

Hans Boller to Hardi Arnold (in England)

Bruderhof, den 6. März 1934.

Hans gives him some addresses and says: "Then I told a Pastor Bonhoeffer (London SE 23 Manor Mount Forest Hill) about you. One of his colleagues in Berlin told me last week that he would probably be very much interested in a life based on the Sermon on the Mount."

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[Translation]

#18A

Birmingham, England

June 14, 1934

Dear Father,

Today I will write only briefly about two important points, as I have been rather pressed for time in the last weeks that I have been here and I must save time.

1. In London I met Pastor Lic. Bonhoeffer, who has two German churches there. He has been here just since October, and before that was a private lecturer in systematic theology in Berlin. When he had the opportunity, for obvious reasons he came over to London.

A short time ago he wrote to me asking that I arrange a meeting with him either here [in Birmingham] or there [in London]. He intends to found a brotherhood with some of his students, solely on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount. He heard about us from Niemöller and wanted to hear about our experiences. So I met with him and two of his friends and heard more about their plans.

The idea is to have an evangelical cloister with religious exercises, confessions, etc. It is assumed that we do not know God's will for our time, but nevertheless they will try to live according to the words of Jesus and to learn the will of God by means of thorough Bible study and religious practices. Unfortunately Bonhoeffer draws a distinction between theologians and laymen, who would also be accepted. Although not absolutely rejecting marriage, he is critical enough to fear that the love between two and the care of the family would cause married people to digress from what is essential.

These are all points which must be discussed in the deepest way. Unfortunately the time was so short that he and I had to limit ourselves to listening to each other. It seems important to me that there is a group of sixty to seventy people following Bonhoeffer's ideas, who earnestly seek to know and do the will of God in this time. For this they are ready to take anything upon themselves. There are such groups in Berlin, Bonn, and Tübingen.

In the middle of next week Dietrich Bonhoeffer wants to visit the Bruderhof. For this reason he is traveling to Germany, and on the same trip will confer with the pastors'

association which shows a deep-going interest in his plans.

He will phone you from Berlin, probably on Wednesday, to speak shortly with you about when and how he can best come to you. I think the whole matter is very important. It would be wonderful if we could become united with this group. At any rate we must be ready. They look up to the Bruderhof very much. His other two friends, who return to Germany some time next month, have also agreed to visit.

In the autumn Bonhoeffer plans to go to India for half a year with one of the two, Dr. Yehle, to live in Gandhi's community, which, as you surely know, has complete community of goods but is strongly monastic and ascetic. It seems to me that Bonhoeffer hopes for much from this contact. In the essential points we agree with B.: 1. no private property but the communal management of property, and 2. non-violence. But it appears that he has not yet grasped the church as the circle led by the Spirit of God. Perhaps you can help him. I gave him the chapter about the Holy Spirit from Innenland.

[Second point of the letter not included here.]

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Emmy Arnold

Rhönbruderhof, 20. Juni 1934

She tells him how much Eberhard and all of them appreciate his letters. "Also the new group that you found through Professor Bonhoeffer interests us very much. Today is Wednesday, and we hope he calls. This visit will be very interesting for us. God grant that we come to an understanding...."

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Excerpt only

Eberhard Arnold  
Rhönbruderhof, 26 Juni 1934

My dearly beloved Eberhard Heinrich!

... I rang up Dietrich Bonhoeffer, but he has not yet arrived here. It appears to me that with him, as with others, the attitude to poverty, the communal management of property, and non-violence is far removed from the commission given to the "Gemeinde" through the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Although following the Sermon on the Mount and living according to the words of Jesus is significant for them too, everything is put into question by their thoughts on the cloistered life of monks and their tendency to Eastern Indian religion. This was true also with Leo Tolstoy and the Doukhobors. Also Werner Zimmerman will found a more or less communistic life in South America with almost the same words but with a still more liberal freedom from legal marriage. Both are mistaken views of marriage, the one to the right, the other to the left, and both are equally dangerous. We have again experienced the inner breakdown of such a community experiment with those at Eisenach and still carry the memory of the Habertshof and Neusonnefeld painfully in our hearts. . . .

