

A photograph of a man in a dark, heavy coat walking through a field. The image is overlaid with a blue and orange color scheme. The man is looking down, and the background is a blurred landscape.

Eberhard Arnold *Selected Writings*

INTRODUCTION BY JOHANN CHRISTOPH ARNOLD

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Johann Christoph Arnold*

Plough

Arnold's significance is not limited to his relatively small community. Someday the whole family of humankind will recognize what Eberhard Arnold means for the spiritual renewal of man in these dark and troubled times. God sent him as a light into the darkness, to show erring man the right way and the true goal.

— Přemysl Pitter, General Secretary
Christian Communists, Prague, 1935.

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Johann Christoph Arnold

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Introduction

*Blessed are they who die in the Lord;
their works follow after them.*

Widely sought after as a writer and lecturer in his day, Eberhard Arnold remains largely unknown to modern readers. Small but growing numbers of readers, however, are discovering the relevance of his work, which Thomas Merton said “stirs to repentance and renewal.”

Though he was my grandfather, I never met him. He died at fifty-two, five years before I was born, but I feel as though I have always known him – both through my grandmother’s radiant memories of their life together, and through his heavily-underlined books, which my father inherited.

Much more than a writer, philosopher, and theologian, he was loved most of all for his humility, his fatherly friendship, and his deep faith. Born in 1883 into a long line of academics, his life was hardly conventional. In a time and place where church and state were anything but separate, he threw away what might have been a brilliant career when he left the state church at age twenty-five. By thirty-seven, he had abandoned middle-class life altogether. He spent his last fifteen years at the Bruderhof, the religious community he founded in 1920, but remained active in traveling, lecturing and writing until his death in 1935.

Much of what he wrote is available to readers today: thousands of talks, essays, and letters he left behind have been published in English. Yet, especially toward the end of his life, he spoke often of his own inadequacies, pointing instead to the working of the Holy Spirit. And yet his witness, however small, cannot be left unrecognized. His insights into the human condition are as relevant today as they were in the early twenties, and his call to discipleship rings as true now as it did then.

What was his message, and how did he arrive at his radical faith? His own words, spoken in 1933, say it best:

In my youth, I tried to lead people to Jesus through studying the Bible and through lectures, talks and discussions. But there came a time when I recognized that this was no longer enough. I began to see the tremendous power of mammon, of discord, of hate, and of the sword: the hard boot of the oppressor upon the neck of the oppressed. I saw that dedication to the soul alone did not fulfill all of Jesus' commandments; he wanted us to care for people's bodies as well.

From 1913 to 1917 my wife, Emmy, and I sought painfully for an understanding of the truth. Shortly before the outbreak of the war, I had written to a friend saying that I could not go on. I had preached the gospel, but felt that I needed to do more. The cause of Jesus was more than just a meeting of individual souls; it had to become a tangible, real-life experience! So we searched everywhere: not only in old writings – in the Sermon on the Mount and in other scriptures – but also in books about the working class and their oppression by the economic and social order. We wanted to find the way of Jesus, of Francis of Assisi; the way of the prophets.

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The war years brought unforgettable horrors. One young officer came back with both of his legs shot off. He came home to his fiancée, hoping to receive the loving care he needed so badly from her, and she informed him that she had become engaged to a man with a healthy body.

Then the time of hunger came to Berlin. People ate turnips morning, noon and night. And when they turned to the officials for money or food, they were told to eat more turnips. At the same time, well-to-do “Christian” families in the middle of the city were able to keep cows and had milk! In 1917 I saw a horse fall in the street. The driver was knocked aside by a mob of men who rushed in to cut pieces of meat from its warm body – they had to bring something home to their children and wives! Dead children were carted through the streets wrapped in newspapers; there was neither time nor money for coffins.

It was during this time that I visited a woman in a basement dwelling. Water ran down the walls of her cellar, and the only window in the room was closed because it opened to the street above. She had tuberculosis but could not afford isolation; her relatives lived in the same room with her. I offered to find another dwelling for her, but she refused – she wanted to die where she had always lived. Inwardly, she was already a corpse!

