



The Living Word

Eberhard
ARNOLD



INNER
LAND

The Living Word

Inner Land

A Guide into the Heart of the Gospel

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 - The Heart*
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Volume 5

The Living Word

Eberhard Arnold



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Preface

Born to an academic family in the Prussian city of Königsberg, Eberhard Arnold (1883–1935) received a doctorate in philosophy and became a sought-after writer and speaker in Germany. Yet like thousands of other young Europeans in the turbulent years following World War I, he and his wife, Emmy, were disillusioned by the failure of the establishment – especially the churches – to provide answers to the problems facing society.

In 1920, out of a desire to put into practice the teachings of Jesus, the Arnolds turned their backs on the privileges of middle-class life in Berlin and moved to the village of Sannerz with their five young children. There, with a handful of others, they started an intentional community on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, drawing inspiration from the early Christians and the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. The community, which supported itself by agriculture and publishing, attracted thousands of visitors and eventually grew into the international movement known as the Bruderhof.

Eberhard Arnold's magnum opus, *Inner Land*, absorbed his energies off and on for most of his adult life. Begun in the months before World War I broke out, the first version of the book was published in 1914 as a patriotic pamphlet for German soldiers titled *War: A Call to Inwardness*. The first version to carry the title *Inner Land* appeared after the war in 1918; Arnold had extensively revised the text in light of his embrace of Christian pacifism. In 1932 Arnold began a new edit, reflecting the influence of religious socialism and his immersion in the writings of the sixteenth-century Radical Reformation, as well as his experiences living in the Sannerz community. Arnold continued to rework the book during the following three years, as he and the community became targets of increasing harassment as opponents of Nazism. The final text, on which this translation is based, was published in 1936. Arnold had died one year earlier as the result of a failed surgery, before completing this final chapter. Up to page 56 of this volume he had declared the manuscript ready for print. The text was completed after his death by his son Eberhard C. H. Arnold, following his instructions, using talks he had held in October 1933. The conclusion was taken from the 1923 edition.

This final version of *Inner Land* was not explicitly critical of the Nazi regime. Instead, it attacked the spirits that fed German society's support for Nazism: racism and bigotry, nationalistic fervor, hatred of political enemies, a desire for vengeance, and greed. At the same time, Arnold was not afraid to critique the evils of Bolshevism.

The chapter “Light and Fire,” in particular, was a deliberate public statement at a decisive moment of Germany’s history. Eberhard Arnold sent Hitler a copy on November 9, 1933. A week later the Gestapo raided the community and ransacked the author’s study. After the raid, Eberhard Arnold had two Bruderhof members pack the already printed signatures of *Inner Land* in watertight metal boxes and bury them at night on the hill behind the community for safekeeping. They later dug up *Inner Land* and smuggled it out of the country, publishing it in Liechtenstein after Eberhard Arnold’s death. Emmy Arnold later fulfilled her husband’s wish and added marginal Bible references. (Footnotes are added by the editors.)

At first glance, the focus of *Inner Land* seems to be the cultivation of the spiritual life. This would be misleading. Eberhard Arnold writes:

These are times of distress; they do not allow us to retreat just because we are willfully blind to the overwhelming urgency of the tasks that press upon human society. We cannot look for inner detachment in an inner and outer isolation. . . . The only thing that could justify withdrawing into the inner self to escape today’s confusing, hectic whirl would be that fruitfulness is enriched by it. It is a question of gaining within, through unity with the eternal powers, that strength of character which is ready to be tested in the stream of the world.

Inner Land, then, calls us not to passivity, but to action. It invites us to discover the abundance of a life lived for God. It opens our eyes to the

possibilities of that “inner land of the invisible” where “our spirit can find the roots of its strength.” Only there, says Eberhard Arnold, will we find the clarity of vision we need to win the daily battle that is life, and the inner anchor without which we will lose our moorings amid the mass emotions and follies of the modern age.

