



Eberhard Arnold

God's Revolution

Justice,
Community,
and the
Coming
Kingdom

*Introduction by
John Howard Yoder*

God's Revolution

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The Plough Publishing House

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*In memory of our beloved brother and sister
J. Heinrich and Annemarie Arnold*

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A Word to the Reader

What can I say about a book that has virtually turned my life upside down? At the time I first read *God's Revolution* I was part of a fledgling group of disenchanted Christians living together in inner-city Denver. We were tired of sermons and weary of professions of faith that went no further than personal edification. We were frustrated by the distinctions of class and rank that persisted in the church, despite Jesus' command to "give everything to the poor and follow me." We were sickened by escalating salaries of local mega-church pastors who preached the good life of the American dream instead of the gospel of justice, love, and the kingdom of God. We were disheartened that among so many "Bible believing" Christians we knew, important social, economic, and political questions were dismissed as irrelevant, while at the same time communities, congregations, and marriages (including those of pastors) were falling apart. Finally, we were searching for a life where words could be matched by deeds – a community that was truly built on faith, hope, and love.

When I began reading *God's Revolution*, it was like experiencing redemption all over again. My heart literally pounded as I turned the pages. These were not just words, but a testimony based on experience. Arnold affirmed the certainties of my inward longing, and gave me hope that I could experience them as a reality in my life. His directness, especially, confronted me as I had never been confronted before: "So poorly

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have we Christians lived that the question must be asked: Are we Christians at all?"

The question still haunts me. For what does seeking the kingdom of God mean if we who call ourselves Christians are unwilling to "look to the future and shape our lives in accordance with it?" What is the gospel – the good news – and what difference does it make to go out and tell people about it, unless we can show the world what Arnold calls the "alternative reality" of the gospel in a viable, concrete way – a way that demonstrates "true unity among believers who are ready to live a life of unlimited, active love?"

Arnold witnesses to God's uncompromising call to live *now* in accordance with the future kingdom of peace. To him, this call demands far more than simply praying and believing. He says that to be "faithful in our expectation of that day we must work faithfully toward it." Such faithfulness implies constant change and constant struggle. The seeds of injustice, division, impurity, and all the rest lie in each one of our hearts. And the birth of God's new order must be preceded by their death – by "the killing of selfishness, self-love, self-will, and self-importance."

That is why Arnold's book is such a challenge. For as badly derailed as this world is, and as irrelevant as so many of its churches are, I have to confess my own guilt for the confusion and disarray. What about the violence in my own heart? What about my own possessiveness, my self-importance, my pet pursuits and good causes? Am I truly willing to become my brother's keeper (and to let him become mine), and to submit myself in loving service to others? In short, am I willing to change?

As you read this book, be prepared to undergo a revolution; a transformation that "proves your readiness in the trivialities

of daily life” and yet “does not stop at any boundary, least of all the boundary that divides the spiritual from the material.” Don’t read it cautiously, however, but expectantly, and embrace whatever upheaval it brings. Open your heart so that something entirely new and different can enter.

Charles Moore, 1997

Introduction

Emmy Arnold stood outside her husband Eberhard's study, ready to face the Gestapo. Eberhard lay on the couch, his broken leg in a cast, watching his sister-in-law burn potentially incriminating papers in the stove. Meanwhile, 140 Nazi storm troopers and secret police were searching the little community in the Rhön hills for nonexistent arms and anti-Nazi literature. It was eight o'clock in the morning of November 16, 1933, in Hitler's Germany. Late that evening one of the Gestapo's big cars drove off full of books and papers.

We commemorate today the living legacy of a man whose work seemed smashed at fifty. Eberhard Arnold was crippled by a leg injury from which he never was to recover (his death came two years later from the complications of attempted corrective surgery). His ambitious publishing program was ended in midstream by the seizure of his office and the tightening coils of Nazi censorship. His energies in those last two years were to be drained by shepherding his refugee household into Switzerland, Liechtenstein, England...