Gradually it became clear to us that the way of Jesus was practical and tangible. It was more than concern for the soul. It said, very simply: “If you have two coats, give to him who has none. Give food to the hungry, and do not turn away from your neighbor when he needs you. When asked for an hour’s work, give two. Strive

for justice. If you want to marry and start a family, then see that those around you can do the same. If you seek education and work, make these available to others also. And if it is your duty to care for your own health, then fulfill this duty to others. Treat them as you would treat yourself. Enter through the narrow gate, for it is the only way to the kingdom of God.”

We knew that we had to become as poor as beggars – that we, like Jesus, had to take upon ourselves the *whole* need of men. We had to hunger for justice more than for water and bread. We knew we would be persecuted for the sake of this justice, but our righteousness would be greater than that of the moralists and theologians. And we would be filled with fire from above: we would receive the Holy Spirit.

But we could not endure the life that we were living any longer.

My grandfather practiced what he preached, and by 1920 he and my grandmother, with five young children, had left their comfortable suburb of Berlin-Steglitz for the tiny village of Sannerz in Hessen. This move was more than just a geographic relocation; it was a radical change of life. Though the years ahead would be ones of grinding poverty, the Arnolds would never again be held back by financial worry. The Sermon on the Mount was not merely an ideal, but a way to live. From now on their house would be open to the destitute; their lives would be consumed in caring not only for souls but bodies as well.

To their friends, this was madness; to them, it was an “opportunity for love and joy.” But rash as it seemed, their move from Berlin – as their earlier move away from the

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state church – was a step taken in faith; or rather, as my grandmother often said, a leap:

We had no financial basis of any kind for realizing our dreams of starting a new life. But that made no difference. It was time to turn our backs on the past, and start afresh . . . to burn all our bridges, and put our trust entirely in God – like the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. This trust was to be our foundation – the surest foundation, we felt, on which to build.

Eberhard's spiritual quest had already begun years earlier when, as a teenager on summer vacation at the home of his mother's cousin, he had begun to read the New Testament. This relative, a Lutheran pastor who had once sided with local weavers during a labor dispute, impressed him considerably. By the time he returned home he had become aware that his clothes were better than those of many other classmates, and that when his parents held a party, they invited only their coterie of well-to-do academics – and not the poor of the street. His questions about these matters infuriated his father, but he remained undeterred. Were Jesus' words metaphor only? Sooner or later, he must find out.

In the years to follow he estranged himself from his schoolmates as well: he took his new-found faith so seriously that he sought out former teachers and begged their forgiveness for his previous unruly and dishonest behavior. By the time he was a university student, however, his fervor no longer caused embarrassment: Dwight L. Moody's religious revival was now sweeping Germany, and his enthusiasm for its cause soon gained him popularity as both a writer and speaker.

It was around this time that he first met my grandmother, Emmy von Hollander – known to us children as “Oma.” The daughter of a law professor, she shared Eberhard’s social and intellectual background, and like him was active in the revival movement. Within a month, the two were engaged. They would remain together until his death, twenty-eight years later.

It was during this same time in 1907 that the question of baptism emerged as a central theme. Many young adults felt that their christening had made them heirs to a culture but not a faith, and so began to have themselves re-baptized. Characteristically, Eberhard cautioned Emmy to test everything in prayer. The issues were complex and required careful consideration:

To me it seems almost certain that baptism of believers is biblical. But the question is complicated, and we must test it slowly and objectively. Let us say nothing until we have reached incontestable clarity. Let us search honestly and thoroughly for the will of God, and then act accordingly. Either way, however, we shall not be moved one millimeter from the center. What we need is Jesus – nothing else!

In the end, thorough study convinced the young couple that the baptism intended by Jesus meant baptism of believing adults – not infants – and both were baptized in 1908.

The consequences were swift: Eberhard was denied the opportunity to sit for his exams in theology, and he was forbidden to meet Emmy for one year. This punishment was painful, but he and Emmy had expected nothing less. Their baptism was a declaration of war against the state church, and as such was no small matter – least of all for a young man whose father was a professor of church history,

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and whose name was synonymous with good society. As always, however, he exhorted Emmy to persevere in faith:

This momentous decision will give our life a sharply-defined direction, laden with suffering. . . . What will happen only the Lord knows, but that is sufficient. I know with certainty that Jesus will lead us excellently!

