



AN EMBASSY BESIEGED

The Story of a
Christian Community
in Nazi Germany

EMMY BARTH

Foreword by Johann Christoph Arnold

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The foreword and sample chapters 6 & 7 follow in this preview ebook.
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We are ambassadors for Christ,
God making his appeal through us.

—2 Corinthians 5:20

The Apostle says that we are ambassadors of God, representing Christ, the messiah king, the regent of that last kingdom. When the British ambassador is in the British Embassy in Berlin, he is not subject to the laws of the German Reich. The grounds of the embassy are inviolable. In the residence of the ambassador, only the laws of the country he represents are valid.

We are ambassadors of the kingdom of God. This means that we do nothing at all except what the king of God's kingdom would himself do for his kingdom. When we take this service upon ourselves we enter into mortal danger.

—Eberhard Arnold

Foreword

HERE PUBLISHED FOR THE first time is the story of my grandfather's resistance to National Socialism. My parents were young adults when Hitler came to power, and I grew up hearing the story from them. They both experienced the Gestapo raid of the community my grandfather founded after refusing to vote for Hitler in the plebiscite of November 1933. My father was lined up against the wall with other young men and thought they would all be shot. My parents' wedding took place hurriedly two years later so that they could use their "honeymoon" to escape the military draft by fleeing to England.

The Gestapo would come again, and this time they told the community that they had only twenty-four hours to pack up and leave. Community members could take only what they could carry on their backs. It was April and the community lived in the Rhön mountains where it was terribly cold and windy. There were many little babies, mothers and children. Several young men, including my father-in-law, were put into a Nazi prison. He never expected to come out alive, but by the grace of God he did. In fact, all of us safely escaped Nazi Germany.

We eventually made our way to England and then several years later, right during the war, we were forced to emigrate to South America. I was six months old when my parents risked a voyage across the submarine-infested Atlantic to the jungles of Paraguay. It was in these conditions that I grew up, and it was clear to me from childhood on that radical discipleship would mean suffering for my faith.

I have lived for more than fifty years in the United States, where the Bruderhof Communities have been allowed to live in peace. For this I am very grateful. But I am also very worried about what is happening in our country today. We are living in a culture of death, where euthanasia, capital punishment, abortion, physician-assisted suicide, and on-going military action are a mainstay of everyday life. We don't know where it will end!

There have been dramatic political and economic shifts as well. The level of frustration, anger, and fear combined with an ever-increasing rhetoric of hate and blame remind me a lot of the 1920s and 30s in Germany. We hear rumors of war, and governments on both sides of the Atlantic encroach on religious liberties, making it more and more difficult to live as true disciples of Jesus.

This brings me back to my grandfather. Engraved on his tombstone is the following verse from Revelations: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth . . . They may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.” This epitaph seems particularly fitting when viewed through the lens of history. He died seventy-five years ago. Yet, while Hitler’s “Thousand Year Reich” crumbled in defeat after a mere twelve years, the Bruderhof movement continues to flourish. More than that, however, my grandfather’s prophetic vision speaks right into our situation and the questions that face society today.

I am struck by his literal understanding of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “Love your enemy. Pray for those who persecute you.” My grandfather rejected power politics on the one hand but also spiritual quietism on the other. He practiced the politics of love: “You can love a man only when you have understood what is living in him,” he told his community. “We have to find an inner understanding with the Nazis, and then we have to represent to them the politics of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. After coming to a heart-to-heart exchange with them, when we confront them with the policy of the coming kingdom of God, we are going to collide sharply with them.”

My grandfather died shortly before the Bruderhof was forced to leave Germany. He knew it was only a matter of time, yet he never gave up hope that even Hitler could be reached by God’s love. In a personal letter to Adolf Hitler in November 1933, he addressed him as “Our beloved Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler.” He expressed his respect for Hitler’s “God-given task of government” and pleaded with him to spare the innocent. He ended his letter: “We ask God from our hearts that at God’s hour [our beloved Reichskanzler] may become, instead of an historical instrument of supreme state authority, an ambassador of the humiliated Christ, to whom alone it was given to reveal the perfect love of God’s heart.”

The greatest enemy of our country today is the polarizing forces of hate and violence that feed off the apathetic indifference of self-satisfied

people. As the vanguard and embassy of God's kingdom, the church is called to show that only radical love can overcome the bankruptcy of these two extremes. Here is a story that demonstrates in very concrete terms what this love entails, why it matters, and why it cannot be defeated. May it inspire us, especially those who confess Jesus as Lord, but more importantly, may it move us to act while there is still time.

Johann Christoph Arnold
June 2010

Sample chapters 6 & 7 follow in this preview ebook. For the complete book, please visit [Wipf and Stock Publishers](#).

October to November 1933

IN MID OCTOBER A letter arrived from Ludwig Müller, the Reich bishop himself. Dated October 11, it said:

To Herr Dr. Eberhard Arnold

The Herr Reich bishop would be interested to learn from you what attitude you and your community take toward Christianity and the church. We would be grateful if you would let us have documents pertaining to this.

The brotherhood met to speak about how they should answer. This was the opportunity Eberhard had been waiting for to make a public witness. They would write respectfully, but they would make their position clear. Many wrote letters expressing their personal convictions. Eberhard wrote a cover letter and sent along several books and pamphlets.

Bruderhof
October 17, 1933

To the Reich bishop
of the Protestant churches of Germany
Berlin

Concerning the Reich bishop's inquiry of October 11, 1933

Our brotherhood wishes to express its cordial thanks to the Reich bishop of the German Protestant churches (Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist) for taking an interest in our witness to Christ. Our Christian confession consists in the words of the prophets and apostles, grounded in the four Gospels. Repentance and faith in the kingdom of God are proclaimed daily among us. In the spirit of the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' high priestly prayer we intercede for the whole of Christendom and all nations, in particular for

the German nation and the government God has set over it. We hold the Sermon on the Mount and the early church founded at Pentecost as described in the Acts of the Apostles, which are common ground for all believers, to be normative for the character of the church of Jesus Christ. Each member of our brotherhood acknowledges the Apostles' Creed as our common faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as God's perfect unity in himself. The unalterable confession of faith for all the communities called Hutterian is to be found in Peter Riedemann's written exposition of the Apostolic Creed: *Confession of our Religion, Teaching, and Faith* of 1540.

Eberhard went on to describe the Bruderhof's connection with the Hutterian communities in the United States and Canada and their four-hundred-year history. Then he gave his own credentials:

The twenty-volume *Quellen* series of Christian witnesses throughout the centuries, published by the undersigned, points to God, the universal reality.