The Editors

Introduction to the 1975 Edition

J. Heinrich Arnold

“The Living Word” fights against the dead letter. In this final chapter of *Inner Land*, my father claims that the last persecutions of the Christians will be undertaken with the Bible, that men with the Bible in hand will cause heads to roll, and that the Bible is the greatest weapon of the devil. He says that the devil uses the Bible constantly to kill the souls of people, and even children. He says the Bible is not the word of God; reading aloud from the Bible is not necessarily proclaiming the word of God, which cannot be handled and printed and sold. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, he said to the tempter, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every living word that comes out of the mouth of God.” That living word is the word of God, which God speaks to you now, at this very moment, into your hearts – not what he said to Moses or Elijah or even

Matt. 4:4

J. Heinrich Arnold (1913–1982), a son of Eberhard Arnold, was the elder of the Bruderhof.

to Jesus. And yet the remarkable thing is that if God really speaks to you, he never contradicts Jesus or the prophets of God.

In reading the Bible, it is important to recognize that it is only a witness of the word of God. The word of God can be spoken into your heart only by God himself. No one can speak the word of God to someone else. God does this himself to each one and to a whole circle. That is the wonderful experience of the church, that the whole church hears the holy word, hears the same gospel – not that one hears he should go to war and fight for his country and the other hears he should be a conscientious objector. (Formerly, for example, the Quakers went to prison for their conscientious objection; now they believe that this is left to each person to decide individually, and everyone is still considered a good Christian.)

In the confusion of our time, we have no possibility whatsoever of finding clarity in ourselves. All Christians have to recognize that only God can solve their problems – not that we are actually clear and God will hopefully become clear. “All inner voices that come out of the depths of our emotional hearts are dangerous,” my father writes. That is a remarkable word!

My father tries to explain this mystery of the living word through the writings of a servant of the word (minister) of the early Hutterites, Ulrich Stadler, who worked as a missionary around 1540. Ulrich Stadler said that everything depends on faith in the Holy Spirit and on these three articles of the Christian faith: Firstly, God is recognized in that he is almighty and has power over all creatures. Secondly, God is recognized through the seriousness

and justice of the Son, Jesus Christ. And thirdly, God is recognized through the goodness, mercy, and compassion of the Holy Spirit.

We can understand these words only if God speaks directly into our hearts. For instance, if we take alone Stadler's first fact written about God the Father – that he is almighty – it is true and in keeping with the whole Bible. However, the fact that someone is almighty gives us no love to him. That Hitler with his army ran over Holland did not give Holland more love to Hitler. And yet we feel an enormous joy that God is almighty because we know he is also endlessly good and merciful and compassionate. But that cannot be learned by rote.

My father writes that if we want the word that Jesus spoke to become truth in our hearts, we must first experience pain and inner poverty and suffering. We must first be willing to carry his cross. Jesus said to Nicodemus, a man who came to him at night, that man must be born again. This new birth brings new life. When this living word is born in our hearts, it wants to live in love, and it wants to live in God alone.

John 3:1–8

God is a living God, and a living God wants to be honored by living hearts. That is why I am not for a Sunday school where the children are taught prayers by rote. I am very much for children praying in the evening and in the morning, but if you make a “must” out of it, they hate it; they do not love it. And then you have just the opposite of a prayer from the heart, which God actually wants. I am for the Bible; the Bible is good. But it has to come alive in our hearts – even the Bible itself teaches us this.

There is no higher created thing than the Bible, but it still belongs to creation and is not God himself. One could not put God in bookstores and sell him for twenty dollars apiece. But certainly when God speaks in our hearts, what he says never contradicts the words of Jesus. He will never say anything to us that is against what Jesus said or the opposite of what Jesus said. “The Holy Spirit will remind you of every word that I have said to you.” And that happens: every Christian can experience this, or has experienced this, many times.