The years that followed were tumultuous. Eberhard was forced to change his course of study to philosophy; he wrote his thesis on Nietzsche and earned his doctoral degree in 1909. He and Emmy were married the same year, and their house soon became a gathering place for all kinds of writers, students, and radicals.

War came in 1914, and although Eberhard was called to the front, he was discharged within weeks on account of his tuberculosis. He supported the war effort with nationalistic fervor all the same, publishing propaganda as the newly-hired editor of a magazine run by one of his boyhood friends. As the war dragged on, however, he became increasingly disillusioned, and by 1917 he was a convinced pacifist.

Even earlier, his chief concern had been the care of souls, as this statement on the ultimate goals of his literary work shows:

The name of our publishing house, *Die Furche* ("the furrow") should be a powerful admonition to inner deepening. A furrow is something that has been plowed up and opened; such an opening must precede every sowing. Only where the plow of God has exposed the inner life can such a sowing bear fruit. A deepening of the inner life can be brought about only by the plowing

of repentance – that inner revolution and re-evaluation which leads to *metanoia* – a fundamental transformation of mind and heart.

His views were not shared by all, however, and over the next two years it became clear to him that his calling was no longer one with that of the publishing house. By 1919, his insistence that Christ's teachings were meant to be practiced in daily life was causing increasing controversy with the directors of *Die Furche*. Emmy writes:

There were always tensions at work. Everyone could appreciate the confusion of the youth, a result of the suffering of the war and then the turmoil of revolution. But while some wanted to lead them back onto the beaten track of pietism, others – Eberhard among them – saw public events with an entirely new eye. They had learned a lesson from the blatant inequalities between rich and poor, from the war psychosis they had so painfully observed. They believed they had to go an entirely different way: the way of Jesus, the way of the Sermon on the Mount.

The years that followed brought widespread social change. In much the same way as American hippies rebelled against the complacent affluence of their parents during the Vietnam War, young people in the Weimar Republic turned their backs on the social conservatism and aristocratic pretensions of the failed Prussian empire.

Thousands of them left the cities for the country, roaming farms and mountains in their search for truth and meaning in life. They lacked no diversity in background and opinion, but held in common the belief that old structures and conventions must die and finally give

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way to something new. And although many of them soon drifted into the hedonism and moral decay that characterized the post-war period, others, like my grandparents, saw in the Youth Movement* an affirmation of their spiritual quest for wholeness.

The Youth Movement sought answers to life's questions in the simplicity of rural life, in the trees and mountains and meadows, and in the poetry and literature of the romantics. They rejected the crass materialism of the cities in favor of the rural life, with its simple pleasures of folk-dancing and hiking, and turned their backs on the sterility of factory life to embrace the hard work – and the stench – of the farm. For them, the collapse of civilization as they knew it was proof of humankind's need for nature, and for God.

But it was the question of separating the spiritual from the material that brought about the birth of the religious community my grandparents founded in 1920. To them, life could not be lived in fragments. Everything was connected: work and leisure, family and friends, religion and politics – all these had to become one. Repentance could not effect change in one area while leaving another untouched. And if one sphere of life was to be influenced and molded by God, then all other spheres must be influenced by him as well.

It was this recognition that led them to leave Berlin for a new life in the impoverished farming district of Fulda, opening their doors to wandering musicians, artists, anarchists, and tramps. If the words of Jesus could be lived out

* The Free German Youth Movement of the early 1920s, not the Hitler Youth of the mid-1930s.

in the first century, they could be lived out again now; if Christ could pour out his spirit on earth two thousand years ago, it could happen again today. Such was their faith as they ventured to create a community of work and of goods: a life in which everything belonged to all and yet to none.

This determination to apply the Gospel in practical ways led to my grandfather's final resignation from *Die Furche* during the spring of 1920. By June of the same year, he and his family had moved into the storage rooms of Gasthaus Lotzenius, an inn in the small village of Sannerz.