The undersigned, spokesman of the only Bruderhof in the German Reich, was appointed and confirmed in the service of the Word by the elders of the North American communities for the purpose of building up the Bruderhof in Germany according to their old church orders. The appointment was carried out by the unanimous decision of all Hutterian servants of the Word at the Stand Off Bruderhof in Alberta, Canada.

Further brief information about the undersigned may be found under his name in the reference work, *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*; the only correction to be made is to substitute "Hutterianism" for "Quakerism." His Christian conviction is set forth in his books, enclosed herewith, *The Early Christians After the Death of the Apostles* and *Innerland: A Guide Into the Heart and Soul of the Bible*. The first edition of the latter came out in 1914; . . . a new edition of two thousand is in preparation. We will be glad to send the other works on request, including the complete series of *Quellen* books already mentioned. Today we also enclose a few small publications telling about the building up and composition of our Bruderhof and its service of love.

In the hope that this information will convey all the essentials without taking up too much valuable time, our whole brotherhood wishes the German Reich bishop of the Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist churches and his colleagues the grace of Jesus Christ and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in carrying out the will of God, who by the example of the disciples of Jesus wants to reveal his love and unity to all men.

with love and respect, on behalf of the brotherhood,
its spokesman

Eberhard Arnold

No evidence suggests that there was any further communication from the Reich bishop.

Injury

From the moment he became Reichskanzler, Hitler was deliberately driving Germany toward war. International disarmament agreements being negotiated in Geneva had reached a deadlock. On October 14, Germany pulled out of the negotiations and at the same time withdrew from the League of Nations, “in view of the unreasonable, humiliating and degrading demands of the other Powers.”¹ The German people were expected to express their support of this action in a plebiscite or vote of confidence.

This announcement was of immediate concern to the Rhön brotherhood, as can be seen from the words Eberhard spoke a week later:

In the extreme seriousness of the present political situation it is of the greatest importance that we are completely clear and united in the inner life of our brotherhood circle. Every day I am astonished that we are still allowed to be together, still in this place. I see this as a wonderful providence that one can hardly grasp. If our situation becomes worse through the reelection and the plebiscite on the present government’s policy, it will be even more necessary to stand together in absolute clarity about the deepest things.²

Two animals in nature show us the decisive contrast: the wolf shows us the sneaking predator, and the lamb shows us the gathered flock that is ready to be sacrificed. All works must be tested as to whether they have a predatory nature, that craves and tears and kills, or whether they have a lamblike nature, that is ready to be sacrificed, that draws together. This lamblike nature knows what serves the whole flock.

Looking at the world around us, we see clearly how lonely our little community is—an isolation so deep as to be almost inconceivable. We cannot expect help from any human quarter! The professor of German in England [John Stephens] said that if we were thrown into prison, nobody in England would lift a finger

on our behalf. We would just disappear, unnoticed, into a concentration camp. No one would rise up in our defense. In times like these, the church of Jesus Christ stands completely alone.

Petitions from the American Bruderhofs would not alter that. Clearly, in this struggle we have to depend completely on the strength we are given as a community. And it is good so. In the coming weeks we will probably face very heavy political pressure. Unless God places a downright miraculous protection around our houses, we are going to be visited by the wild election propaganda of the Nazis; the roars of the beast of prey will penetrate our very rooms. We shall have to say *no* to their demands. We shall be called enemies of the people and of life. Persecution may soon start in earnest.

If I look around the circle, I see that each one is burdened by the struggles of daily life. One feels oppressed by his lack of gifts, another has had a disagreement with someone and doesn't have the courage to clear it up. All of this dampens our joy and darkens our view. Let us not be anxious! Let us not be cowardly! We need to be brave.

When the profound joy of our complete unity fills our hearts, we shall fear no man. Perfect love drives out fear.³

On Friday, October 27, 1933, Eberhard called on the district administrator's office in Fulda to ask for advice concerning the plebiscite scheduled for November 12. Every German citizen was required to vote. What would happen if they refused, or if they voted "No?"

"If you don't say yes, Dr. Arnold, there is only one thing left—concentration camp," he was told.

Eberhard came home discouraged and agitated. He felt responsible for the children, their mothers, the young people—for more than a hundred souls. His taxi dropped him off at the edge of the woods as usual, and he walked the last bit along a footpath down the hill. It had been raining and it was already dark. He slipped and fell.

Alfred Gneiting, a young gardener, had gone to meet him. Years later he recalled:

I went out to meet him alone with a storm lantern, so he would be able to see the way better, as it was quite uneven. The grass was wet and Eberhard was wearing a lightweight pair of town shoes. They were not the kind fitted with nails, which could have given a good support at such a place. Suddenly he started slipping, and even though I supported his right arm, I was not able to hold him. I wanted to help him to get up, but he said: "It will not work. Go

inside and call for help.” The meeting had already begun. Moni determined right away that the leg was fractured, as the bone was even protruding. So we carried Eberhard into his study.⁴

That night the brotherhood gathered around his bed. He was in great pain, but he spoke with firm faith and love. He suggested that everyone should go to the election booth and submit a statement of his or her beliefs. Knowing that the results of such an action were unpredictable, he asked that the brothers and sisters consider where they should meet if all should be scattered. They agreed on a farm belonging to Hannes Boller’s family in Switzerland.⁵

The following morning Eberhard was taken to Fulda by ambulance, where the surgeon, Dr. Gunkel, wired the bone together in a three-hour operation. He was discharged from the hospital after six days (although the doctor would have liked to keep him longer) and given a non-weight-bearing cast and instructions for six weeks of strict bed rest. He was very pale, weak, in much pain, and had very little appetite.⁶ From now on, Hans Zumpfe took over much of the practical leadership of the community with the help of Georg Barth, Hans Meier, and Hannes Boller.



At the beginning of November 1933, the following notice appeared in the villages of the parish of Veitsteinbach:

Public Notice

On Saturday, November 4, at eight o’clock in the evening in the hall of Mr. Leineweber’s inn at Veitsteinbach, a meeting will take place to which all men fit for service in the SA between the ages of eighteen and forty-five are *urgently* invited. Those *failing* to attend will show by their absence that they have no interest in their nation and fatherland.

Zeihner (Mayor)

When November 4 arrived, the brothers concerned sent Mayor Zeihner a list of their names along with this message:

To: Mayor Zeihner, Veitsteinbach

As we have a meeting for worship this evening, we shall not be able to attend the Veitsteinbach meeting. We are conveying our best wishes and hope the meeting will go well. We testify that

we have the greatest interest in our nation and fatherland and that this evening, too, we shall intercede from our hearts for the government of Hindenburg and Adolf Hitler.