May it also be given to us in this strength to come together here with Dietrich Bonhoeffer or perhaps with Dr. Jele and also get to know their circle in Berlin, Bonn and Tübingen. But after some experiences which I have just had, with similar hopes, at the universities, I can hardly accept that as many as sixty to seventy young people were ready to risk everything for the life shown by Jesus. Perhaps you will write to me immediately whether we should write again to Dietrich Bonhoeffer at Berlin even after phoning his mother, who perhaps did not pass on our message.

Hardi Arnold

Birmingham, 3. Juli 1934

... I will meet Bonhoeffer and Dr. Jehle in London. Regarding the latter, I have the distinct feeling that he is leaning toward us. He will look us up in August ... On Tuesday I will meet Pastor Bonhoeffer, Dr. Jehle, and the young Pastor Weckerling from this group of an evangelical-cloistered direction. I talked to Bonhoeffer on the phone, and he told me that his pastoral work didn't allow him to be away from London for more than 4 days. That's why he wasn't able to visit us from Berlin this time, where he was for barely three days. But he wants to come in August ...

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Hardy to his fiancé Edith Boeker

Birmingham, [Friday,] June 15, 1934

Dear Idel,

One of the most important experiences in London was the meeting with Pastor Dietrich **Bonhoeffer** and two of his friends, Dr. Gehle and Vicar Weckerling. Jointly with some inwardly moved groups of young theologians in Berlin, Bonn, and Tübingen (!), these three are planning to found a community of an evangelical monastic type with confession, spiritual exercises, and, as far as possible, celibacy. Their plans are still somewhat muddled, but they do have the laudable idea of learning from others--from monasteries, from Gandhi's ashram, and--from us! So in the middle of next week, Licentiate **Bonhoeffer** will make his way to the Bruderhof, so impressed was he by what I was able to tell him. If it were given for us to come to unity and uniting with this group of between 50 and 70 young people--that would be marvellous! A sizable number of them, from different localities, would have to visit us, and we them! On many issues the group does take a very clear stand, e.g. as regards the use of force and the question of property. The fact that they are still unclear about a number of issues and that the whole thing has a pronounced streak of asceticism and negation can actually be accounted for by this small movement's hour of birth: 1933! "Come out of Babylon!" [Isaiah 48:20] The big shock and terrible disappointment the N. S. [National Socialist] revolution had in store for all who had believed in the possibility of permeating the state and our economic system with a Christian spirit--that is what now drives them toward monastic communism. Apart from a firm core that will live permanently within the Order, they plan to provide training for a whole group of young theologians, previous to their taking up their pastoral duties. The yet-to-be-founded Order is to be based on the Sermon on the Mount. By means of religious exercises, deep-going studies, and an endeavor to follow the words of Jesus--in a legalistic manner to begin with, they hope to get close to the essential core of Christ's truth, while openly admitting, from the very start, that they are still in the dark about God's will for our time. So the whole thing is closely tied up with theology, e.g. the idea that in-depth and unceasing Bible reading will provide protection from erroneous beliefs--in other words: from heresy (of which they are terribly scared!).

One thing they obviously lack: the pouring out of the Spirit and the recognition of the need for this, and it occurs to me that this was also lacking in St. Francis and the first members of his Order. Hence what comes first with them is the rule, made up by one person and willingly and humbly submitted to by the others. In the church community, by contrast, order arises out of the unanimity of the Spirit-led body of believers; it has not been thought out and formulated beforehand but springs from life itself. That is why we are not an "Order" but a church community--as long as the Spirit is among us. What **Bonhoeffer** has in mind is an evangelical Order. Given that it is quite particularly Gandhi and Hutterianism that he and his friends have their eyes on and want to learn from, a lot will depend on whether it will be given us to present them with a living witness to church community, in deed and word.

After **Bonhoeffer's** Bruderhof visit I shall meet him again in London at the beginning of July, as well as Dr. Gehle, who is actually the one I get along with best. When the other two had to leave on Tuesday, he and I still went for a long walk in Hyde Park. He is the least theological one of the three, a doctor of engineering, a lovable Swabian from Stuttgart, 27 years old. He has asked me to visit him in Cambridge, so that's where I am going to be on July 2 and 3; then in London until July 10, and after that in Paris. (And I will now really buckle down to preparing for the task of finding children.)