Within weeks, however, my grandfather was publishing again. He had no money and only a tiny staff, but he felt compelled to publicize as widely as possible the truths that he and my grandmother, with the small circle that gathered around them at Sannerz, had begun to recognize. Formulating his thoughts that August, he wrote:

The task and mission of our publishing work is to proclaim living renewal, to summon people to the actions of Christ; to disseminate the thinking of Jesus in the midst of national and social distress; to apply Christianity publicly; to testify to God's action in present history. It is not a church question—it is a religious question. We must face the deepest forces of Christianity and recognize them as indispensable in the solution of the crucial problems in contemporary culture. With breadth of vision and with energetic daring, our publishing house will steer its course into the torrent of present-day thought. Its work in fields that are apparently religiously neutral will gain for us relationships leading to our greatest tasks in life.

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Already at this stage, my grandfather was an established writer. He had numerous books and articles to his name, and definite ideas for even more ambitious projects. Aside from continued lecturing and writing, he planned to publish a series of books devoted to the great Christian thinkers Zinzendorf, Kierkegaard, Augustine, and Dostoyevsky, as well as books on German women mystics, Tertullian, and the Christians of the first and second centuries.

By September, however, his co-editor Otto Herpel had resigned, unable to agree to a document stating that the new publishing venture would call only on those writers whose articles were written “in Christ, of Christ, and toward Christ.” Eberhard had become “too pietistic,” even for his best friends.

He was hardly deterred by these disappointments, however, and plunged even more feverishly into the work of building up the Sannerz community and publishing house. As he put it, any apparent defeat in the face of partisan socialism and religious politics was “in actual fact a victory for the decisive spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.”

The community in Sannerz grew rapidly over the next two years. Business was relatively good, and dozens of articles, pamphlets, and books were written, edited, and produced. Yet the publishing work was only part of the community’s mission. The founders believed strongly that community was the solution to all of life’s questions: economic, social, educational, political, and sexual issues were all addressed and fully answered by the common life. Even more, then, the literary achievements of the first years at Sannerz are staggering, considering the interruptions

by the two thousand visitors who came in 1921, as well as the farm work and household chores that had to be done.

But the summer of 1922 brought trouble: while traveling in Holland, Eberhard was notified by telephone that the shareholders of his fledgling publishing house had met to liquidate the firm. They accused him of financial irresponsibility, idealism, and even fraud.

The crisis erupted over the management of the community's publishing house. My grandparents had left Sannerz several weeks earlier to visit a sister community in Holland, but while they were gone inflation had suddenly soared, and loans that had not been due for months were suddenly recalled. The community back home at Sannerz panicked, but my grandparents advised inner calm. To them, the words of Jesus about the lilies and the birds were not mere poetry; they were a mandate for the disciple's life.

In the end, a friend surprised them with a large envelope of guilders which, when converted to marks, came to the exact amount due at the bank the next day. Inflation had been on their side, and more importantly, their faith had been rewarded. Too late, however, they returned home to find the publishing venture liquidated – by the very friends they had left in charge.

More than forty people left Sannerz in the following weeks, all firmly convinced that spiritual and temporal matters could not and should not be mixed. The “experiment” was over: people were too weak, too human, too selfish to live by faith. Yet for my grandparents, the community had been no experiment: it was a calling, and they would hold fast to it.

Within weeks, there was a complete split between those to whom faith was merely an ideal, and those to whom it

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was a living reality that had to determine every decision and every action.

In addition to splitting the circle at Sannerz, those who left also divided the publishing house. They took with them both office equipment and several best-selling titles, including the periodical, which they began to put out under a new name only months later.

The crisis was especially painful because of the bitter and slanderous accusations with which so many people left the community. But as a shareholder admitted during the liquidation proceedings in August, Eberhard had done nothing dishonest. It was simply a matter of faith versus economic considerations: “What separates Eberhard Arnold from the rest of us is his conviction that faith must determine *all* relationships, including financial ones.”

Years later, a Vienna newspaper would agree, stating that Eberhard Arnold was one of the very few publishers who not only published religious works, but dared to apply their message in his own life. This was the heart of his vision. The spiritual had to penetrate and transform the material, for Christ intended not only words but deeds: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.”

Thus my grandparents rejected the notion that their community was an escape – that they had isolated themselves from the problems of society. True, the people who joined them had removed themselves from the mainstream of modern life, but only to the extent that they could live unfettered by it. Their ultimate goal was to remain a corrective in a world that had gone badly awry: to be, in the words of Jesus, salt and light.