The undersigned brothers of the Bruderhof

The national plebiscite was scheduled for November 12. Eberhard had been told that failure to participate would mean concentration camp. This was the moment, then, to make the witness he had been thinking about for the past nine months. Instead of checking the “yes” or “no” boxes on the ballot sheet, the Bruderhof members would write a statement giving their position in regard to the National Socialist government. At the same time he would send out the “avalanche of petitions” he had spoken of earlier, in the hope of pre-empting retribution. He dropped his work on *Innerland* (which he was never able to finish), and from his bedside dictated a series of letters to Nazi authorities. Six were mailed before the plebiscite on Sunday, November 12.

To begin with, on November 7, a letter was addressed to the adviser on church affairs in the Reich ministry of the interior, Ministerial Counselor Conrad. As in all his petitions, he boldly emphasized those ideals that the Bruderhof had in common with the Nazis and that might conceivably commend it to Nazi officials; by the same token he carefully distanced the Bruderhof from political parties, from Marxists and anarchists, to safeguard it from being lumped together with such groups anathema to the Nazis. He told of the close bond between the Bruderhof and the Hutterian colonies of ancient German stock in North America. He expressed his respect for the government of Hindenburg and Hitler, but stated clearly that the Bruderhof had a different calling and did not take part in politics.

For our beloved country and nation, our great German fatherland, we do acknowledge the God-ordained necessity of that *other* calling—a calling not given to us—which by God’s will and leading is now entrusted to the government of Hindenburg and Adolf Hitler. We pray earnestly every day for these beloved men and with all respect wish them the very best for all they have to do or leave undone, that they may carry out their great and heavy task in accordance with the will of God. We are able to offer no other or better help for this task of government than faithful intercession before God, and we ask that this be recognized . . .

In view of our task here, we are not inclined to contemplate the emigration of [one hundred ten] people unless the wish for the mass emigration of our whole group should come from our beloved German government itself. We love Germany and would not want to be absent, especially in the present hour of need. On the contrary, we want to place all our strength at the disposal of our country and nation by putting the full gospel into practice in a manner befitting that gospel; we want to bring all our love into action without getting involved in political, military, or legal affairs. That is why we request to be thoroughly investigated and to be given a basic direction as to whether we will be permitted to live and work in Germany in the Hutterian way by our conscience bound to Christ . . .

We ask the Reich minister of the interior to show kind understanding and grant us protection and help, also for the urgently needed building up of our farm settlement. This would enable us to continue the service of love to many a fellow countryman by allowing our branch of large Germanic families to increase for the benefit of the fatherland. Then the truly Christian life of early Hutterianism with its faithfully maintained customs would keep its roots among the people of Germany today and make its influence felt. By the grace of God its influence might be a greater blessing for the government's best intentions than one would expect of a cause so small and so absorbed in one goal.

In that trust at this decisive hour we send copies of this letter to the Reich president, the Reichskanzler, our *Oberpräsident*, our regional governor, and our district administrator. At the same time, we respect the fact that the Reich minister of the interior is the authority in our German Reich from whom our free church group living in community must expect the investigation and decision we have requested regarding all our concerns. Therefore, we wish to close by requesting that as soon as possible a representative of the Reich minister of the interior visit our Bruderhof, Neuhof, District of Fulda.

We sincerely and respectfully wish to be accommodating and submissive; our best wishes to Adolf Hitler; all salvation (*Heil*) through Christ!

As Eberhard had pointed out earlier, the salute “Heil Hitler” was related to the Roman imperial oath, “Hail Caesar.” But the German word “Heil” could also mean “salvation.” Therefore Bruderhof members, in refusing to use the “Heil Hitler” greeting, liked to say “Best wishes to Adolf Hitler, but *Heil* only through Jesus Christ.”

A similar letter was addressed to Baron von Monbart, governor of the Kassel region, in which the Rhön Bruderhof was situated. Copies of the letters to Reich Bishop Müller and to Ministerial Counselor Conrad were enclosed.

By Thursday, November 9, 1933, the letter to “our beloved Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler” was ready to send. Eberhard deliberated over the wording of this letter: how to speak out against blatant injustice without provoking retribution on the community.

Bruderhof
November 9, 1933

To Adolf Hitler
Chancellor of the German Reich
Berlin
PERSONAL and CONFIDENTIAL

Concerning the Bruderhof called Hutterian, of Germanic and early Christian roots, and its loyalty to the government:

We greet our beloved Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler for November 12, expressing our loyalty to him in his God-given task of government and representation of the German Reich. We believe that our Reichskanzler and our Reich president alone have been entrusted by God with all political matters pertaining to the German state, since it is the purpose of God in his wrath, and as ruler of the world, to strike down all the ruling powers of recent decades insofar as they have violated morality and family life, justice and the common good, truth and loyalty. May God protect the innocent from suffering unduly under this judgment. We faithfully intercede with God and before men for our rulers Hindenburg and Adolf Hitler, that they be given grace to preserve their high principles in the face of all evil powers and to establish peace, justice, and a people’s community to an extent hardly ever achieved before in world history.

For four hundred years we brethren known as Hutterian have, for the sake of Christ, renounced this calling of statesmanship, even in the humblest station. Our only calling in life is to love God in loving our Führer and deliverer Jesus Christ, whose discipleship we are called to put into practice in a communal life, fully united in faith and in all decisions.

Granted that enormous tasks face our beloved Reichskanzler on behalf of the millions of German people, nevertheless the following facts about our Germanic and early-Christian brotherhood (which gathered four centuries ago on Moravian soil) will be of great interest to him. Even though living among Slavs,

Hungarians, and Americans, our Hutterian brotherhood, constituting a people's community that practices positive Christianity, has to the present day kept its pure German customs and dress, its traditional Tirolean language, and its peasant culture so intact that in its selfless dedication to the common good it has allowed no alien influence to creep in. The Hutterian Brethren numbered at times twenty thousand souls and at present about four thousand. Over the years their heroism, their preparedness for the cross, has led to the martyr's death of more than two thousand. The last two died in the United States during the World War.