But that was not the end. The Bruderhof movement, though decapitated, cut down, and scattered, did not wither away but grew up again, and again, in England, in Paraguay, in the United States...

That 1933 was not the end, but only the middle of a story, we owe not to the man but to his living witness. It is that witness which this book documents by gathering and



Eberhard and Emmy Arnold Whitsun 1921

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ordering fragments, mostly previously unpublished, from his writing and teaching.

An introduction could seek to summarize what follows in the book; I shall not do that. An introduction could seek to explain why what follows is important, or why it is true. That I shall not do either. I shall attempt rather to locate Arnold, to put him on the map; to make understandable to readers today what the causes and the cultural currents were which, in 1899 or 1907, in 1919 or 1932, fed into the new global vision which the following texts in this book expost. Other narratives of the life of Eberhard Arnold himself and that of the Bruderhof are already available. We seek here only to recount enough so that the reader unfamiliar with their story can understand the world from which and into which Arnold came and identify the issues to which these texts originally spoke.

Eberhard Arnold saw himself as servant of a vision which he did not invent, herald of a cause incommensurably greater than his service to it. That vision had come together from many sources borne toward him by many people and movements. The reader who is less interested in backgrounds and origins may prefer to read Arnold directly, as he himself seeks to read the gospel with unvarnished immediacy.

From before the First World War into the late 1920s, Arnold was a popular figure on the lecture circuit in Germany, serving universities, the Youth Movement world, and the student Christian world. Notes or outlines of many of these talks have been preserved in rough form. From early 1920 until his death in 1935 Arnold was regularly presenting teaching sessions for the members and the guests of his community. From many of these talks as well, rough notes have been retained. It is from these sources that most of the following materials have been

drawn. The talks have been reconstituted and translated by the labors of the archive workers at the Bruderhof, selected (with the advice of many others in the community) with a view to their not overlapping with the already available writings of Arnold and yet presenting an independently coherent picture of his teachings. In this process I have aided as “editor” only in an *a posteriori* and honorific sense, reviewing with the community staff their decisions as to which fragments to retain and as to what explanation is needed.

The texts we have before us are not the preferred point of entrance to the devotional or spiritual guidance of Arnold. That would be his *Innerland*, written in the face of the spiritual crisis which Germany faced in World War I and expanded since then in several editions until his death. Nor are the following texts all the heart of his message. That, Arnold himself would probably have said, was his *Salt and Light*, his interpretation on the Sermon on the Mount, not because of any great originality but because of its simplicity and because he was convinced that his movement had its heart not in himself but in the person and teaching of Jesus. Nor can it be a survey of the breadth of things he taught and wrote about, which extended from secular philosophy, ancient and modern, into political economy and the arts.

What we have here is rather a selection of those dominant strands of Arnold’s instruction which will most faithfully and adequately portray to the reader the source and rationale of the life of the community which has survived him for half a century by listening attentively to his both simple and prophetic pastoral instruction. That the selection is fitting for that purpose is guaranteed by the means used to prepare it. The initial choice of passages to reproduce was done by a wide consultation involving most of the senior members of

the community. At least a half-dozen community members shared in the task of translating those fragments which had not already appeared in English. At least fifteen couples contributed to the process of choosing which texts they thought most distinctive and representative. The passages chosen were then honed and ordered by the team of several workers who devote part of their time to the community archives. The resulting collections have also been reread in plenary assemblies. Thus while every word is from Eberhard's teaching or writing and over a half-century old, the text is also the living witness of the Bruderhof communities.

The topic choices and the judgments as to how much of which texts belonged in which place were made in that internal discipline of the community's own memory bank. An outsider might have selected other fragments as more original, or less familiar, or farther from the awareness of the reader. That selection would not have spoken in the same way of the living memory which is sustained by and which sustains the witness of the Bruderhof as organism.

