



Homage to a Broken Man

*The Life of
J. Heinrich
Arnold*

Peter Mommsen

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P E T E R M O M M S E N

To Christoph and Verena

Without your wounds where would you be? The very angels themselves cannot persuade the wretched and blundering children of earth as can one human being broken in the wheels of living. In love's service, only the wounded soldiers can serve.

Thornton Wilder

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1. Opa

The morning my grandfather died, I told everyone in my kindergarten class, “Today Opa went to heaven!” My teacher, a longtime friend of our family, started to cry, but her tears made no sense to me. Who wouldn’t be proud to have a grandfather in heaven?

Of course, I would miss him. Opa and Oma lived in an apartment in our house, and ever since Oma (my grandmother) had died two years before, he had been sick and rarely left it. My mother, the seventh of their nine children, is a doctor, and Opa had a buzzer by his bed for calling her at night. She spent at least an hour or two in his room every day, sitting at his bedside while I played on the floor. I loved bouncing on his bed and—when he let me—on him. There was a sort of trapeze suspended above his pillow that he used for pulling himself up. It was perfect for swinging on, and then letting go of, to land on his stomach.

On some afternoons my mother wouldn’t let me use the trapeze. “Let Opa rest,” she’d say, and then I’d have to content myself with just sitting next to him. It was probably on one of those days that I noticed the little black cross that hung on his wall. It fascinated me, though I didn’t know what I know now: that he had made it as a boy for Tata, an aunt who had been like a second mother to him.

Opa listened to Bach by the hour. Whenever I hear *St. Matthew Passion* I’m transported back to the times I helped bring him his lunch. He is sprinkling so much salt on the sliced tomatoes that they look frosted, despite my

2. Revolution

Berlin, January 1919

After breakfast, when there was a break in the shooting, the boy in the sailor suit went down the *Landauerstrasse* toward school. On the way he had to cross a trench the soldiers had dug across the street. They had piled up the dirt and pavement to make a barricade and thrown some planks across it as a bridge. The six-year-old walked out to the middle of the plank and looked down at the helmeted men below him. As usual, they were smoking cigarettes and waiting. This was the daily truce that the government and the revolutionaries had scheduled in order to keep the school system running. “Be careful and hurry,” his mother had told Heiner. “Soon the guns will start up again.”

Every day the soldiers shouted up “Good morning” to the boy. Heiner liked them because they were cheerful and friendly, unlike the neighborhood children, who were mean. It was all because of his father, people said. The other men on the block wore the black, white, and red ribbon of the Conservative Party on their suits. But Dr. Eberhard Arnold wore the red ribbon of the Workers’ Party. No wonder the children yelled at Heiner and called him a name neither he nor they understood: “Communist! Communist!”

“I am not a Communist,” Heiner’s father told him. “But I do believe in justice for the working class. They have suffered the most during this terrible war.”

There were other words Heiner had learned that winter. *Abdicate* meant that the Kaiser had abandoned his country and fled to Holland. *Armistice*

3. Sannerz

Tata herded the children out of the train and into the June evening. There on the platform, waving, stood their father and mother, who had traveled ahead a few days before. Eberhard had hired a horse-drawn farm wagon to take the luggage to their new home. As the children climbed onto their seats, Emmy placed a cornflower garland on each of their heads. She had also tied bunches of flowers to the wagon frame.

It was a perfect night for a city boy's first drive through the country. Fireflies glimmered in the hedgerows, and a bird called from the black woods. Heiner stared in awe. The sight was supernatural, magical.

An earthier reality hit him as the wagon passed through the first village, where a steaming dung heap (prime fertilizer) marked the entry to each homestead. So this was the country—a fairy tale that smelled bad.

The wagon entered another cluster of houses, and it was time to get off. But where were their living quarters? "Follow me," Emmy called to the children, and led them to the back of the inn, and up a rickety flight of stairs. Here, in three rooms previously used for apple storage and saddle-making, was their new home. Hardy and Emi-Margret stared, dumbstruck, at the exposed rafters and the rough-hewn floor boards. It was so different from Berlin. And that smell: over-ripe apples and a faint stench of hogs from the stall downstairs.