In view of these facts, our Bruderhof in Germany pleads with our beloved Reichskanzler to grant the Hutterian Brethren in Germany today the same freedom of conscience that Prussian kings once granted to the Mennonites, who have similar beliefs. We brethren, as ministers of Jesus Christ, cannot participate in military service or in government or judicial actions because we believe that love is the highest good. From this love springs the uninterrupted labor-service given in our life of full community that serves our whole nation and the aims of its government in the best possible way. Because we love our German fatherland, nation, and government, we ask that our Bruderhof be allowed to remain in Germany under the protection of the Reichskanzler and to live and work in accordance with our early Christian principles. We address this request to our beloved Chancellor also in the name of our fellow brethren of German descent who live in thirty-eight Bruderhofs in America. These German communities abroad ordained and confirmed the undersigned for the task of building up and maintaining in Germany a monastic Protestant community in line with their centuries-old faith and life. This community in Germany has existed for many years and today comprises twenty families, in all 120 souls.

For further information we enclose copies of our letters to the Reich bishop of the German Protestant Church and to the Reich minister of the interior, as well as a copy of the first part of the essay "Light and Fire," just off the press. We entrust these documents to our beloved Reichskanzler and ask God from our hearts that at God's hour he may become, instead of a historical instrument of supreme state authority, an ambassador of the humiliated Christ, to whom alone it was given to reveal the perfect love of God's heart.

With loyal respect,
the brotherhood,

[signed] Eberhard Arnold

Additional letters were sent to Dr. Burkhardt, the district administrator in Fulda, and to Prince Philip of Hesse, governor of the province of Hessen-Nassau, as well as a shorter one to Reich president, Field Marshal von Hindenburg:

The undersigned minister and spokesman of the Bruderhof (Neuhof, District of Fulda), who from childhood on was known to Georg Michaelis, Reichskanzler in 1917, asks the Reich president for help to enable our brotherhood to remain in Germany without acting against their early Christian convictions. As is evident from the enclosed copies of letters to the Reichskanzler, the Reich minister of the interior, and the Reich bishop of the German Protestant Church, we loyally acknowledge that the Hindenburg-Hitler government has been given to our nation by God. We pray daily with gratitude and respect for our beloved Reich president and our beloved Reichskanzler.

Our brotherhood requests that it may serve the German Reich and its government in works of love as a traditional German Christian community in the way that the Hutterian Brethren have done faithfully for four hundred years, without taking part in military, political, or judicial actions. We believe that by putting into practice the love of Jesus Christ we can best serve the national community and public interest.

We ask that our petitions and letters may receive kind and thoughtful attention in view of the seriousness of our situation.

After the letters had been drafted, the brotherhood met to read them out. Because it was vital that everyone stand behind them, they met several times over the next two days until everyone was in agreement. Years later Hans Meier said:

I had to overcome my hatred against Hitler. He was a murderer, and I felt I hated him. But Eberhard Arnold represented very strongly that we could only write to Hitler and Hindenburg—or anyone else—if we loved him. Out of love we have to tell him the truth. But love is not an emotional thing; loving the enemy means to challenge him, to tell him the truth. I had to fight against these feelings of hatred before I could write to Hitler in peace and become an instrument of God's love instead of hatred.⁷

Edith wrote to Hardy:

Last night there was a *Rundrede** about this, including the novices, and we were completely unanimous and recognized more fully

* *Rundrede*: A meeting in which every individual present was asked to speak.

the historic hour. Love your enemies, see and affirm everything in them that is good. No “appeasement” can help them, however, but only a clear witness to absolute truth. We were able to give a witness in the letters and are infinitely thankful that we could.⁸

Transcripts of the meetings, partially reproduced below, show how the entire circle agreed with the witness they wished to make and were willing to overcome their personal prejudices for the sake of this witness.

Moni Barth: Having just returned from Fulda, it was brought home to me how mighty is the power opposing us. There is a swastika hanging from every floor of every house. It is a gigantic movement that confronts us. One can only rejoice that we dare to go on the offensive, even though the powers ranged against us are so much stronger. I completely support these letters.

Sekunda Kleiner: I am glad that a completely different, powerful world speaks through these letters and confronts the other one.

Anni Mathis: Great clarity and love come through these letters and prove to us again that the Spirit does come down to the church community to give the right word at the right hour.

Karl Keiderling: It is very important that we have read the letters once more. Yesterday I felt so overwhelmed I was not able to take it all in. What moves me is the straight line shown us as the direction to take, neither affirming the state too positively nor negating it altogether. These petitions have given me inner quiet and firmness.

Hannes Boller: I am happy that Eberhard, in spite of his severe pain, was given strength to put them together. It seems to me that these letters can only be rightly understood as an expression of, and pure witness to, the forgiving and creative love of Christ.

Adolf Braun: What Hannes has said is very important to me: the forgiving love expressing itself in fervent words as beloved Reichskanzler, the fact that we can address all these people as people we love, is only possible if we are ready to forgive. Later generations perhaps will write volumes about this letter to the Reichskanzler; it contains many thoughts that are only hinted at. Hearing these letters again today makes me even more happy that Eberhard has put into words what we all felt.

Georg Barth: Without doubt, the hour we live in is a momentous one. We were waiting for it, yet it did not occur to us that it would come so soon. These letters represent an advance along the whole

front, a proclamation of the will to live for peace, against the threats coming from the opposing side.

Trudi Hüsey: I would like to take this further to say how overwhelming it is that in opposition to that power now in demonic revolt, Eberhard was inspired to give true expression to the highest command of love: "Love your enemies!" The fact that this hour has come upon us and has been taken hold of in this way has a downright freeing effect.

Edith Boeker: I am very grateful that the letters could be written the way they are. We all feel they have been written with the full authority of the Spirit. Recognizing that, we can look forward in firm faith to whatever response we may meet.

Annemarie Wächter: What I find to be a great gift is that in this case where two utterly conflicting worlds face each other, the testimonies pick out what is positive in the other side, so that these two opposing worlds can actually be brought together.

Arno Martin: I feel overwhelmed by the love they express: love precisely to people most closely involved in the use of force. They are being faced by the love and peace of God's kingdom. We must be especially grateful to Eberhard for composing these letters in the midst of his terrific physical suffering. Even in such suffering he has heard the Spirit's voice and has found the way to communicate it to the world.

Fritz Kleiner: Some of us who have come from socialist and peace circles do not consider being German terribly important. But what matters is that we deliver a clear message of Christian community to the government. At the same time we state the Christians' positive attitude to the state and say it so the government people can understand, what both they and we want.

Margrit Meier: These testimonies truly come from God. To be able to understand them I feel it is necessary to understand the love behind them. I can imagine they may make old friends think we are trying to accommodate the government; it may not be understood by them.

Hans Meier: Once more it has been made clear to me that this way can only be walked in complete love; never with the aid of a rational balancing pole. I want to stand completely behind these letters.

Peter Mathis: The great thing is the all-embracing love to the enemy, something I did not understand right away, coming as I do from Religious Socialism. I too stand behind everything the letters say.