At the beginning of August, Dr. Gehle, coming from Stuttgart, will visit either Silum or the Rhön Bruderhof. Very important! For in September he and **Bonhoeffer** want to travel to Gandhi in India and live for half a year in his ashram. If they could previously have a real experience of church community--being strongly influenced by Barth, they instinctively regard all such workings of the spirit as morbid religious "enthusiasm"--that journey might actually prove unnecessary.

Still, I am more and more inclined to think that sooner or later an emissary of the church community will have to seek out Gandhi, for his cause is without doubt the most positive and live expression of what is presently sprouting from the soil of individual mysticism and the related concept of an "Order". Sooner or later we must come to a heart-to-heart sharing with him. In view of the tremendous influence his simple lifestyle exerts on many of the best people (among them Jack Hoyland!), it is incontestably necessary for us--indeed part of the church community's worldwide mission--to get in touch with zealous seekers wherever they are, whether in Asia, Europe, or at the North Pole. It must happen soon; it is getting more and more urgent.

In that context, I shall meet in London two important persons, who have heard of the Bruderhof: Middleton Murry and MacMurray, both well-known intellectuals--the first one a communist writer, the second one probably England's best-known philosopher, a professor at the University of London. Murry has invited me to see him on July 5. In one of his books he has proposed--more from a political and philosophical standpoint--a communism of voluntary banding together, such as can become reality only in the church community. I eagerly look forward to that encounter! ...

your Eberhard Hch. [Heinrich]

*footnote in Against the Wind:*

Eberhard knew the **Bonhoeffer** family from Breslau, where Dietrich's father had been a professor of psychology and neurology. [where does this info come from?]

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It is interesting that the Confessing Church Synods gave the word, "No withdrawing from the Church!" But that cripples every bit of initiative. For if the Church is godless, it is useless to say, "We protest, but we remain in the Church." If the Church is ruled by demons and idolatry, it is useless to say, "We protest, but we remain in the Church." The reason for this limp attitude is clear. Even protesting groups in the Catholic and Protestant Churches render unconditional homage to the National Socialist State. They are willing to take active part in government functions. So what good is it if, from within the Churches, they protest about isolated incidents that lead to suppression of the freedom of speech, brutal murder, and all the other horrors, while they support the overall application of this evil system? The failure of the Churches of the Reformation to take the radical, early-Christian position in regard to State and society is taking its toll. We are paying for the historical sins of the Peasants' War: the bondage to the princes' rule and the outrages committed against the popular Anabaptist movement. We are reminded of the way Christianity in England sold out to the State. (EA Aug 12, 1934)

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from Emmy Arnold

to Heini and Annemarie Arnold, Woodcrest, Rifton  
Bulstrode, June 30, 1959

My dear ones! Heini and Annemarie!

Thank you very much also the children, this time specially Edith and Lisa [Arnold], for their dear letters.

We do not know what this week will bring us. First of all Peter [Rutherford] and Arno [Martin] are coming to talk over the whole question of staffing, since there is so much happening on every place.

As you already might know, a German Jewess from Pastor Bethge's group in London has joined us. Bethge is a friend of **Bonhoeffer's**. He, Pastor Bethge, was here at Easter with a group. (The friendship dates back to Hans [Zumpe]). The visit turned out pretty good, even though nearly all the German youth were marching against the H-Bomb, and only a few remained here! Klaus Barth spoke to the group, and we had been asked to look after it in a special way! Derek [Wardle] also helped and also specially some of the Dutch people. From this group Ilse Zwicklitz came a short time later, a German Jewess of 50 years, and soon she said, she would remain. Soon she took part in the Gemeindestunde and asked for the novitiate. I also had a talk with her and I asked her, whether she received a compensation from the German state. She has lived 20 years in England, but left "voluntarily." A few days later she brought £1,800, and today she is getting DM 3,000 from London! She said that the £1,800 are only half of what she is to receive, and which is due to her.

Specially for Tom [Potts] this was something very great! He said that the older members often told him how help had come at the last moment! When the other £1,800 will be paid she does not know, it all goes via a London attorney for all Jews. Had she been kicked out of Germany and not "only" suffered, she would have received more. So one can never know where help might come from. For the visit of this group no one had

shown much interest at the time! Probably everyone was pretty much stretched to the limit! But it still was quite a nice visit, also Pastor Bethge wrote that to us. ...

Always in great love,  
Mama