John 14:26

So let us honor and praise God and ask him to give us always a living church – never a dead rule, a dead letter, or a dead law, not even in the most wonderful things like community of goods. To gather treasures for oneself on earth is only a burden. Community of goods is such a wonderful solution, but even that, if it becomes a dead law, is deadening. Only God can save us from this. I wish so much for a living, fresh wind to blow so that everything cold and old and “law” is swept away by this living wind of God.

The light of the true Christ shines in all people who are open for the living word. It is not learning the Bible that makes us living. The Spirit of God explains the truth. The word begins in every believer, invisibly, and we don’t need to watch ourselves to find out whether the living word is being born in us. When a baby is born, it does not watch the procedure. A new life is suddenly there.

If we have an inner need, an inner darkness, then we will only find healing by accepting the living word of Jesus. If his word is to bring healing, it must

come from his heart and go into our soul and heart. Then the open book of the Bible suddenly becomes a flaming book. Every letter is like fire. Christ comes into the heart as fire and hot coals – it can be compared to the tasting of salt, it is so very real.

To proclaim the word, it is not enough to go to university and divinity school; that is not even needed. Just be a very lowly person and live from the heart. Then it is no longer a question of our human theories and theology and the world of our own thoughts; rather, Jesus himself comes and gives us his healing medicine, and we receive him in person.

Hans Denck, Sebastian Franck, and Ulrich Stadler, Reformation-era writers who appear in this book, speak of eighty places in the Bible where two passages contradict one another in the sharpest way. “Both passages must be true, for God deceives no one” (Hans Denck). If we listen to the Spirit deep down in our innermost heart, then we will understand the truth. If we listen to the intellect only and let the contradictions stand, then we are still far from the truth of God. “The Bible is completely closed to the scholarly approach. Only the Master has the key to this book” (Eberhard Arnold, page 26). He is the truth, who was with God from the beginning and who became flesh at the appointed time. He is the center of understanding and he is the life. Without Christ himself no one can understand the truth.

Inner Land had a very sad fate. My father died in 1935 before he could finish it. The book was buried in the earth in metal boxes at the Rhön Bruderhof

for a long time so that the Gestapo could not get hold of it. Then it was transported to the Alm Bruderhof in Liechtenstein. Later in England, at the Cotswold Bruderhof and the Wheathill Bruderhof, it was not translated, apart from one chapter, “The Peace of God.” People did not feel the depth of this book speaking to them at that time. Still, almost every sentence could be written out in gold letters and put on the wall.

This entire last chapter of *Inner Land*, “The Living Word,” throws a light on the problems of the twentieth century. Today governments are in a terrible turmoil, also in America. But we do have freedom to live in community and to refuse military service, and for that we can be infinitely thankful – also that until now we have had no Adolf Hitler. But America is in such confusion and moral decadence and there has been so much lying that one might well be afraid that an Adolf Hitler could rise to power. May God protect us from that.

I feel a very strong urge and wish for all true believers that the presence of Jesus and his living word be in their hearts. Without the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, community life will become dead. Actually, the world should come to faith through our unity, and there is hope in that. This means there is a great urgency for us to give a witness. It has to become an attack on war, disunity, and murder. Love and unity have to be stronger than the spirit of this world, if only in a very small circle.

The Living Word

Jesus is the life-creating word

Complete clarity is needed for carrying out the highest vocation. Therefore every appeal for inwardness is a rousing challenge to seek this clarity. But only God can bring about an inner awakening; only his will is clear. Only God gives us the one pure light that can cope with all that may arise in a dark future. Nothing in our own nature can help us to come to real clarity out of our deep confusion. All those “inner voices” that speak from the bottom of our own emotional hearts are dangerous. They are often will-o’-the-wisps. They flicker up out of swampy ground and lead the traveler astray.

As heirs of fallen mankind, we show our old nature again and again. On our own, therefore, we can never achieve anything except unclarity. There is only one hope: the sun must rise and cast its enveloping radiance on the swampy lowlands. Only in the light of day does false light grow dim. Jesus brings in the day and ends night. He is the morning

star of the dawning day and brings the old mankind to an end. Jesus is the founder of a new race – early Christianity called itself the “third race.” He is the last Adam: the new man reveals himself as the new forefather. As the inner light he shines out, and as the creative word he brings into being the new man of creation’s new day. He is the enlightening and life-begetting word.