Alfred Gneiting: What makes me especially happy is that the two tasks have been differentiated so clearly: the task of the church and the task of the state. It is a powerful witness.

Josef Stängl: I am amazed at the way we have been led. There was always the danger that the demonic powers might open a real gulf between the church and the nation. But the Spirit has guided us again and stressed the positive things the church can do.

Heiner Arnold: What makes me especially happy is the great love that at the end challenges Adolf Hitler to become a Christian. That is the greatest sign of love.

Monika Arnold: I find it so wonderful that in these letters the possibility of a new way comes out much more strongly than criticism of the old one. I am very thankful.

Emmy Arnold: I find it very disturbing for two worlds to clash the way these do. That is quite a collision—a more violent one than we may have experienced so far. That is an aspect we must bear in mind. I rejoice that the letters are being mailed and hope they will reach their destination.

Hans Zumpfe: It's a great joy to find that we have once more come through to a unanimous feeling. We stand completely behind these testimonies. We are grateful we still have this opportunity to give such a witness, grateful that the church of the Hutterian Brethren in Germany has not simply been swept away without further ado.

Of course, this may be a turning point; in fact, we can definitely count on that. We do not know what will happen. It is in God's hands, but it will be a turning point. If Adolf Hitler thinks and acts in line with his earlier pronouncements, there will be no special privileges for us. He made particular reference to pacifist circles and to persons not taking part in actions organized by the state.⁹

Christian Löber and Arno Martin were sent on bicycles to mail these important documents on Saturday night; the plebiscite was scheduled for the next day. They skirted the villages on their way because of the unrest everywhere.

Except for a short acknowledgment from Hindenburg's office, the Bruderhof never heard whether their letters had been received. But Hans Meier related the following anecdote:

Near the Rhön Bruderhof, there was once a big military maneuver. The control of the military maneuver was in the castle of Ramholz [just a few miles from the Bruderhof]. To the Stumm family, who owned that castle, belonged the big forest along the Weinstrasse. We bought our wood from that forest. The forester from whom we bought the wood told us that Adolf Hitler was in Ramholz and that he asked, "Do the Bruderhof people live up there?" So he must have had some idea about the Bruderhof, and he must have known what it is.¹⁰

Plebiscite and Raid

NOVEMBER 11 WAS ARMISTICE Day for most of the world, celebrated every year since 1918 with a period of silence at 11 o'clock on the 11th day of the 11th month—a day dedicated to peace. But most Germans remembered it bitterly as a day of infamy. Sunday, November 12, 1933, therefore, would be a proud affirmation of the new Germany, the Thousand Year Third Reich and its Führer. Every German was to stand up and pledge his or her support of Hitler's program. Out of the ashes of military defeat and the malaise of the Weimar years would arise the phoenix of a renewed Volk, an awakened and unassailable people.

The brotherhood considered whether they should simply stay away from this plebiscite; but Eberhard had been warned that such abstention would mean concentration camp. They felt they could not evade the direct question.

Do you, as a German man, and do you, as a German woman, approve the policy of your Reich government, and are you ready to affirm and solemnly to pledge yourself to this policy as the expression of your own conviction and your own will?

Instead of answering yes or no, the members of the Bruderhof decided that they would write out a statement that Eberhard had drawn up:

My conviction and my will bid me stand by the gospel and for the discipleship of Jesus Christ, the coming kingdom of God, and the love and unity of his church. That is *the one and only* calling God has given me as *mine*. In this faith I intercede before God and all men for my people and their fatherland and in particular for their Reich government with its different calling, given by God, not to me but to my beloved rulers Hindenburg and Adolf Hitler. [Emphasis in the original statement.]

Each brotherhood member copied the statement onto a piece of paper and signed it. That Sunday afternoon they all walked together down to Veitsteinbach, their designated polling place. Each pasted his slip of paper onto the ballot sheet and—“with a feeling of determination and even a measure of exhilaration,” as one brother recalled—dropped it into the ballot box. Since his broken leg prevented Eberhard’s going to Veitsteinbach, two election officials brought a ballot box to his bedside. No one was to be left out.

Edith described the day of the plebiscite in a letter to Hardy:

In the morning we had a brotherhood meeting in which we considered our stand. After lunch we met for prayer. We closed with the song, “A mighty fortress is our God,” and were all full of joy about our mission. Then we went to Veitsteinbach to vote and give witness that we recognize and esteem the calling of Hindenburg and Hitler as given to them by God. Of course we also testified to our calling.

At about 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. we had another worship meeting with Papa. He was carried into the dining room. For me this was one of the most wonderful meetings. Our beloved Papa was given the word as only the Spirit himself can express it. I can’t really describe it; it was as if the door to that other world that is our true home were being opened a bit wider. One more veil has fallen. That is such an immense joy, and the hope for the true fulfillment of life is growing.¹

Eberhard’s words lifted those gathered anxiously around him out of their worry. They caught a glimpse of the spiritual aspect of the step they had taken and how important it was that someone, there in Germany, was willing to take an unpopular position against the mood of their entire nation:

It is a great thing when individual people are moved to stand firm in unity with Christ. It is greater still when a church is so firm that it can demonstrate to the whole world by its daily life and work the character of the kingdom of God.

It is a great thing when people are found worthy to be thrown into prison or killed for the sake of the gospel. It is greater still when a church is found worthy to be called to abandon the place it has built up so laboriously and to venture into the unknown, when on the threshold between having and not having, it can grasp anew perfect unity, peace, justice, and brotherhood in the unity of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

It is greatest of all if it is given in such an hour to love one's enemies in the spirit of Jesus Christ, to embrace those who intend to drive out the members of the church into misery and oblivion. It is useless to crawl on one's knees, to sing hymns and fold our hands, to babble about the cross, if we are not ready—ready as Jesus was to take the cross upon himself—to tread that way to the very last step, to the last breath. That alone is true discipleship of Jesus Christ; all else is lying and deception.

So we are joyful. Even though we do not yet know if we will be found worthy of experiencing that ultimate reality, this day's act brings that reality before our eyes as a real historical possibility. That makes us indescribably happy, for Jesus said: "Leap for joy when they denounce and curse you and lie about you. That is how their ancestors treated the prophets, and how they are bound to treat all apostles of the embassy, for that is the world's way. As they hated me, they are bound to hate you; as they persecuted me, they are bound to persecute you. But whoever listens to you, listens to me; whoever rejects you, rejects me." In the reality of the cross and of Jesus' utter surrender apostolic mission begins. Only in that way can the world be reached.

