years old and I had discovered that there was no real adventure in the world."

It was a discovery he would soon reassess. Recovering in a

rehabilitation hospital, Andrew picked up the Bible his mother gave him and opened it for the first time. The Word of God came alive for him and he gave his life to Jesus. So began a life more adventurous than many of us could ever dream of.

Brother Andrew earned the nickname God's Smuggler after a series of clandestine Bible deliveries behind the iron curtain during the cold war. He narrowly escaped imprisonment many times and had many miraculous near misses with the authorities. He attended private meetings with the leaders of extremist groups, risking his life to advocate on behalf of persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

Every door is open

Brother Andrew often said, "Our very mission is called 'Open Doors' because we believe that all doors are open, anytime and anywhere. I literally believe that every door is open to go in and proclaim Christ, as long as you are willing to go and are not worried about coming back."

Born in 1928 in Witte, Sint Pancras, the Netherlands, Brother Andrew grew up during the rise of Nazi



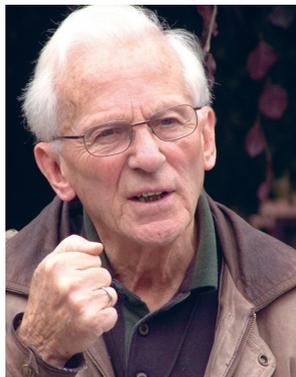
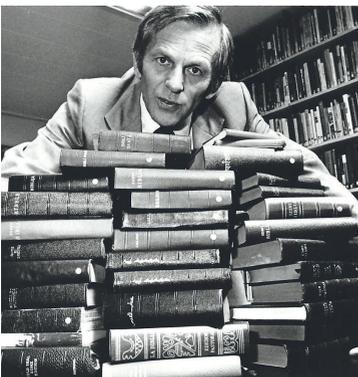
power in neighbouring Germany. When German soldiers occupied his village in 1940 Brother Andrew led his own resistance, stealing the highly rationed sugar from his mother's kitchen and sprinkling it into the gas tank of the lieutenant's car. He set off fireworks under the noses of the troops, outrunning them when they tried to catch him.

“When you were on earth, you made blind eyes see. Now, I pray that you make seeing eyes blind.”

When the war was finally over, Brother Andrew was nearly 18 and his father demanded to know what he would do with his life. “I knew what I wanted alright,” he said. “To find somehow a life that broke out of the mould. To find adventure, to get away from Witte, from the mental set that was constantly looking backwards.”

Searching adventure

“So, aged 18, he joined the Dutch army to help put down the rebellion in the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. His mother packed him off with a Bible, which he stuffed in the bottom of his duffle bag and forgot about – until he found himself in rehabilitation. Once





recovered, Brother Andrew returned to the Netherlands, where he became a committed Christian and decided to become a missionary.

“Brother Andrew always liked to do unique, almost impossible things.”

Brother Andrew trained for two years at Worldwide Evangelism Crusade (WEC) in Glasgow. By 1955, he was ready for his first adventure – the trip that started Open Doors. He took a train from Amsterdam to Warsaw to participate in a worldwide Communist youth rally. His suitcase was bursting with Christian tracts in a variety of languages, to give out illegally behind the iron curtain.

In Poland, Brother Andrew discovered that churches behind the iron curtain were isolated and in need of encouragement. After preaching to a small dwindling church one Sunday the pastor said to him, “Your being here is better than your ten best sermons. Even if you had not said a word just seeing you would have meant so much. We feel as if we are alone in our struggles.”

Strengthen what remains

The Bible verse “Strengthen what remains and is about to die” from Revelation 3:2 stuck with Brother Andrew as he travelled around Poland. He realised the tremendous need of these isolated and marginalised Christians. Over the following years he visited Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia.

Driving the now famous bright blue Volkswagen Beetle across Europe, he smuggled hundreds of illegal Bibles across borders to encourage and strengthen the church whose access to Bibles and right to religious expression were being squeezed by the authorities. In each country Brother Andrew once again heard what he had first heard in Poland – that the church felt isolated and alone and that his presence there meant everything to them.

“He gained the right to speak to (the leaders of Hamas) because of his genuine care and love for all people.”

The first time Brother Andrew smuggled Bibles over a border he said, “Lord in my luggage I have scripture that I want to take to our children across the border. When you were on earth you made blind eyes see. Now I pray you make seeing eyes blind.” The prayer ‘make seeing eyes blind’ was recited before every border crossing and is still prayed by Open Doors staff today. Brother Andrew was never caught.

In fact, after the fall of the iron curtain, Brother Andrew obtained a copy of the 150-page East German Stasi report about his work in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He was surprised to find out that they knew so much about him yet were not able to stop his work.

One million secret Bibles

In June 1981, a 20-man Open Doors crew nosed a custom-built barge onto the China coastline under the cover of darkness. They floated 1 million Bibles to the waiting church.

After the fall of Communism, Brother Andrew turned his attention to the growing Islamist violence toward Christians across the Middle East, Persian Gulf, Northern Africa and Southeast Asia, preaching against retaliation. Pastor Hanna Massad, pastor at Gaza Baptist church and founder of Christian Mission to Gaza, once said, “When Gaza was under siege, we found Brother Andrew in our midst seeking to encourage the persecuted church in Gaza. When no Christians were willing to speak to the leaders of Hamas in Gaza, Brother Andrew was the first person to do this without compromising his faith. I heard him say to one of the leaders in Hamas that everyone needs to know Christ. He said that if we did not go to them with Christ’s love they would come at us with their weapons. He gained the right to speak to them because of his genuine care and love for all people.”