The last luggage unloaded, Eberhard tipped the wagon-driver, and it was time for supper. Herr Lotzenius, the innkeeper, brought fresh bread, butter,

4. A Blow

It was the summer of 1922, and Eberhard's settlement was entering its third year. Casual visitors still came and went by the dozen, but the core household had multiplied and grown. Apart from the children and long-term guests, there were twenty-three full members. *Neuwerk*, the publishing house, was putting out a popular journal on religion, social issues, and current events; and in the line of books, Eberhard was developing an impressive list of titles, among them a collection of fairy tales, a Jewish scholar's history of anti-Semitism, and a volume on medieval women mystics. Speaking engagements at universities were making Eberhard's name known up and down Germany.

But despite the vitality of the Sannerz settlement, its members were living hand to mouth. Post-war inflation rose, then soared, and by the time *Neuwerk* subscribers paid their invoices, the payment had often lost much of its value. Eberhard took Jesus' words literally: "Do not worry. Look at the birds. They do not sow or harvest, and yet their heavenly Father feeds them. How much more will he feed you, his children?" Not that he wasn't a stickler for good business practice—he had a committee of auditors certify the community's books, and in members' meetings he reviewed reports on profits and expenses item by item. All the same, he insisted that faith, not money, was what mattered.

Eberhard disliked fretters and long-term planners. "Worry is just another form of materialism," he would say. Sannerz was for people of the spirit, not managers and accountants. When finances were especially tight, Heiner heard him say, "The money is there; we just haven't got it yet."

5. Conversion

After Heiner turned eleven, something began to take hold of him. An Indian sadhu (holy man) was on a speaking tour of Germany, and he was making headlines everywhere he went. In the evening, as the family gathered around the kitchen table, Eberhard took out newspaper clippings and read them aloud.

The sadhu's name was Sundar Singh. As a fifteen-year-old Sikh growing up in the Punjab, he had desperately wanted to find out who God was. He read everything he could, starting with his own religion's scriptures, and then devouring the sacred books of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. But he would have nothing to do with that hated imperialist religion, Christianity. At the Presbyterian missionary school where his parents sent him in order to prepare for the university, he shredded and burned a Bible in front of his horrified classmates.

Sundar Singh's self-satisfaction with this deed was short-lived. One night not long afterward, he threw God a challenge: "Reveal yourself now, or I will kill myself to see what lies beyond." He refused to lie down, but stayed up praying.

According to his own account of what happened next, a glow filled the room at about 4:30. At first he thought there was a fire in the house. Then a figure emerged from the brightness and said to him in Urdu, "Sundar, how long will you mock me? I have come to save you because you have prayed to find the way of truth. Why, then, don't you accept it?" Seeing wounds on the figure's hands and feet, Sundar recognized him as Jesus.

When Sundar Singh told his parents next day, they dismissed it as a dream. As time went on, however, there was no denying it: the young man was

6. The Sun Troop

During the seven years that the Arnolds lived in Sannerz, the family never had a living room of their own. By 1925—just three years after the split when Christel and the others had left—every corner held a bed, and the villa hummed with some fifty inhabitants, among them two young families and ten foster children.

The five Arnold children daydreamed about having their mother to themselves, but because Emmy had so many demands on her time, Tata and Moni mothered them just as often. If they were sick in bed, Tata sat with them for hours entertaining them with jokes and songs; if they came home starved, Moni would try to find something to hold them over until dinner. Sometimes guests would ask the von Hollander sisters how they could stand having the children's affection split three ways. Weren't they jealous of each other? "No," they said, "we are only richer this way, and the children are richer too."

Emmy did not neglect her children, though. Before bedtime she gathered them around her to tell them stories or sing with her lute. She let nothing keep her from these times. If community meetings went on too long, she would slip out through the kitchen to find them. It wasn't just a matter of having a cozy time: Emmy knew her children missed nothing of the goings on in the bustling house, and she made sure they had a place to air their observations and anxieties. Heiner's sensitivity was a special concern to her. As she wrote to a relative, "He is a child who flourishes only in the atmosphere of God."