It is a great gift when we approach one individual or several people to tell them about the kingdom of God, when at a meal with others we can speak about the great cause, if we can send out our books, or if occasionally we can send out brothers on mission.

But it is a much greater thing if the world is confronted with a historical reality—a happening unforgettably branded into the records of history—as a witness to the truth of the gospel. It means far more to be called to participate in making history by representing the way of love and peace and justice in the midst of a hostile, untruthful, unjust world, a world bristling with weapons. We are called to live out this witness, unperturbed and unswayed, while a tempest of historical events rages fiercely all around us.

That is the church's true calling: to carry out a final, quiet, united action in the face of the horrors of the demon-gripped doomsday events of this time—an action expressing complete unity and faithfulness, complete love and forgiveness, complete goodness and truth, complete surrender and trust, united action that cries out: Repent and believe in the gospel, for the kingdom of God is at hand. It is alive in the church of Jesus Christ. For it does not consist in eating and drinking but in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit!²

All the next day the brothers and sisters trembled as they waited for the votes to be counted. On Tuesday, the Fulda newspaper reported the election results for Veitsteinbach:

Plebiscite: votes cast 272
Yes: 270; No: 1; Not valid: 1

Parliamentary election: votes cast 262
National Socialist Party: 221; Not valid: 41

The Bruderhof's statements had been counted as "yes" for the plebiscite, and "not valid" for the parliamentary election. The *Fuldaer Zeitung* reported:

Election Day, like the campaign preceding it, was fundamentally different from previous elections. Gone were the effects produced by overheated electoral contests. Previously the police were present everywhere, but this time very few policemen were to be seen. In Berlin the array of flags is particularly impressive. From all houses—indeed, from almost every window—the black, white, and red flags of the old, victorious Germany and the symbol of the national revolution, the swastika flag, flutter in the breeze. Innumerable banners, with captions that point to the significance of election day, are strung across the streets or along the fronts of houses. Many cars with election posters cruise through the city, and at every street corner the advertising pillars with their giant placards remind the citizens of their electoral duty. Immediately after the opening of the polling centers the people turned up in crowds such as were never seen before. Before long, the streets were full of people all proudly wearing a voting pin reading "yes." Particularly impressive was the parade of disabled war veterans, who were pushed along the streets in their wheelchairs. They carried posters saying: "German citizen, have you voted yet? If not, our sacrifice is in vain."³

Raid

Tuesday and Wednesday, the days after the plebiscite, passed quietly. Perhaps nothing would happen. Thursday, November 16, dawned dull and gray. Families woke up as usual, ate breakfast together, and sent their children off to school. The adults went to their assigned work places.

But around 8:00 in the morning, the Bruderhof was stormed by 140–160 uniformed men: armed SS, rural policemen, and Gestapo, led

by Inspector Dr. Hütteroth of the Gestapo office in Kassel. Later the members told what had happened to each of them.⁴

Kurt Zimmermann was on his way to the carpentry shop. His wife Marianne had gone to the school where she was teaching. Suddenly he heard voices and saw a whole crowd of uniformed SS men streaming down the hill. He ran back to the school and knocked on the window of the classroom where Marianne was teaching. "I want to say good-bye quickly; it might not be possible later," he said to her, fearing that all was over and they would be scattered or worse.

Heiner was in the barn hitching the horses to the wagon. Suddenly Alfred came running in: "Do you see those two SS men? I am afraid they are going to your father." Heiner looked out the door and saw them marching toward his father's room. He called to Josef and ran out. The whole place was swarming with SS and police. They had surrounded the property and now appeared from all sides, almost as if out of the ground. Some were armed. As he tried to run to his father's room they shouted at him, "Stop! Stop!" An SS man drew his revolver and shouted, "Stand against the wall! All of you!" Two of them took hold of Heiner and lined him and the others against the wall of the print shop. He was afraid they would be shot. There were Josef Stängl, Peter Mathis, Alfred Gneiting, Arno Martin, Kurt Zimmermann, Adolf Braun, Ludwig Kleine, and Friedel Sondheimer.

Friedel was Jewish and mentally handicapped; he simply refused to stand against the wall. Heiner pleaded with him, but he said, "No! I was told to bring firewood to the kitchen." The men were searched for weapons; every pocket had to be turned out. When no weapons were found, the Nazis shouted and herded them into the carpentry shop, guarding the doors. Armed men with revolvers drawn stood at the doors and windows. They kept asking where the weapons had been buried. "We are Christians. We have no weapons," Heiner replied. At this they laughed.

Heiner wondered what they were doing to his father and the women who worked in the school, kitchen, laundry, or nursery, where there were no men. Many hours passed. The sun rose higher.

On the second floor of the children's house Annemarie was tidying the bedrooms of the foster children she was caring for. When she looked out of the window she was shocked to see the SS men coming from all sides. Within minutes they were in the building at every door, and nobody could leave the room in which she happened to be. Annemarie was

trapped. She was not allowed to go to the dining room and had no way of knowing what was happening.

Trudi Hüßy was teaching. Among the police she recognized Police Officer Weigand, who whispered a comforting word to her. The younger children were more curious than frightened; the older ones were aware of the danger. From the classroom they heard the tramping of heavy boots in the private living quarters above.

Emmy was helping Eberhard who was still confined to his bed. Suddenly her sister Moni (who was a nurse) appeared at the bedroom door to tell them that the whole place was crawling with SS and police. Two SS men were standing outside the living room, but Police Officer Weigand would not let them enter the room until “the doctor and his wife” were up. Two SS men were in Eberhard’s study, and in the living room two policemen started to look through everything: writing desk, boxes, chest, cupboard.

Moni had her wits about her. She closed the door to Eberhard’s room and told the intruders she must first treat the sick man. There was a little wood-burning stove in the room, and into it she threw potentially incriminating documents—meeting transcripts, notes, and letters containing Eberhard’s sharpest criticisms of the Nazis.

From where they were held, the community members were called one by one to the dining hall, where the Gestapo from Kassel, a few SS men, and the district administrator were seated. The place no longer looked like their dining room. The Gestapo had taken over. The men and women were questioned individually, and everything they said was typed up.

Susi Gravenhorst was asked whether she had been persuaded by Eberhard Arnold to join the community. “No,” she answered, “I came of my own free decision.” Later she remarked, “In that moment, all my fear left me.”

The chief Gestapo officer went to the carpentry shop where the young men were being held. Heiner asked him if he could go to his father. “Who are you?” the officer asked.

“Heinrich Arnold.”

He was taken under guard to the dining room. As he walked past the room where his father lay, he heard shouting and scolding. “You are a communist, an enemy of the Fatherland, an agitator!” Heiner heard his father answer calmly and clearly, with no anxiety in his voice.

