

# The Communion of Saints and an Anabaptist Community: A Study of the Bruderhof

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**Abstract:** A stress on the communion of saints might not be anticipated among those within the Anabaptist tradition, since Anabaptism, as a movement of radical Reformation and separation, stands in contrast to the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions in which the communion of saints has been given prominence. However, the Bruderhof differs in certain respects from some other streams of Anabaptism. Among the Bruderhof distinctives are: a strong stress on community and sharing of life, which informs ideas of communion; a deep interest in and study of Early Church writings and a sense of connection with the past; the experience of the death of members in the community and the understanding that they are part of the 'Upper Church'; a lively sense of the Holy Spirit's work; and a belief that the 'Upper Church' brings empowerment to witness. These themes will be explored in this article. The main focus is the first two decades of the movement, and in particular the addresses of Eberhard Arnold as the co-founder and shaping thinker of the Bruderhof, but the article also looks at more recent years.

**Key words:** Bruderhof, Eberhard Arnold, Upper Church, Eternity.

## Introduction

A stress on the communion of saints might not be anticipated among those within the Anabaptist tradition, since Anabaptism, as a movement of radical Reformation and separation, stands in contrast to the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions in which the communion of saints has been given prominence. For Anabaptists as a whole, it is personal faith, confessed by baptism and church commitment, which is crucial. However, the Bruderhof ('place of brothers') differs in certain respects from some other streams of Anabaptism. Among the Bruderhof distinctives are: a strong stress on community and sharing of life, which informs ideas of communion; a deep interest in and study of Early Church writings and a sense of connection with the past; the experience of the death of members in the community and the understanding that they are part of the 'Upper Church'; a lively sense of the Holy Spirit's work; and a belief that the 'Upper Church' brought empowerment to witness. These themes will be explored in this article.

The Bruderhof community traces its origins to the work of Eberhard Arnold (1883-1935), his wife Emmy (1884-1980), and her sister Else von Hollander (1885-1932), in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century. The core group which formed the first community in 1920, in Sannerz, a village in the state of Hesse (north-east of Frankfurt), was shaped by a vision of Christian communal life. As Eberhard Arnold put it, and Markus Baum in his biography of Eberhard notes, the group drew together ‘reborn people who have accepted the life of the Sermon on the Mount’. They were to be people who ‘radiate the spirit of Christ - people who witness for Christ with their entire being’, and ‘who give up everything to live simply and solely for love and for productive work’. The group wanted to testify ‘that we are a church of Christ, a Lord’s Supper fellowship.’<sup>1</sup> Over a century later, the Bruderhof consists of over 3,000 people – families and single people - living in 29 intentional communities of differing sizes on five continents. In 2012 the Bruderhof produced a document, *Foundations of Our Faith and Calling*, which (it explains) was ‘the outcome of discussion and study within the Bruderhof communities about the basis of our life together’.<sup>2</sup> This study examines the thinking and practice of the Bruderhof regarding ‘the Communion of Saints’, with particular reference to Eberhard Arnold’s addresses to the community.<sup>3</sup> The main focus is the first two decades of the movement.<sup>4</sup>

## The Church through the Centuries

In 1901 Eberhard Arnold, having had an experience of evangelical conversion two years earlier, began to take an interest in movements of renewal and change in church history, especially the sixteenth-century Reformation.<sup>5</sup> This was something his father, a Lutheran and a Professor of Church History, encouraged. The movement that most attracted Eberhard was a radical one: Anabaptism. Through his father’s work, Eberhard became aware of Johann Loserth, an Austrian Professor who had researched the communitarian Anabaptist movement led by Jakob Hutter. Eberhard read Loserth’s volumes on Anabaptism in the Tyrol, and he was attracted by Loserth’s description of Anabaptists as ‘good, faithful people with a pure way of life and love of Jesus’. Eberhard found here a movement that spoke to him about how to follow Jesus. It also raised queries in his mind about the Lutheran state Church.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Emmy von Hollander (who was to

<sup>1</sup> Markus Baum, *Against the Wind: Eberhard Arnold and the Bruderhof* (Rifton, NY, and Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 1998), 126. I will use first names – for example Eberhard and Emmy - to a large extent.

<sup>2</sup> *Foundations of Our Faith and Calling* (Rifton, NY, and Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 2012), vii.