“Our very mission is called ‘Open Doors’ because we believe that all doors are open, anytime and anywhere.”

In 1967 Brother Andrew released his first book, *God's Smuggler*, which detailed his time behind the iron curtain. It quickly became a best seller with over 10 million copies distributed worldwide in 35 languages. He has since written a further 16 books about his life, work and advocating for persecuted believers.

Encouraging the church

One of his last trips was to his beloved Pakistan, aged 89. The trip to Pakistan was a private one. He visited many of his friends, old and new. His mission – as always – was to encourage the local Church. “We are fatigued, weary and aching”, one church leader said. “We were waiting for him. Seeing him and his friends, reminded us that we are neither forgotten nor alone. We are loved ever so much by the Body of Christ, this time represented by Brother Andrew.”

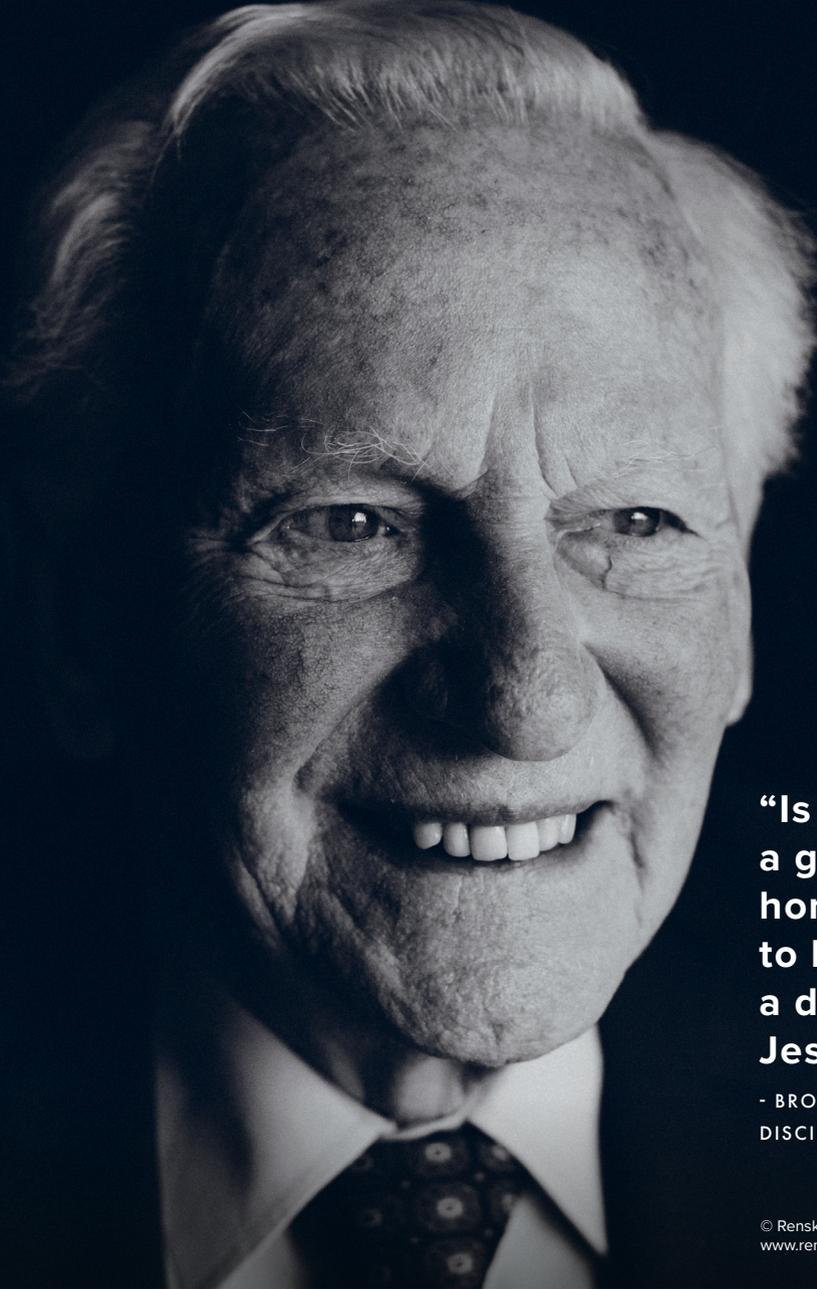
Johan Companjen, founding president of Open Doors, said, “When I think of Brother Andrew two things come to mind. One, he was a pioneer, always looking for new and unique things. Second, he was a prophet. Many times, he shared thoughts and ideas that we could not ‘place’. But years later we discovered that he was way ahead of us. Brother Andrew always liked to do unique, often impossible things. If a project was possible he was not interested. ‘Everybody can do that,’ he would say. However, when he heard the word impossible he was very excited.”

Brother Andrew met his wife of 59

years, Cornelia, known as Corry, when he was working in a chocolate factory after returning from fighting in the West Indies. They married in Alkmaar. Corry was born in March 1931 and died on 23 January 2018, surrounded by her family.

Brother Andrew is survived by his five children, 11 grandchildren, and by the organisation he founded, Open Doors.





**“Is there
a greater
honour than
to be called
a disciple of
Jesus Christ?”**

**- BROTHER ANDREW,
DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST**

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