As a school boy Heiner had founded a club, the Sun Troop, with the mission of telling other children about Jesus. He and his friends had made a flag, red with a yellow sun, which still hung in the dining room. Now the soldiers pounced on this—red was a sign of communism. They had heard that Heiner had designed it, and now they questioned him about it.

To their amazement, the police got the same answer from everyone they questioned, and as the day wore on they became quiet. “There is a peculiar unity here,” one of them said. “Nobody is afraid.”

The raiders had probably expected resistance. They looked in, under, and on top of beds and cupboards, and underneath floorboards. Walls were torn open and all chests and boxes emptied. Hans Meier had to unscrew one of his electrical tools to show that it wasn’t a time bomb. Books and letters, including personal letters of engaged and married couples, were scrutinized and sometimes ridiculed. Particular attention was paid to letters from abroad, in search for what was called “horror propaganda” against Germany which was punishable as treason. Artwork that the publishing house had collected was taken as “pornographic.” Anything the raiders found offensive was carried to the dining room where pictures, books, and writings were heaped up.

The men searched longest in Eberhard’s study and in the archives and library, for anything “hostile to the state.” Eberhard lay on a sofa in the Arnold living room with his painful leg raised on a cushion. He asked repeatedly to speak with the men in charge. Finally they came to his bedside. He greeted them and thanked them for coming as he had been waiting for an open, heart-to-heart exchange with them. He told the Gestapo leader that out of love he would have to tell them the truth, and respectfully but very clearly he presented the Bruderhof’s position. They questioned him sharply, however, and called him a dangerous, bloodthirsty agitator. One of the SS asserted he could swear that he had seen Eberhard agitate against Adolf Hitler at a communist mass meeting. Eberhard protested, “That is a lie! I challenge you to tell me that to my face! I never did that!” His accuser was silent.

The house search lasted almost all day. Gradually, though, the tension eased; there were conversations between the brothers in the carpentry shop and their guards. It turned out that the SS had been called together from a wide area; some were from the Kinzig valley ten or fifteen miles away and some from Gelnhausen twenty-five miles distant. When

asked why they had come, some said they had been called out of bed at midnight “to eradicate a communist nest.” Some of the guards said the Bruderhof way of life was actually also *their* ideal; they, too, wanted true community, where the common interest would supersede self-interest, but because people would not do it of their own free will, they had to be compelled to do it.

One of the Gestapo officers said: “If some crackpots want to live together and preach to one another, that is their business. But there is to be no propaganda. And the children are not to be brought up this way.”

While looking about in the Arnolds’ living room, Inspector Hütteroth noticed the von Hollander family’s coat of arms on a piece of furniture. “Is there someone here by the name of von Hollander?” he asked.

Emmy Arnold answered: “Yes, that was my name. My father was Johann Heinrich von Hollander, professor of law in Halle.”

“Then I helped carry your father to his grave,” the Gestapo chief replied. He bowed and clicked his heels. He had been one of Heinrich von Hollander’s students.

At 5:00, when it was already getting dark, the intruders left at last, marching off four abreast. A small crowd of peasants had gathered from the neighborhood to see how many from the Bruderhof would be arrested and were perhaps disappointed that no one was. The top officials drove off in a big car carrying several laundry baskets full of books, writings, and records of meetings. They took away all the books with red covers, assuming them to be communist. They also seized minutes of brotherhood meetings to see whether Eberhard or others had used subversive language against Hitler and his government. They left with the recommendation that the Bruderhof leave Germany.

Hans-Hermann wrote a rather dry account of this day to his brother Hardy:

You asked me for a detailed report of that fateful day, the sixteenth. I must confess that I feel little talent for this. Actually it was pretty uneventful. In the morning one hundred SS men and twenty-two “protective” police came onto our land and confiscated everything. We were all sent into the dining room under guard while they searched the house from top to bottom for weapons and writings. Unfortunately they discovered brotherhood minutes which they confiscated and took to Kassel. They also found

a few suspicious books (Hans Volker). Then they left saying it would probably be good if we emigrated. That was all.⁵

After the Raid

The community breathed a sigh of relief. In the evening the brotherhood gathered at Eberhard's bedside and offered a heartfelt prayer of thanks. Danger had passed them by for the moment. Eberhard was in tremendous pain; he looked pale and worn. He fully expected to be arrested. "If you ever read in the papers that I committed suicide," he said, "do not believe it."

Leave the country, the SS had said. But where could they go? They were over a hundred people, many of them young children. Switzerland? England? The United States or Canada? They had invested so much in their beloved Rhön Bruderhof. But more than that, Eberhard believed the community still had a mission task, of witnessing to a life of brotherhood. They would not leave until they were forced to or God showed them clearly that they should emigrate.

The Bruderhof was now being watched even more closely. It was surrounded by enemies. One of the duties of the night watchman was to walk around the building during meetings to make sure no one was listening at the windows. The previous owners of the farmstead, an old peasant couple by the name of Valentin and Maria Schäfer with their twelve-year-old daughter Josephine, had a legal right to continue living in three rooms on the second floor of the main house. The relationship to the Schäfers was a friendly one, and Valentin was helpful in answering questions about the farm. But they had no wish to be identified politically with the community, on special occasions the Schäfers flew the swastika flag from their window.

Their living room happened to be directly below the Arnolds' living room, a little attic room with sloping ceiling that served often as a meeting room, especially while Eberhard was laid up with his broken leg. One evening the watchman caught sight of someone in the Schäfers' living room standing on a chair. Whoever it was could almost put his ear to the ceiling! The community had always been surprised how much the district administrator knew about details of their life. Now they discovered that Josephine Schäfer was asked every morning by her teacher in Eichenried what she could tell about the Bruderhof. The teacher herself

admitted after the war that she had passed along to the Nazis all that she learned. As soon as Eberhard could bear the strain of going up and down the stairs, the community moved its meetings to the dining room on the first floor and on the other side of the house.

Following the raid and house search, Eberhard asked Fritz Kleiner's help to protect what was already printed of *Innerland* from being seized and destroyed. Fritz made special metal boxes to protect the signatures from moisture, and these were buried on the hill behind the Bruderhof. Only the two men who actually did the digging knew about it. Later, when the Alm Bruderhof was established, the signatures were secretly dug up and taken, over a period of months, to Liechtenstein. They survived remarkably well. In spite of the secrecy, prying eyes must have noticed the faint glow of the kerosene lamps used by the diggers; certainly rumors spread that the Bruderhof had a cache of weapons up on the hill.