<sup>3</sup> The Bruderhof Historical Archive, Walden, NY, USA, constitute a rich resource. When I refer to material there, I use the abbreviation BHA. I am most grateful to Bruderhof members involved in archival work. There is current work to create a website of all Eberhard Arnold’s writings: [www.eberhardarnold.com](http://www.eberhardarnold.com)

<sup>4</sup> Accounts of the Bruderhof have been written by those outside the movement, including Benjamin D. Zablocki, *The Joyful Community: An Account of the Bruderhof: A Communal Movement Now in Its Third Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Yaacov Oved, *The Witness of the Brothers: A History of the Bruderhof* (New Brunswick, USA, and London: Transaction Publishers, 1996); and a determinedly hostile account by Julius H. Rubin, *The Other Side of Joy: Religious Melancholy among the Bruderhof* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> For the spirituality of the Bruderhof, see Ian Randall, ‘Church community is a gift of the Holy Spirit’: *The spirituality of the Bruderhof community* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *Aus dem Worte Gottes*, cited by Baum, *Against the Wind*, 14-15.

meet Eberhard in 1907), became especially interested in Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760) and the Moravian community founded in Herrnhut, Germany.<sup>7</sup>

Emmy and Eberhard met in Halle. Both became part of meetings for spiritual revival in Halle, part of wider revival in Europe linked with the (1904-05) Welsh Revival.<sup>8</sup> Eberhard was by now a student of theology, and an increasingly noted speaker, and Emmy was a nurse. They soon became engaged and for periods of time when apart exchanged almost daily letters. The relationship of conversion to baptism became an issue. Although Eberhard had seen infant baptism as God's will, on 4 September 1907 he wrote that he had 'been convinced by God, with quiet and sober biblical certainty, that baptism of believers alone is justified'.<sup>9</sup> Eberhard was disqualified in 1908 from sitting his doctoral examinations in theology because he had made known he was leaving the Lutheran Church and was going to be baptised as a believer. Else von Hollander was also studying baptism, and was baptised in August 1908, with Eberhard following in October and Emmy in December. All of this was against a background of opposition from their families. Eberhard switched from theology to philosophy and completed a thesis, on 'Early Christian and Non-Christian Elements in the Development of Friedrich Nietzsche', in 1909. He graduated 'Summa cum laude'. Soon Eberhard and Emmy were married and set up home in Leipzig.<sup>10</sup>

Although he had left the Lutheran Church and was associated with evangelical fellowships, Eberhard had not cut himself off from wider Christian involvement; he was a sought-after and highly effective speaker in a variety of settings. For years he was a leader in the German Student Christian Movement (SCM).<sup>11</sup> In spring 1913, however, after meetings in Halle, he became seriously ill with tuberculosis and for the sake of his health he and Emmy and their children - at that time Emi-Margret and Eberhard (Hardy), later joined by Heinrich (Heini), Hans-Hermann and Monika - moved to the Tyrol. In this area, where Anabaptist communities had been present in the early sixteenth century, the Arnolds became fascinated by Anabaptist figures such as Hans Denck, Balthasar Hubmaier and Jakob Hutter.<sup>12</sup> Many Anabaptists, including the Mennonites, encouraged mutual aid, but it was the Hutterites (called after Hutter) who implemented community of goods.<sup>13</sup> Hutterites saw themselves as part of a spiritual tradition: they pointed to Church Fathers who praised giving away possessions, and to denunciations of selfishness in Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Emmy Arnold, *A Joyful Pilgrimage: My Life in Community*, (Rifton, NY, and Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 1999), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Noel Gibbard, *On the Wings of the Dove* (Bryntirion, Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2002), 43-5.

<sup>9</sup> Eberhard Arnold to Emmy von Hollander, 4 September 1907, *Love Letters* (Plough Publishing: Rifton, NY, and Robertsbridge, 2007), 132.

<sup>10</sup> Emmy Arnold, *Joyful Pilgrimage*, 13-15.

<sup>11</sup> This included editing the SCM magazine, *Die Furche* (The Furrow).

<sup>12</sup> Emmy Arnold, *Joyful Pilgrimage*, 17-18.

<sup>13</sup> For the early Hutterites see, for example, Hutterian Brethren, ed., *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren, Volume I* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1987); Werner Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants' War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 431. An early Hutterite, Peter Walpot cited patristic authors to situate Hutterian practice within the larger Christian tradition. Peter Walpot, 'True Yieldedness and the Christian Community of Goods', Daniel Liechty, ed., *Early Anabaptist Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 194-5.

Ongoing and deepening interest in community on the part of Eberhard and Emmy, and Emmy's sister Else, led to the establishment in 1920 of the community in Sannerz. Although, for them, there was 'new work' to do (and an associated magazine was *Das Neue Werk*), they saw themselves as in a tradition of those who had undertaken creative spiritual initiatives before. Here we have the idea of the Communion of Saints. Eberhard wrote a significant letter in 1920 in which he drew attention to the area of Germany north of Frankfurt, noting the movements 'of far-reaching significance' that had existed there – specifically some near Büdingen, about twenty miles from Frankfurt. Eberhard spoke of the presence there of the Cistercians in the thirteenth century, the later 'Inspirationists, Baptizers, and all manner of sectarians', and the Moravian movement's very large settlement at Herrnhag established in 1736 – in what Eberhard called 'that enthusiastic, life-affirming epoch of the Moravian Church'. For Eberhard, these varied movements exhibited the 'depth of spirit' he espoused.<sup>15</sup>