My responsibility as editorial consultant has not included reaching back into the original texts, nor finding other texts in the untranslated sources which might be more interesting. I have merely reviewed some of the final stages of selection and translation, in order to help the original thrust of a text come through as adequately as possible. We have sought to have the voice be that of Arnold himself and not of his disciples a half-century later: yet we recognize that distinction to be intrinsically impossible. It is the people still living in the life which he founded who are most able to be custodians of his memory, even if the guardianship itself may unavoidably and usually unconsciously soften the differences between founder

This Crumbling World and God's Coming Order

On the Edge of Catastrophe

We seem, to our horror, to be standing on the brink of a catastrophic judgment. It is so close that it can be averted only through God's direct intervention.

September 1935

The human race has made stupendous technological progress, conquering time and space by means of cars and planes; but how many thousands of people are being killed by these very same means! There are amazing achievements in the big cities, yet most urban families die out in the third or fourth generation.

The most sinister powers of our civilization are the three mighty organizations – the state, the military, and the capitalist structure. These three organizations represent the highest achievement of the earth spirit. The tremendous edifice built up by a fallen creation is incredible. But it will end in death. How mighty is this power, how unquestioned its apparent worth!

September 1934

The dark reality of today – humankind destroying and ruining itself in reiterated madness – must be opposed by a much greater reality: the light of tomorrow. In this light humankind is called to something that is the opposite of

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betrayal and deception, of murder and hate, of death and destruction. (1 Thess. 5:4–5)

But we will not find the assurance that the dawn is coming until we have grasped night's darkness, its impenetrable blackness and bottomless suffering.

April 1919

The rule of evil affects all human beings. In our day it has reached massive proportions. We come across it in every form of government, in every church, in every gathering no matter how pious, in all political parties and labor unions, even in family life and in our brotherhood. It has a demonic power that shows up in every one of these structures, however different they may be on the surface. They are pervaded by the inclination to obstinate self-determination, the tendency to present what is one's own as the only thing that counts – one's own person, one's own nation, state, church, sect, party, labor union, one's own family or community – or at least, one's own way of thinking.

1926

There has hardly ever been a time when it was as evident as it is today that God and his righteousness and love do not yet rule. We see it in our own lives and in current events. We see it in the fate of the hopeless, the millions upon millions of unemployed. We see it in the unjust distribution of goods though the earth offers unstintingly its fertility and all its potentials. There is urgent work that must be done to help humankind, but it is obstructed and destroyed by the injustice of the present world systems.

We are in the midst of a collapse of civilization. Civilization is nothing but humankind's orderly work in nature. And this work has turned into a disorder whose injustice cries out to heaven.

There are hundreds of signs that something is about to happen. Nothing in history takes place, however, unless it comes from God. So our plea to him now is that he make history, his history, the history of his righteousness. And when God makes his history, we all have every reason to tremble. For as matters stand today, he can do nothing unless his wrath first sweeps over all the injustice and lovelessness, all the discord and brutality, that rule the world. His wrath will be the beginning of his history. First must come the day of judgment: then the day of joy, of love, grace, and justice can dawn.

But if we ask God to intervene, we must bare our own breasts before him so that his lightning can strike us, for we are all guilty. There is no one who is not guilty of the wickedness in today's world.

1933

No one can deny that the revolutionary movements have aroused the human conscience, thus violently shaking humanity's soul. The conscience cannot find peace until its warning cry reaches into every person's life. The attack by socialism and communism on the status quo is a call to our consciences – those of us who consider ourselves Christians. This call warns us more strongly than any sermon that our task is to live in active protest against everything that opposes God in this world. So poorly have we Christians filled this role that the question must be asked: Are we Christians at all?

1919

Every awakening of humankind's collective conscience is of deep significance. There is such a thing as a world conscience, the conscience of humanity. It rises up against war and bloodshed, against mammonism and social injustice, against violence of any kind.

April 1919

At this eleventh hour hearts must be made ready, through faith, to receive the powers of the future world, the spirit of the upper Jerusalem. (Rev. 3:10–12)

The final kingdom is near, and the whole world should be on the watch. But the world will not take heed unless the church of Jesus Christ puts the unity and justice of this kingdom into practice daily. Faith will bring about true unity among believers who are ready to live a life of unlimited, active love.