Four days after the raid, on November 20, Eberhard wrote to the man who had led it, Inspector Hütteroth in Kassel. In this letter he did his best to defuse the explosive nature of some of the material the Gestapo had confiscated:

The undersigned wishes once more to express to the director of the secret state police in Kassel his sincere thanks for their visit and thoroughgoing investigation of November 16. We are happy that the governments of both the Reich and the State of Prussia are now in a position to ascertain the real facts and true state of affairs with respect to all the complaints made against our brotherhood, which up to now we have had no opportunity to respond to. We had urgently requested and expected that visit. As you could see, we had left everything, important or unimportant, just as it would have been had we not expected such a visit from the government.

We had not even gone through the important and strictly confidential minutes of our brotherhood meetings. They have to be understood as unchecked shorthand notes, which, though surely free of gross errors, give only a very imperfect and incomplete picture of our discussions and decisions. You will know how to safeguard everything of a personal nature as well as various letters—these being confidential family matters within our monastic order—from the irresponsible foolishness of persons with no active part in the management of the state and Reich, for in all that material you will find nothing that would warrant public exposure . . .

I would have liked so much to convey [our beliefs] to your youngest and most tempestuous companion, but it was hard to find a listening ear that would enter a heart-to-heart talk that alone can lead to clarity. After so many of you visited, the one point that grieves me deeply is that in proportion to the rest of your investigation you all took so little time to inquire about my and our inmost thoughts and feelings . . . Perhaps your political duties will require you to engage in a more thorough exchange about these matters at some future time. I and my helpers and all brotherhood members will gladly be at your disposal.

I would especially have welcomed an opportunity to speak in greater detail about your repeated insistence that true Christianity requires nationwide mission. I would have told you how, just as all of us have done in our various ways, my wife and I, though our background was exclusively academic, went right out among the people to whom we belong. For the sake of Christ, and Christ only, we sought close contact with, and a deeper understanding of, all Christian movements, especially also, the German youth movements before and immediately after the war, and the various workers' movements—always with the one goal of helping as many people as possible to turn from their wrong ways and half-truths to the one and only truth of the gospel.

We ask you to understand in this light all the books and writings to which you took exception. In proportion to our total library of nearly eight thousand volumes and many thousand pages of writings they represent but a small fraction of what we need for our research work . . . I inherited for our brotherhood quantities of books from the libraries of my father, my father-in-law, and my mother's last brother—all of them, like my grandfather and great-grandfather and other relatives, professors at German universities. Their libraries contained books and writings of the kind you object to. The owners in no way shared the world views and ideologies in question, but all the more they felt it their duty to be reasonably well informed about such contemporary trends.

True, in comparison with those ideologies, the floodtide of National Socialism has caught us quite unprepared, and even now we know much too little about its philosophy. But as you can gather from the *Confession of Our Religion* of 1540, the very sternness and severity of the National Socialist government could not but prove to us that it has been instituted by God, that is, by God's wrath, whereas we brethren are called to the love of Christ, to love alone. That explains on the one hand our misgivings, and on the other hand our declarations of respect for the present national government; we can therefore perceive no contradiction in

our attitude. We love our German land and people and want to belong to them all our life. As you will gather from my writings, especially from my book *Innerland*, my German background and outlook were formed by the old folk songs, by German mysticism, by Fichte and Schelling, but above all by our Christian brotherhood movement, now 400 years old, which is so characteristically German in all its ways.

For just that reason I had hoped we would be enabled to honor the present government more and more and, vice versa, that we would be granted the privilege of living in the midst of the new Germany unmolested, following our conscience as Germans and Christians, learning ever better to render to the present government with respect and love whatever is due to it, since God has given it authority over us.

With sincere respect and love,
the spokesman of the Bruderhof,
a branch of the communal church known as Hutterian,

[signed] Eberhard Arnold

Two brothers were sent to Kassel to deliver the letter to Inspector Hütteroth personally—Hans Zumpe and Hannes Boller. They also called on the regional governor, Baron von Monbart. In reply to their request for his advice, he told them it was no concern of his; the matter lay in the hands of the Gestapo.⁶

As a safety precaution, a German brother traveled whenever possible with a brother from Switzerland or Sweden when visiting government officials. Eberhard often carried letters from abroad when he traveled, since at this time Germany was still trying to preserve an image of legality abroad.

Hardy asked Professor Karl Heim in Tübingen to write a letter of support for the Bruderhof. Heim consented, a brave step knowing that the Bruderhof was in disfavor with the government. Eberhard enclosed a copy of this letter in several of his petitions:

Tübingen, November 26, 1933

I have been in contact with the leader of the Bruderhof, Dr. Eberhard Arnold, ever since his student years. He is the son of the late church historian in Breslau. I have been in a position to observe the personal sacrifices and the hard work of the growing Bruderhof community in its agricultural development. They have built up this farm in the heart of Germany, and they have

maintained it with tenacity and diligence through extremely hard times.

The early Christian pattern of community of goods practiced on the Bruderhof follows the example of the Hutterian Brethren of the Reformation period. It is much older than any political communism and has nothing whatever to do with it. On the contrary, the brotherly love practiced at the Bruderhof has contributed more—in an spiritual way—toward overcoming political communism than many a present measure designed to overcome Marxism. Year after year the Bruderhof has taken in hundreds of fellow Germans who are in economic and emotional need and given them a chance to share in the communal work for shorter or longer periods of time.

I understand the intention is to dissolve the Bruderhof. The reason given is that its members share everything in accordance with the Franciscan ideal and also because, in line with the Hutterian tradition, they reject any use of violence, including military service. Such dissolution would make a considerable number of farm families homeless and destitute and compel them to emigrate. They have no private property. With a religious vow, they have bound themselves to a lifelong observation of the rules that govern their life; they cannot turn away from those vows. For reasons of foreign policy alone I would consider a forced dissolution unwise. If present-day Germany were to drive these selfless people into exile, her reputation abroad would suffer seriously. Besides, I can see no legal grounds for such a measure. Consider:

1) The early Christian community of goods practiced at the Bruderhof has as little to do with political communism as the cooperative structure of the Moravian church. It is merely the expression of religious togetherness.

2) The refusal of military service, as practiced at the Bruderhof, is a purely individual decision. They clearly recognize the necessity for the state to use force. Thus such an attitude has nothing to do with pacifism. If, for example, members of Catholic monastic orders are allowed to abstain from active military service because they have bound themselves by a religious vow, it is hard to see why a similar exception cannot be made also in this case.

(signed) Karl Heim, Tübingen

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The complete book is available from
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