John 1:1–14

God’s word is revealed in the Trinity

There is only one way to reveal the mystery of the creative word: in the unity of the Creator with Christ and his Spirit. In the early days of the brotherhood movement in Reformation times, Ulrich Stadler wrote his “True Christian Teaching on How to Judge Interpretations of the Holy Scriptures,”¹ in which he points to the power of the Holy Spirit and to the testimony of the three articles of the Christian faith as being vitally important for clarity; God’s word, like God himself, can also be understood only in the unity that is clearly differentiated in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

1 Cor. 2:9–10

First of all, according to Ulrich Stadler, God is recognized as God through his omnipotence – he is the Father of all creation. Next, God is recognized through the earnestness and righteousness of the Son; and thirdly, through the loving-kindness and compassion of the Holy Spirit. Rational people recognize the Creator of heaven and earth through the works of nature. They see in creation unmistakable proofs of God’s omnipotence as the power of

¹ Ulrich Stadler, died 1540, in an old Hutterian “epistle book” given to Arnold by Hutterites in Manitoba, Canada. In the following paragraphs, Arnold quotes this document directly or paraphrases.

the Father. All God's works indicate that there is a God. Yet people still lack something decisive when giving honor and glory to God: the hallowing of God's name, which arises out of the second article of faith, out of the justice and righteousness that the Father fulfills in Jesus Christ and in the corporate body of all his members, the church. Thereby the third and last article is revealed: the infinite loving-kindness and compassion of the Holy Spirit! Nowhere else, and in no other way, can the word of God be recognized and grasped.

Rom. 5:5

If we are to gain knowledge of the living Son, we must expect God to do in us what was done to Christ. We must carry the cross of Christ and follow in his footsteps if his word is to become alive in us. The word must become true in deed and in reality. The works of Jesus Christ, the truth and righteousness of the crucified Son of God, are the means by which the word is revealed. In our own persons, we must submit to all three articles of faith if we are to recognize the highest good. The word as a whole must be received, living, into our hearts – it does not bestow itself in part. It must become flesh and live in pure and open hearts through the Holy Spirit. But this does not happen without great fear and trembling, as with Mary when the angel told her of God's will. The word must be born in us, too, and it can come about in no other way than through pain, poverty, and misery, within and without.

1 Pet. 2:21
Matt. 16:24

New birth brings new life. When the word is born, when it has become flesh in us, we live for love itself and for the fruits of love: we live for God alone. So our hearts are at peace. So, as the church of Jesus

Matt. 12:48–50 Christ, we become mother, brothers, and sisters of God. Then the third article of faith will be revealed: the loving-kindness and compassion of the Holy Spirit. No one can come to him save through the deep waters of need and distress. Through the bath of rebirth, we are born anew. We become children of God, a brother or sister of Jesus Christ. We are awakened from the dead, led out of hell, and made alive in Christ. Through the cross we receive Christ; now we can confess that Christ has come into the flesh, for Christ lives in us. All who have experienced this are ruled by the Holy Spirit. Through the word of God, the third article of faith appears in them. The Holy Spirit rejects in them everything of the world. He lives in them as the living word of eternal truth.

Titus 3:5–6

Gal. 5:16–22

1 John 16:13–14

The true light – Christ – shines in all people who are given an understanding of the living word through suffering and the cross. Then they all see the loving-kindness and compassion of God. No one can really see or recognize God's love as long as the heart is wrapped up in worldly pleasures. But through the Holy Spirit, the living word can in truth be seen, for he brings the crucified Christ into our life; in his light the whole of scripture, with all the words and sayings of God and Christ, is encompassed in the unity of the Trinity. In this unity the scripture speaks of the true, godly life; and in the Spirit we shall see how to achieve it. The living word will place it before our eyes even though it may not be written on the pages of the Bible in front of us. All those who have the Spirit of God are able to discern all things through this one Spirit.