Heiner and his brothers and sisters ate breakfast in their parents' bedroom each morning. During this quarter hour, Eberhard insisted that they should

7. Lotte

Lotte met Eberhard in 1923, at a public speaking engagement in her hometown, Nordhausen. An orphan who had grown up in a home where she was never truly welcomed, she was a deeply troubled young woman. In a letter to the Arnolds, she asked to join their community, and wrote, “I lack what you have, which is the core: Jesus. The waves are drowning me, and I could curse those who brought me into this world. They have poured their devilish intentions into my heart...and now no one can rescue me.”

To the children at Sannerz, Lotte at first seemed like any other sixteen-year-old. She liked to dance with Emi-Margret on the meadow outside the house. Then she began to behave strangely, affecting a peculiar, dark mood, and jeering maliciously. “You and your silly Sun Troop,” she scoffed at Heiner one day after hearing him in a childish argument. “Always bickering, aren’t you!” Lotte seemed to enjoy the look of pain that spread over a person’s face when she attacked him, and the way her onlookers tittered nervously.

Then the convulsions began. Her body quivered and twisted as if exterior forces were shaking her. She shrieked grotesque blasphemies in a voice that was not her own. The fits could go on for hours. Lotte had to be watched constantly, since whenever they left her alone she would try to kill herself. Only Eberhard and Emmy and a handful of other adults seemed able to handle the responsibility of watching her, and they soon grew exhausted from lack of sleep.

Eberhard was determined to help Lotte to a complete recovery. But he believed her attacks were not only a sign of emotional imbalance. A deadly battle between good and evil was tearing her apart.

8. Father and Son

No one who aims to spend his life as a tramp should risk becoming over-educated—Heiner was sure of that. Hadn't Christel warned him that an intellectual "can never become one of the working class, not even a well-meaning one like your Papa"?

When Heiner turned fourteen, the minimum legal age for leaving school, he begged his parents for permission to quit. He'd waited three years since Jesus had called him. But his father refused. Still, he never pushed Heiner to apply himself or pushed him to improve his abysmal grades. Hermann and Hardy were different—he never spared them. Hermann was to be prepared for the university by intensive study at home, while Hardy was dispatched to a boarding school at fifteen. But Heiner knew that his father's lenience was not a matter of permissiveness. It stemmed from a sensitivity to his son's deeply-felt calling.

When guests came to the villa, Hardy and Emi-Margret would cluster around them. How they loved the bold new ideas of visiting authors, reformers, and free-thinkers! Heiner tended to ignore such people, not because he disliked them but simply because he preferred the homeless men who came with ragged clothes, broken shoes, and dirty hair. They seemed so much more real than other visitors. When he met these "brothers of the road," as his father called them, he would put his arm around their shoulders and ask "Do you know about Jesus?" Many would weep and tell him about their past lives.

Heiner often took walks with Fräulein Rotkohl, a plain young woman who was a long-term houseguest. Fräulein Rotkohl had few social graces and, as if

9. Adolescence

Eberhard and Emmy had never wanted to found a community of their own, much less a new sect. Even before moving to Sannerz, they had sought out like-minded seekers. For years they had felt a kinship with the Quaker and Anabaptist traditions, and around 1920, they discovered the existence of modern-day Hutterites. The adherents of this radical communal offshoot of the Reformation had been practicing community of goods since the early sixteenth century. Their model, like that of Eberhard's own community, was the first Christian church in Jerusalem.

Originating in the Tyrol, and fleeing one wave of persecution and warfare after another, the Hutterites had settled in Canada in the late 1800s. Eberhard studied their history, then corresponded with them, and finally decided to visit them in the hopes of forging concrete ties. Fundraising was also an important incentive. Surely these people who had suffered so much for their faith would sympathize with the Sparhof and give what they could. In May 1930, he left on a ship from Bremerhaven to visit them. He didn't plan on it, but he would stay in North America for a whole year.

Before Eberhard left, he looked around for someone who, in conjunction with Emmy and Tata, could take responsibility for the well-being of the Sparhof while he was gone. He chose Hans Zumpe, Emi-Margret's fiancé for the past one-and-a-half years.

Hans was a young accountant who had first arrived around the time of Georg and Moni's wedding; the following year he had decided to stay. When

10. Tata

In July 1931, just in time for Hans and Emi-Margret's wedding, Tata returned home from Switzerland. The cure had failed.