May 1934

He has called us, not so that we love our own lives, not even the lives of our fellow human beings. In other words, we are called to live, not for people, but for the honor of God and his kingdom. We must not endeavor to raise ourselves to God's kingdom by loving our life and taking good care of it. The way to the kingdom leads through death, through very real death. It demands that our life be given up for the sake of God and his kingdom. (Mark 8:35)

If we understand our time as it really is, we cannot fail to see how close that demand has come. We need not even go so far as to think of war, though it seems imminent. The political situation today requires that we be willing at any

moment to lose our lives in serving the cause we have taken up. And woe to those who try again and again to keep their lives! (John 12:25)

September 1935

Wake up, you who sleep, and arise; then Christ will reach you! (Rom. 13:11) The call is meant for anyone who has slipped back into the gloomy twilight of his own heart: “Wake up and arise from the dead!” Christ, the true light, stands before you. (Eph. 5:14) He will strengthen you so that you may do powerful deeds, the deeds of love that are born solely of faith in Christ.

You are living in the end-time. “It is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18) See to it that you lead a blameless life. That means you must look to the future and shape your life in accordance with God’s future. Make use of the present moment, for the times are evil. The hour of extreme danger has come. People must wake up if they look for protection in the coming judgment. Therefore do not be foolish. Learn to understand the will of the most high in our day. (Eph. 5:15–17) Be alert in these evil and dangerous times, lest in the hour of temptation you remain under the judgment. The foolish virgins became careless. You too will come to grief in the coming judgment unless you can borrow or are given oil for your lamps. (Matt. 25:1–13)

July 1931

The Kingdom Breaking In

If in all we do we have no other goal than this: that his kingdom come, that his will be done on earth, then our prayer will be answered. (Matt. 6:33) God will prove greater than our hearts can grasp. Much more will happen than we dare put into words. His answer will surpass our boldest prayer. And so that we may be sure it is God who does it all, it will happen while we are yet praying or even before we have spoken our prayer. (Isaiah 65:24) Anyone who knocks at God's door and seeks God alone will receive what he asks for before he knows it. (Matt. 7:7-11)

1929

Let us ask God to send forth his Spirit with renewed authority. New thoughts must break forth from the depths of God's heart that go far, far beyond our own human thoughts and weak notions. Let us pray for God's mighty deeds, deeds that are completely independent of us human beings. Our prayer is that his rulership really breaks in, that his love is revealed, that his kingdom becomes visible, ready for the Holy Spirit and Christ to descend. To this we will give ourselves, even if it costs us our lives. We will pledge our lives that this may come about for the deliverance of all nations.

September 1935

The miraculous powers of God, the reality of his kingdom, will be revealed in your midst; for it is the Holy Spirit who grips you and penetrates you and takes you into the sphere of God's coming kingdom. (Acts 2:17–21) The wind that precedes the storm is part of it. The Holy Spirit belongs to the day of judgment and redemption when the kingdom breaks in, even though he is the voice of God in the storm that precedes God's rule. Every time this happens, confirming the event we know as the founding of the apostolic church in Jerusalem, it affects the entire world.

September 1935

We are a hundred and fifty people, young and old, and each one has experienced a special leading. All these different threads have led us to life in community, a goal common to us all. It is in accord with God's future kingdom. By this we mean something that is earthly as well as heavenly. We believe in life beyond, eternal life. But at the same time we believe in life here on earth, the life that looks toward God's future, that expects eternal powers to break in and conquer the earth for God's coming kingdom.

Because we hold that the church of Christ is an embassy of God's future reign, we believe that the communal church has to represent here and now the charter of the kingdom to come. We say, the Holy Spirit is a harbinger of God's future; the Holy Spirit is the element of the great future. And that is why the church receives the Holy Spirit, not so as to figure out a map or timetable of God's kingdom to go by – far from it – but so that its life may be guided by perfect love, in keeping with the Spirit.

Certainly this means that we are in a situation of crass opposition to the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age. We withstand both the spirit of dictatorship and the liberal spirit that gives free rein to evil and sin, that allows people's sensual nature to have its fling, so to speak. Both go in a wrong direction. So from every point of view we are untimely.