Yet my grandfather never saw himself as unique or capable. His discipleship was uncompromising, but never

self-satisfied; he saw himself as nothing other than the servant of a higher cause. He always sought out the truth in others. And he saw the community he guided not as a lifestyle or institution, but as a free-flowing movement that was driven by – and that would die without – the wind of the Holy Spirit. Looking back on the first years at Sannerz, he later said:

At that time none of us was so narrow-minded as to fail to appreciate the work of God in other people and in other spiritual movements. Perhaps our danger was rather in the opposite direction – that for some time we held back from expressing certain insights into God's ultimate truth, in order to avoid putting pressure on people who had not yet been awakened or called.

We were certain that these people had been struck by God – that they were in the midst of a mighty movement of heart. But they had not yet fully grasped what God wanted in the shaking of their souls, and so we spoke with them only about those things which moved them at that moment. We did not force on them things to which their hearts had not yet opened.

So it was that many spiritual movements came to us. And we were not such foolish missionaries as to say that Buddhism was of the devil or Laozi the Antichrist. We recognized God's spirit at work in Buddha and Laozi. And because we recognized this, we ourselves were animated by what they brought to us from God – even if they spoke in strange tongues.

Thus we did not speak of mission in the sense of going out to people. There was so much life in the house – so much coming and going – that we were a mission station already, in the midst of heathen Germany. But

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it was never that we were the converters and the others the ones to be converted. Rather, we recognized the Holy Spirit at work.

The rooms at Sannerz were filled with a power that did not come from us, nor from those who visited us. It was a power that came from God. People brought it with them, and they in turn felt it in us. But neither they nor we possessed this power; rather, it surrounded us like an invisible fluid, like the wind of the spirit that visited the waiting apostles at Pentecost.

This power did not adhere to particular people. It could not be possessed or held fast, or used for gain or profit. It was an event, a happening, an occurrence; it was history. It was a manifestation of the eternal and everlasting in time and space. It was a communication with a primal force, which we could never have explained in a human or logical way. That was the secret of those times. There was something at work that was more than psychic; something that could not be explained in terms of emotions. It was something spiritual, something of the Holy Spirit.

But we never thought then – it would have seemed a kind of craziness to us! – that only people like us, or even just the handful of people at Sannerz, were visited by God's Spirit, or were illuminated by the Spirit of Christ. To the contrary, we felt the blowing of the Spirit in all people and all places. The important thing for us was to feel this breath of God and to recognize it.

We ourselves had to live according to the calling that had come to us from the words and life of Jesus, from the prophetic image of God's future kingdom. We had to be true to this calling to the end. We believed we could best serve all those who were touched by the breath of God by living out the reality of our ultimate

cause: the objectivity of God's will, and the content and character of his kingdom.

We were called nature lovers – people said that we wanted to go “back to nature” – but that is not at all what we wanted. To the contrary, we looked beyond nature itself and to the divine at work within it. The greatest thing in our movement was that the Creator was honored in his creation. We were not sun-worshippers, but we had an inner feeling for the symbolism of the sun and for the kind of Creator who must have created it. . . .

It may seem strange that such an insignificant group could experience such lofty feelings of peace and community, but it was so. It was a gift from God. And only one antipathy was bound up in our love – a rejection of the systems of civilization; a hatred of the falsities of social stratification; an antagonism to the spirit of impurity; an opposition to the moral coercion of the clergy. The fight that we took up was a fight against these alien spirits. It was a fight for the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ.

By 1931, however, the movement of heart that had swept Germany only a decade earlier had all but dried up. So my grandfather looked farther afield, visiting the Hutterites of Canada and the midwestern United States. Rooted in sixteenth-century Moravia, this group still lived in small communities, sharing all things in common. They were perhaps too narrow-minded and dogmatic for his liking, but they nevertheless represented the purest form of communal Christianity he had ever met. And so he joined hands with their four-hundred year-old movement after a year of careful consideration.

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He had immediately recognized the danger of their conservative pietism, but emphasized that he was attracted not to the twentieth-century Hutterianism but to the Hutterianism of the sixteenth century, that movement of faith that had left behind thousands of martyrs. Also, he had never wanted to found his own sect, but again and again sought to join with like-minded groups. And by 1931 he somehow sensed that he would not live much longer. He had seen numerous community attempts collapse and had been amazed to find that the Hutterites were still living in community after four hundred years. Joining them, he felt, was a safeguard for the Bruderhof.