1 John 16:13–14

The Holy Spirit plants the living word – Christ – into the heart of the believing church. Christ, as the inner word in all believers, is in perfect accord with every line written by his apostles and prophets, who were filled with the same inner word. For it is they who in truth give witness to him as the giver of life. The word comes to life in the heart of every believer. It is essential to grasp in our innermost being the eternal, the living Christ as the life-giving word. Christ himself, as the word coming to life, is the morning star and sun of the believing heart.

John 5:39

John 6:63

2 Pet. 1:19

Only through the light of Christ, who is the word, can our inner lives in their darkness be freed from all their inborn unclarity. The word of God falls into the hearts of erring mortals to flood them through and through with the divine Spirit and with Christian life. From within, the living word shall transform everything. People who are becoming dead and insensitive shall themselves experience a living increase from the word as soon as their inmost hearts follow the radical call from God that has roused his people throughout all ages: “Turn your hearts to all the words I testify to you this day.”

Deut. 32:46

The only way to help our failing life regain health is to prepare our hearts for the living word. A doctor’s visit can help only when the patient takes the doctor’s words to heart and disregards none of the instructions or medicines. Above all, the foolish patient must stop trying to cure himself with his own ideas or with neighborly advice. Our hearts can be healed only if we accept all the words of him who said: “I am the Lord, your Physician.” “The medicine must be taken internally. Outside us it does no

Exod. 15:26

good.” The inner word brings the helpful Physician, who is himself the healing medicine. The best physician is the One who brings healing by the mere fact of his living presence. When, in an inner way, we eat and drink the life-giving word, it means that the Healer and his healing have been accepted.

1 John 4:14

This is the context in which we must see the mystery that drove so many of Jesus’ friends away from him: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, unless you drink his blood, you have no life in you!” This stark way of expressing inner union with Jesus himself was bound to turn away from him all those who were not resolved to win through to final unity with him, cost what it may. Only one who, like Peter, had experienced the power of Jesus’ living word could once and for all reject the idea of leaving him: “Lord, where shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life.”

John 6:53

John 6:68–69

The Savior enters into us; we must take his words to heart, take in the Savior himself, if we are not to give ourselves up for lost. If his word is to heal, we must have it close to our heart and let it burn in our soul. The word lies before us like an open book of glowing truth on a table at which we read and work with heart and soul. Every letter shall become living fire in our hearts. Only through the heart do we receive the word like the tasting of the tongue and the searing heat of flame.

And yet ultimately, it is not through any activity of the human heart that the inner content and value of the word become alive. True, when the word penetrates our heart it awakens our innermost being, which is the first stage of inner growth. For

how could we believe in the Living One if we had not heard of him? We do hear him with the awakening ear of the heart, and slowly faith arises! But the decisive hour is when we come to that faith which only God can give. Faith in God means awakening from the dead. Like Mary, faith holds on to the living seed of the Holy Spirit, the word of God at work within us. In every living word, God and God alone is at work.

The word must be born in our hearts

Through the virgin mother of Jesus, Peter Riedemann shows how the word becomes alive in the heart of a believer:

As soon as she believed, she was sealed with the Holy Spirit. . . . The Holy Spirit worked together with her faith so that the word she believed took human nature from her. . . . Through the union of the Holy Spirit with Mary's faith, the word was conceived and became human.

Eph. 1:13

Luke 1:30–38

The birth of Christ took place through the proclamation of the word. Mary believed the angel and received the Holy Spirit through faith. The Spirit worked together with her faith so that she conceived Christ, and he was born of her. Whoever wishes to be born in the Christian way must first, like Mary, hear the word and believe it.²

Whoever wants to be born of God must keep in mind how Christ's birth took place: it was brought about by the working of the Holy Spirit in faith.

² *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith* (1542) translated and edited by John J. Friesen (Plough, 2019), 68, 102.