July 1935

There will be no need for do's and don'ts, no need for tables of commandments or tablets of law. In this kingdom everything will be regulated by inner rebirth and inward inspiration, under the rule of Christ's spirit.

September 1935

Jesus challenged us to work while it is still day. (John 9:4) He compared his kingdom to labor in a vineyard, the investment of entrusted money, the good use of every talent. If God's kingdom is to transform this vale of tears into a place of joy, it has to be a realm of work. Work, and work alone, befits the destiny of the human spirit. By our nature as human beings we are called to a life of creativity. Healthy joy in life will be ours only through unclouded, loving fellowship in work.

1919

We have been given an important calling in the context of the tremendous struggle between two opposites. We are unworldly in that we deny recognition to mutual displace-

ment and annihilation. Yet we are close to the world and to nature in that we acknowledge the constructive social force of mutual help and interdependence. And we do not exclude anybody. We believe that all human beings, whoever they may be, are drawn together by this deep-down sense of solidarity and mutual service. We believe that all, however deeply they may have sunk into darkness, do yet have a spark of light in the depths of their hearts. We believe that this spark of light in every person must in the end gather them all together in the ocean of light – fellowship with God.

June 1935

It is not uncommon to hear people say it is wrong to try to bring about prematurely any part of God's kingdom. That is true. We human beings must not and cannot hasten into being what God will do. But by saying it is wrong to force anything, people tend all too often to cover up their lack of faith in the Holy Spirit. Men and women cannot precipitate God's kingdom. But God can send a forerunner of his kingdom: he sends the Holy Spirit, who is the essence of the future kingdom, who speeds ahead to herald the coming reign.

May 1934

There have been many people on whose hearts the suffering of the world weighed heavily and who therefore knew that one day justice would have to come. But Jesus is the only one who, as well as implanting in us the longing for justice, gave us the kingdom with its clarity and justice and showed us the way there.

June 1931

The state and the church that supports it are, relatively speaking, the best things in the darkness. Until all this relative good is overthrown, God's kingdom will not come.

The absolute good is the wedding feast of the Lamb and his supper. (Rev. 19:7–9) We need not try to imagine what form it will take. We are not interested in exact descriptions or pictures. Our concern is for his joy and his unity to be made visible across the whole horizon. The entire earth shall be one church of Christ, the whole earth will join in his wedding feast, and peace will reign in all the earth. Christ will be present everywhere. And to live in church community means to be faithful in our expectation of that day and to work faithfully toward it. Every wedding, every wedding feast, shall be a symbol; every common mealtime shall be a sign of brotherhood.

August 1934

Christ fulfills everything, for in him everything is already fulfilled. Boundless joy is given to us when we turn away from the old life and find forgiveness for it, when we turn to a new life with courage to dare. That is the joy of the gospel, the joy of the Holy Spirit, joy in the Lord, the joy that encompasses all of life because it springs from the eternal God. (Phil. 4:4) It is joy in the certainty that this same happiness belongs to all, that the future is the Lord's.

1920/21

The coming down of God's kingdom when Jesus gives this earth back to God on the day of the new creation will be something different. Our prayer shall call on God to bring this about. We cannot do it, not even with our faith. God alone can do it.

An awakening must come; but something still greater must come. Can you grasp this? Can you grasp it that something even greater than the early apostolic times must come, namely the kingdom of God, which will change the whole world?

February 1935

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount

We ought constantly to occupy our minds and hearts with the person of Jesus: who he is, what he said, how he lived, how he died, and what his resurrection means. We have to take in the full import of his words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) and in the parables, and we have to represent to all the world the same things he represented in his life.

March 1935

What the kingdom of God means is made clear in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Lord's Prayer, and in the words, "Enter by the narrow gate!" This means, treat people as you wish them to treat you. This is generally overlooked. You will not be going the way of discipleship until you do for everybody all that you ask from God for yourself, that is, absolute social justice and the peaceable atmosphere of God's kingdom. We are envoys of the coming kingdom of God; we serve only one law, the law of his Spirit.

