FROM CALVARY TO GAMBRINI

From Freak to Gay



Matti Helelä

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Dedicated to my son Markus

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Introduction

This is a true story of my journey from Calvary to Gambrini as I remember it. Only the names of my friends have been changed in this text. Calvary, or Golgotha, was a skull-shaped hill outside the walls of Jerusalem in Israel. There the Son of God, Jesus Christ, shed his blood on the cross for us sinners. Gay Gambrini was Finland's first gay bar, located in a courtyard of Iso Roobertinkatu, out of sight.

Both places were therefore very significant in their respective fields. The significance of Gay Gambrini was naturally local or national. It opened on the fourth of July in 1984, and I went there for the first time on 19 April 1986. Calvary was very significant from the perspective of globalization. Like Gay Gambrini, Calvary has profoundly touched the lives of individuals, ever since the earliest times of our era. This story begins from Calvary.

I went to Calvary and spent time there only figuratively, and I have never been to Palestine. On the contrary, to Gay Gambrini I went in flesh and blood: I sat there at the tables, chatted with people, danced on the disco floor, bought drinks from the bar, and went to the toilet to take a leak.

On Calvary, I met the suffering Christ, and, as a song says, I saw a loving look. In Gambrini, I also found love: the love of a man for the first time. Fortunately, that man did not appear to be suffering. Quite the contrary. In Gambrini, as well, I saw a loving look, and later at night I came to know what loving was all about.

Let me quote the wise words of a skeptic here: "In order to live in the world, one has to believe in things. What you believe says a lot about you. What you don't believe or what you have ceased to believe *is also revealing.*" (Translated from Jussi K. Niemelä, "Miten epäillä empaattisesti [How to doubt empathetically]", Skeptikko 3/2018, page 11.)







"A ruthlessly honest investigation on searching and finding oneself."



This is a true story of my journey from Calvary to Gambrini, as I remember it from the 1970s and 1980s.

Because I was bullied at school and I often felt very lonely, I needed an imaginary friend. At the age of fifteen, I publicly confessed my faith. I had found the suffering and bleeding Christ crucified on the hill of Calvary. He loved me and managed to save me from my loneliness. I made new dear friends, and life was more exciting. Faith guided my choices in life.

From Calvary, I traveled a long way to Gay Gambrini. I opened its door at the age of 31. For sixteen years, I had denied myself and carried my cross. Now, being myself, I started a new life. I found a new kind of love, and many of my friends changed. What should I think about religion now?

From the reader: "Vivid text and relentless humor. A ruthlessly honest investigation on searching and finding oneself. Never bitter, but, even when criticizing, with a gentle twinkle in the eye. An in-depth and touching journey of life. Thank you for the honor of having been able to take part in your journey and now being included in this story."