Every birth from God happens in the same way. When the word is heard and then believed, faith is sealed with the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit renews us and makes us new creatures in the life of God's justice. We are formed in God's image. Where his word is believed, God makes it alive through the gift of the childlike Spirit. All who believe God's word will have their faith affirmed in such a living way by the imparting of the Holy Spirit that they will be renewed by it, virtually born anew. Through the living word, they will live from now on in the holy, divine life of the kingdom of God.

2 Cor. 5:17

Faith arises from proclamation, but proclamation comes from the word of God. The life-creating word is there first. Faith comes second, decisive for each one personally. It is an awakening from the dead when we receive the word of God into our hearts. Then the word must come to life. Faith holds firmly to the word, as Mary did. Like a seed that is germinating, it must remain in the heart and yet blossom forth in life. From its roots in the depths of the soul, the word must spread far and wide. From deep within, the word stimulates all faith's influences and furthers all the deeds of faith. The life-giving word is plainly to be seen in the growth it produces.

Rom. 10:17

Without the Spirit, the law is dead

The Holy Spirit gives life to the word; through it, he produces the works of his love. He is not forced by the dead law – an alien power. He is the living finger of God himself, writing his loving word on living flesh, on the pages of the heart. The word of the Spirit is the living and working word, for

2 Cor. 3:3

it pierces soul and spirit. It destroys the works of the devil and consummates the work of God. All who want to inherit the promised kingdom must be born through the living word. Through the Spirit, the word is planted in the innermost core of living people. All those in whom the word is active through the Holy Spirit, from the smallest to the greatest, know the living God and the kingdom where he is at work.

Heb. 4:12

John 3:5

What the dead law demanded in vain is spiritually alive and given its highest meaning through the word of the Spirit. In the Spirit's divine order of life, everything is accomplished in the living power of God. The written law, insofar as it is bound to the letter, is annulled through Christ, for he has given his Spirit, who has nothing dead about him. The living word leads to repentance from all dead works. The letter is dead and spreads death. If the Spirit does not accompany it, the scripture can never achieve the righteousness that counts before God. Through the Spirit of freely given and newly created life, we become free forever from the law and from all dead works belonging to the law. Once we live in the Spirit, we are no longer under the law.

Rom. 8:3

Rom. 7:6

2 Cor. 3:6

We cannot have the freedom given by community in God without the word alive within us. The power of the word and the obedience born of faith free us from slavery to the letter of the law. They lead to a life where only love is at work, and love is freedom. The righteousness born of faith knows the source of its life. "The word is near you, very near; it is on your lips and in your heart." When the word becomes very dear to our heart, there is freedom

Rom. 10:8

and life. It has decisive significance whether we only look up the “word of God” and consider it, only hear it and read it, only understand it and think about it, only approve of it and acknowledge it, or whether we receive it and cherish it in the innermost depths of our hearts as a living seed of God. What use is it to contemplate the source, if we do not drink from it? What use is the word if we know it only by rote and the all-too-familiar letter stays outside us? The roots of a living flower absorb the water and keep it. Out of the depths, the water must bring life to every fiber. The living word has the same effect as living water: its life wells up and flows into every branch.

Therefore Jesus said, “I give living water.

John 4:14

Whoever drinks of the water I give him, he will never thirst in all eternity: the water I give him will become in him a spring pouring out into life, into eternal life.” The living word of the Spirit is the source of life in the heart of each believer. Christ is at work in each heart as the living word that conceives, gives birth, and bears within it the powers of divine life. In the rebirth that takes place through the word of the Spirit, the life of eternity begins, never to be repressed again.

1 Pet. 1:23

The seed of the word, hidden within, is stronger than anything else. It asserts its life against any shape or form of death. It overcomes any poisoning at the root. It cuts until it separates soul and spirit. The living word divides life from death. It warns against all destruction and awakens all that the divine life demands. It judges all our thoughts and feelings, shedding light on our true selves. It is radiant with the light of him who is himself life.

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