Of his experiences in North America, he wrote:

In spite of their weaknesses, which I have openly brought to light, these American communities have kept from their sixteenth-century origins a spiritual vitality – a creativity in working and organizing along communal lines – that comes from the Holy Spirit. . . .

My overall impression is that the community life of these thirty-five hundred souls is something overpoweringly great. Their spirit of community is genuine, pure, clear, and deep. There is nothing in the whole world, neither in books and writings, nor in any other present-day groups, that can be compared to the essence, character, and spirit of their brotherhood. . . .

Though in full recognition of our own origins, inspired by the Youth Movement, and by the Sermon on the Mount, I have decided to join forces with them. The question of financial support is of a secondary nature.

Despite my grandfather's enthusiastic adoption of early Anabaptist spirituality, however, his hopes for a close economic relationship with the North American Hutterites

never materialized, because of both the great distance between Germany and Canada, and his untimely death.

The first of two Gestapo raids occurred in 1933. Eberhard was not intimidated, however, and sent off reams of documents to the local Nazi officials, explaining his vision of a Germany under God. Before his death in 1935 he would write even to Hitler, urging him to renounce the ideals of National Socialism and to work instead for God's kingdom – and sending him a copy of his book *Inner Land*. Not surprisingly, this letter was never answered. After his death, the entire community would be exiled to England and Liechtenstein; remarkably, not a single member was deported to a concentration camp.

My grandfather's death came suddenly in 1935, the result of complications following the amputation of a gangrenous leg. But as his friend the scholar Hermann Buddensieg wrote years later, he is still very much alive today:

Do not be surprised that I talk with you as if you were still right with me. For what does the present know of what is yonder? You are not dead; no, you are alive in the Spirit. . . .

And now we are together again, my friend, at Sannerz, in the Rhön, and in my study on the banks of the Neckar.

The people come and go, young and old, looking for refuge in their need. They are wrapped up in themselves, unnatural, cramped and stiffened, exaggerated, without a goal beyond themselves. And yet your house has an open door; no one is first asked who he is. . . .

We work in the fields and in the house. Together we toil for an understanding of the people and events

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around us. I see the roguish glint in your eyes, your mischievous smile and waggish beard, your cheerful laugh when the peculiarities of human life force themselves upon us. We are often wearied with dull, commonplace talk, but we also laugh freely and heartily, in gales of truly Homeric laughter. . . .

That was your gift. Your wit was pithy, but free of poisonous hypocrisy. You had no love for stuffiness or sweetness. About you there was no penetrating smell of “Christianity,” no cliquishness, no sentimentality. To seek out heretics was just as foreign to you as was the addiction to straighten out everyone according to your own way. You valued other people as long as they were earnest, and you came to terms with the insincere. You found a way with the most pigheaded peasant and with the most stubborn “man of God.” You were a brother to them when they needed you, and your manner was at all times cheerful, genuinely animated by trust.

You lived life from the center and from the depths. You did not inherit Christ from others, but from out of your own inner experience and encounter. You were one who was truly freed by Christ, who was changed by him. You were free of anxiety. Your faith was no mere acceptance of truths, no flight of fear, but certainty. And therefore there was nothing of conventional Christianity in you, for you knew precisely that Christ was no “Christian.”

You opposed all appearance, all posturing and all self-righteousness. You were not concerned with dogma, but rather with the life of Christ, with the community of brothers and sisters in the sense of the primitive church.

You took humanity for what it is. You were as distant from illusion as from misunderstanding. You knew

demonic powers and the weight of the age, but these things came to you not in isolated recognition, but as a binding call to help your brothers.

You knew the power of the church community within the great current of a completely different world. But you never recruited. Whoever was called, heard, and thus came to you; some to live with you and your friends in community; others, touched by your insight, to remain as good friends. . . .

Let me embrace you, my friend! You are present – a witness of the new life in Christ; a man of kindness, a friend of freedom, a brother of knowing love, but yet one of such decisiveness that you discern and separate spirits.