Tata lived in quarantine in a one-room hut set apart from the main buildings of the Sparhof. Her arms were implausibly thin, and at times it seemed her neck would no longer support the weight of her head. By December, she was so emaciated that she could no longer walk, and in order to bring her to the Christmas Day festivities, the men had to carry her into the dining room on a beach chair. There, despite her weakness, Tata radiated energy and cheer. She greeted every child that passed her, and smiled at the fuss being made over her. But afterward, on the way back to the hut, she grew sober. "I won't leave this room again with a living body," she remarked as she passed over the threshold of the hut. Heiner was devastated. It was impossible to imagine losing her.

When he visited her hut, her mood was usually merry. She laughed often, although she sometimes stopped suddenly, catching her breath with a twinge of pain. She told stories, too, including her old favorites: "Once I went to a revival weekend. In the middle of the night I awoke to see a strange man standing at the foot of my bed. Of course I was surprised and asked him what he was doing. In a peculiar slow voice he answered, 'I have come to bring you Jesus.' When I heard that, I shouted as loud as I could, 'Help! Help!' The rooms next to mine were full of Christian revivalists. But none of them moved an inch. They stayed in their rooms shouting 'Help! Help!' too."

11. An Arrival

The runners rasped as the sleigh left the snowy road, then slid to a halt. The froth-flecked horses whinnied and steamed in the cold. Annemarie looked around. They had stopped in a courtyard surrounded by two big farmhouses, a dilapidated barn, and a Hansel-and-Gretel-like cottage with a steep roof and a huge chimney. That was the bakery, she remembered. Beyond the enclosure nothing was visible; fog lapped against the buildings like a milky sea.

“Where did they lay out Tata’s body?” Annemarie wondered with a pang. “Coming here was all a mistake.” She shuddered to think of the way the religious people she knew dealt with death. The way they tried to cover their grief with little platitudes; the way they simpered and affected hushed tones.

Though she had been here before, the Sparhof looked foreign, not at all like the place she had visited last summer. In her memory, those few June days still shone impossibly bright. How deeply she had been stirred then! She especially remembered one afternoon when she had gone on a long hike with Emi-Margret’s brother Heiner. He had been assigned to entertain her for the day, and although the situation might have felt strange, somehow it hadn’t. He was lanky and very tall, not yet twenty, with arms freckled and muscular from days of plowing and haying.

The two of them had set out along the *Weinstrasse*, an old Roman road that ran through the Fulda Forest. As they walked, Annemarie realized that she was enjoying herself, partly because Heiner was so full of humor. Earlier she had

Epilogue

Woodcrest, July 24, 1982

Anne Schwerner didn't want to stare at the body. It rested on the bed where he had died yesterday, looking natural; and yet no sleeping man's head ever lay so neatly at the very center of the pillow. He held nine roses, one for each of his children, including Emmy Maria and Marianne. Christoph had closed his eyes for the last time and, with Milton's help, washed and dressed him. Anne could see that the mortician had not been allowed to interfere. The twenty-four hours since his death had gently relaxed his face. He looked confident, like a child.

Rather than stare, Anne let her eyes travel around the room. Her husband Nat sat solemn and silent, as did ten or twelve other people—faces she didn't know. The yellow walls of the bedroom displayed dozens of photographs. She recognized Annemarie in many of them, looking into the camera with the happy impatience of someone made to stop and pose in the middle of an urgent errand. All those snapshots of beaming children arrayed in circular brass frames must be his grandchildren. Mounted on the wall near his head hung a small homemade cross, just two strips of wood glued together and painted black.

The two air conditioners were set on high, and running noisily. She signaled to Nat that she needed to go outside. Chairs squeaked as the other mourners shifted to let them past. They stood in the bright heat again, by a bed of roses and geraniums—one of Annemarie's gardens, Anne supposed.

Sources

Information in this book comes from interviews with more than sixty people involved in my grandfather's life in various roles, as siblings, long-time friends, fellow community members, pupils, or co-workers. (Many of their names appear in the Acknowledgments.)

Of course, stories from family members were my starting point. I kept coming back to my uncle, aunts, and parents for more about my grandfather—especially to Christoph, his son and closest confidant; Roswith, his eldest child; Maria, his frequent nurse; and my mother, his doctor.