The Sermon on the Mount tells us what that means in practice. To anyone who is sincere about it, the way is plain. Of course, no one can go this way without grace. Jesus indicates this when he speaks of the tree and its vitality in connection with the kingdom of God. He also speaks of the salt, meaning the entirely new nature bestowed on us in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "Unless your justice is better than that of the

moralists and theologians, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” And he also says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice.”

To be submerged in the wind of the Holy Spirit – that is the new life. Its effect will encompass the whole world. We need to have faith that we live in a time of grace; for the tree is meant to spread over the whole earth. And all humankind gathers under this tree, in the shelter of this living tree.

It is not enough to recognize that Jesus is the friend of our hearts; we must prove our love. And Jesus tells us how to do this: “Those who love me will keep my word!” (John 14:15)

September 1935

To be ready for God’s kingdom does not mean to stop eating and drinking or to reject marriage; it means recognizing the signs of the times and living now as we shall live in the future kingdom of God. But what will be the sign that God’s kingdom is about to come? We read the answer in Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27: “And he will send his messengers with a trumpet sounding afar, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” That is the sign of the second coming of Christ. The gathering together is the sign of Christ – “How much did I desire to gather you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings.” (Matt. 23:37)

August 1934

Jesus says that your words must be your deeds, your faith for the future must be your present living. The salvation of Jesus Christ must be your life. In this way you will find the right attitude to all people and all things. You will not judge,

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but you will sense that people's lives are ruined by social injustice; you will feel that all guilt represents humanity's moral decline. So you will take care not to expose the holiest things to eyes and ears that do not understand. You will try to see that others have everything that you want for yourself. Do you need a house or a bank account? Then make that possible for all. Whatever you expect others to do for you, do the same for them. Love your neighbor as yourself – that is truth and reality; it is the reality of Jesus. And right afterwards he tells us to go in by the narrow gate, to go the narrow way. Beware of the way of compromise, the way of the many, the broad way. Beware of false prophets. They speak of peace and work for peace, but they are not free from the power of money, from mammon, lying, and impurity. Anyone who is not completely free of mammon should not speak of peace; otherwise he is a false prophet. Mammon is the murderer from the beginning. Whoever has not broken with mammon should not speak of peace, since he is a participant in the unceasing war that destroys the dispossessed by the power of wealth and its possessors.

Jesus concludes with the challenge: It is no use to hear these words unless you also do them. The finest peace palace will collapse unless it fully represents the will of Jesus. The call of Jesus goes to the core, to the very heart: Leave everything and go my way. "Sell all that you have and give to the poor. Go with me!" (Matt. 19:21; Luke 5:27)

August 1934

Our experience of personal salvation has to go hand in hand with our expectation for the whole world. Otherwise we are not completely at one with God. And this will not happen until we are at one in the interests that the all-powerful, caring God has. Then we are truly at one.

Who are the blessed? They are those who stand before God as beggars begging for his spirit; who have become beggars in the material as well as the spiritual. They are those who are beggarly poor in goods and in grace. Only the beggarly poor know that to hunger and thirst means to agonize in this desire. Yet these are the truly blessed, who are plagued by this hunger and thirst for righteousness, who bear deep pain, who suffer the ultimate need, as Jesus suffered the ultimate need. Just as he suffered with the world's deepest suffering and in the bitterest God-forsakenness, only those are the blessed who suffer to the verge of death, for the world and its need. They have pure, clear, radiant hearts, they are concentrated on God's cause with completely undivided hearts, they are at one with God's heart and live from their hearts just as God lives from his heart. So they are the ones who bring peace in the midst of an unpeaceful and corrupted world.

February 1935

The New Testament says that faith does not depend on signs and wonders. Jesus says they should be kept secret. People too easily cling to miracles. So Jesus warns us not to speak of them or display them, because he wants us to find a faith that does not depend on miracles. (Luke 8:56)

September 1935