There is no doubt that Eberhard would have disapproved of this eloquent eulogy, and thus it is fitting that this introduction end with words he spoke on his fiftieth birthday, in July 1933. Here he is no longer just my grandfather, but a man of God – a prophetic voice in a world that needs him now more than then:

On this day I have been especially conscious of my lack of ability, of how unsuited my own nature is to the work I have been given. I have remembered how God called me when I was only sixteen, and how I have stood in his way – with the result that so much of what he wanted to do has been left unfinished. It remains a miracle nevertheless that his work has been revealed and testified to in us feeble human beings – not through our merits, but because we have been accepted again and again through the grace of Jesus and his forgiveness of sins.

I have had to think of Hermas, that early Christian writer who describes the building of the great

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temple – how he refers to the many stones that must be thrown away. The masons try to use them, but if they do not fit, even after their corners have been chiseled down, then they must be thrown away – as far away as possible. And even the stones that are used must first be chiseled very sharply before they can be set into the wall. . . .

What concerns me most of all is the powerlessness of man, even of the man who has been entrusted with some task. Only God is mighty; we are completely powerless. Even for the work that has been given us, we are wholly without power. We cannot fit a single stone into the church community. We can provide no protection whatsoever for the community when it has been built up. We cannot even devote anything to the cause by our own power. We are completely without power. But just this is why God has called us: because we know we are powerless.

It is hard to describe how our own power must be stripped off us, how our own power must be dropped, dismantled, torn down, and put away. But it must happen, and it will not happen easily – nor through any single heroic decision. Rather, it must be done in us by God.

This is the root of grace: the dismantling of our own power. Only to the degree that our own power is dismantled will God give us his Spirit. If a little power of our own rises up amongst us, the Spirit and authority of God retreats in the same moment and to the corresponding degree. This is the single most important insight regarding the kingdom of God. . . .

The Holy Spirit produces effects that are deadly for the old life and that at the same time have a wakening

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and rousing power for the new. So let us use this day to give glory to God. Let us pledge to him the dismantling of our own power. Let us declare our dependence upon grace.

— *Johann Christoph Arnold*

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I

God's Revolution

A Call to the Inner Life

Despite the negative connotations the word may imply, "revolution" comes closest to describing the spiritual upheaval to which Arnold calls us. The following address was delivered in November 1917, but its message is not dated: the need for inner renewal in the face of overwhelming social and political change is as vital today as it was then. And Arnold's assertion that Bolshevism would fail to bring about peace and justice is prophetic. Certainly, the outer life has to change. But the inner life has to change first, and this change can come about only through repentance.

There is much talk today about upheaval, and in fact, we all feel that we are in the midst of the greatest upheaval humankind can experience. As a result of the war, our European civilization is undergoing a tremendous change. It is a change that brings judgement and chastisement from God over all that we thought we had so firmly under our control, and it has cast us down from the heights of presumption and pride.

The greatest changes are taking place in the economic sphere. A powerful wave of social upheaval has swept across Russia, a wave which has not yet run its course. We have no idea what kinds of change will still take place there

in the distribution of wealth between rich and poor, in industry and commerce, in buying and selling. We cannot yet foresee how far the revolution in outward things will affect everything else. But one thing is certain: we need an upheaval.

Certainly most people will get no further than applying it to outward matters. They are like the Social Democrat who stated, "We have no time to spend on inner matters, for the outer ones keep us busy enough." And that is the danger for most people: because of their many cares they forget the innermost things and neglect them, and attend only to outward matters. This is perhaps the worst thing about the pressing circumstances of the present moment: those who long for change completely overlook the inner side of life. Yet we must understand that any lasting change will have to start in the inner life.

What is great in our eyes is an abomination to God. We have preferred human honor to God's honor, and since we have raised ourselves up instead of bowing down before God, we have sunk deeply into sin and death. That is why we need an upheaval: a complete reversal, a re-valuation of all things and all values.

We proclaim Christ as divine power. Jesus is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is freedom. Whoever comes under the influence of this Spirit experiences an upheaval from within, and this upheaval of the soul brings the renewal that we thirst for and need. Power from above transforms us from within and makes us capable of what we would otherwise be quite incapable of. We no longer live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Paul speaks of this when he says: "If anyone is in Christ, he is