In addition, I was fortunate in having a wealth of primary documents. For starters, there were my grandparents' papers: certificates and medical records, photographs, speaking notes, autobiographical writings, poems, journals, and—last but not least—letters. Thousands of letters from and to them survive. Their correspondence from 1951 alone fills a 200-page binder—and their correspondence from other years is even more extensive. The rest of my grandfather's family—his parents, Eberhard and Emmy; his brothers, Hardy and Hans-Hermann ("Hermann" in this book); and his sister Emi-Margret—were all prolific letter-writers on a similar scale. Emi-Margret Zumpe's unpublished memoirs were invaluable for my chapters on Berlin and Sannerz.

Bruderhof members who are not family members made their diaries and letters available too, so that for each year of my grandfather's adult life I could turn to multiple sources, often with differing points of view, to corroborate important events and dates.

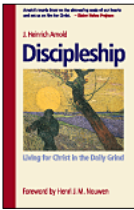
Acknowledgments

This book is not an exhaustive biography of J. Heinrich Arnold, nor even a thorough one. No thorough biography could omit mentioning names like Merrill and Kathy Mow, Glenn and Marlys Swinger, Rudi and Winifred Hidel, Mark and Peggy Kurtz, Hannes and Else Boller, Arnold and Gladys Mason, Bob and Jane Clement, Paul and Mary Pappas, or Hans and Margrit Meier. Yet this book says nothing about any of them, or about several other of my grandfather's close friends and co-workers. It's also silent about several important episodes in his life—for instance, his decades-long relationship with the Hutterites of the Dakotas and Canada.

But I did not aim at completeness. Instead, I wanted to present a living portrait of a man. With this in mind, I strictly limited the cast of people who appear and was selective in choosing episodes to highlight.

In the stories that *are* included, however, I aimed at accuracy and balance. In a handful of cases, real people who are minor characters in the book appear only in a negative light; to protect their privacy, I gave them pseudonyms.

I would never have even started on this book without the care and guidance of my uncle Christoph Arnold, from long before I ever began writing. My aunt Verena read over the manuscript numerous times, making countless invaluable corrections and suggestions. To my father and mother—for their love through all the ups and downs, and for making Opa and Oma a living part of my life from childhood on—I owe a huge debt of thanks.



Discipleship

Living for Christ in the Daily Grind

by J. Heinrich Arnold

Foreword by Henri J.M. Nouwen

Organized by topic, these short selections from writings, talks, and personal letters address a wide variety of concerns, including Illness and Death, Forgiveness, Humility, Unity, Spiritual Pride, World Suffering, Dogmatism, Gifts, Marriage, Commitment, Salvation, Community, Leadership, Doubt, Evil and Darkness, Church Discipline, Repentance, Purity of Heart, The Mystery of the Cross.

Jimmy Carter, Former President, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
I have found *Discipleship* to be an incisive and inspirational Christian guidebook.
It is a clear call to higher religious ideals.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

I pray for all who read this book that they may come to follow Jesus more closely in their whole lives. He has not called us to be successful, but to be faithful.

Dale Aukerman, author, *Reckoning with Apocalypse*

In a masterful way, J. Heinrich Arnold brings together the evangelical offer of God's forgiving mercy and the radical claims of Jesus for total self-giving in discipleship. Arnold writes that "the greatest gift is a burning love to Christ." That love pervades this book.

Cardinal Joseph O'Connor, Archdiocese of New York

Discipleship is a clear call to greater conviction and faith. Readers who open their hearts to the witness of this book will be challenged and inspired.

David Bercot, author, *The Pilgrim Road*

One of the best books on discipleship that has come out in years.. It is filled with keen insights on what it really means to love God with your whole soul and to love your neighbor as yourself. Reads like a twentieth-century version of *The Imitation of Christ*.

Helen Prejean. C.S.J., author, *Dead Man Walking*

Discipleship is not simply a book. It is a cry from the heart of a man passionately alive for God and the work of God. Arnold's words blow on the simmering coals of our hearts and set us on fire for Christ.

Trevor Saxby, author, *Pilgrims of the Common Life*

This is theology with a beating heart, a spirituality that is marked with the flowing humanity of Jesus. Arnold writes as one who has prayed, wept, and struggled through the issues of being a radical Christian today.. He meets people where they are. I commend his book wholeheartedly.