In line with this sense of being connected with the Church through the centuries, a massive publishing project was envisaged, described as 'a [multi-volume] series drawn from the living testimony of Christian witnesses across the centuries', with the title *Quellen* – source books.<sup>16</sup> Eberhard and Else were the leading figures in this enterprise. Eberhard tried unsuccessfully to recruit Karl Barth, whom he knew, as an advisor for his project. The first volume to appear was on Zinzendorf, by Otto Herpel, a friend of the community and a Lutheran pastor. Volumes appeared between 1925 and 1926 on the early seventeenth-century mystical writer Jakob Böhme, on the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and on Francis of Assisi.<sup>17</sup> In a letter from Eberhard in 1925 to his sister Hannah, Eberhard described 'the Lutherans and the Zwinglians, believing Catholics like Staupitz for example, the Biblicist Schwenkfeldian Church of the Holy Spirit, the communal peace Churches of the Baptizers, and many other shadings' in the Reformation period as 'in unity in the eyes of God'.<sup>18</sup> Eberhard wrote *The Early Christians after the Death of the Apostles*, and the breadth of his reading and awareness is evident in his commentary and his inclusion of writings by (for example) Polycarp, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria. Although he did not see the martyrs of the Early Church as a special group - which was probably part of the process that led to some being denoted 'saints' - he considered the early Christians brought powerful challenges and his hope was for the 'spiritual distance' from them to be 'narrowed'.<sup>19</sup> It showed a belief in the Communion of Saints.

<sup>15</sup> Eberhard Arnold to Hilde Hoppe, Marburg, 28 April, 1920, cited by Antje Vollmer, 'The *Neuwerk* Movement', Doctoral Thesis (Berlin, 1973), 60.

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Margret Gneiting who showed me some first editions during a visit I made to Sannerz.

<sup>17</sup> Baum, *Against the Wind*, 166-7.

<sup>18</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *An eine Gemeinschafts-Christin*, 1925, EA 25/15, 20126083\_07\_S, BHA.

<sup>19</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *The Early Christians: In their own Words* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2014). For background see, for example, Michael Perham, *The Communion of Saints: An Examination of the Place of the Christian Dead in the Belief, Worship, and Calendars of the Church* (Alcuin Club; London: SPCK, 1980).

## Death and eternity

Another aspect of the narrowing of ‘spiritual distance’ and of the Communion of Saints had to do with the link between those living in the community and those who had died. In 1934, by which time the community numbered over 70 and was known as the Rhön Bruderhof (the farm they had taken over was in the Rhön, and they had become part of the Hutterite movement in North America, which used the designation Bruderhof), Eberhard gave a significant address on ‘Four Deaths in the Community’. He spoke of ‘very deeply moving experiences of death’ over the course of the previous 14 years. The first death was Olga von Hollander, the oldest von Hollander sister, who was part of the Lutheran Church but when she was dying with tuberculosis asked that she might die in the community. Eberhard continued: ‘What happened as we stood there around the deathbed of our Olga von Hollander was really very powerful. She saw deeper and deeper into the mystery of the life of our church community, and she came nearer and nearer to eternity and to the spiritual life of the heavenly worlds; it was something tremendous that in the last weeks and days we could feel how she was lifted up into divine worlds.’<sup>20</sup>

The moment of Olga’s death was later recounted in the community. In 1931, Emmy gave an account. Olga had adopted Ruth, then nine, and Emmy spoke of how at the hour of Olga’s death ‘something bright was observed which dropped down on Ruth that night, and remained on her for a long time and then disappeared out the window. Olga’s death and the power of resurrection that affected us through her death gave us renewed courage’.<sup>21</sup> In his report in 1934, Eberhard expressed this slightly differently: ‘At the actual moment in which life departed from her body, our children saw a lovely spiritual form pass by the window and disappear.’<sup>22</sup> In 1978, Hardy Arnold recalled aspects, such as communal singing of hymns such as ‘The mighty healer now draws near’, ‘Into time brightly shine, O Eternity’, and ‘specially the moving song’, ‘I would go there where my Jesus I may see’. At the time of Olga’s death, Emy-Margret Arnold and Ruth saw ‘a white being hovering in the room’ - Olga’s soul. All the children in the community, wrote Hardy, ‘sensed that this was a holy hour of God. They were filled with reverence and amazement before the mystery of death, of the soul, of eternity. They sensed that Jesus was very close and that everyone in the house, adults and children alike, felt the same and were deeply bound together.’<sup>23</sup>

Two out of the four deaths Eberhard recounted in 1934 were of children. Ursula Keiderling was a baby, and Eberhard spoke of her death as ‘a powerful breaking in of eternal power, such a tremendous shaking up coming from eternity’. He explained that Ursula’s death was ‘connected with carelessness with an iron stove’ and what followed in the community was ‘deep repentance’ and a ‘deep change in our attitude’, involving taking greater responsibility for all.<sup>24</sup> Emmy later explained further, that Ursula had been in a room in which a bundle of wet wood was drying near the stove, and the child died

<sup>20</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, 0000000115\_03\_S, BHA.

<sup>21</sup> Emmy Arnold, ‘The Story of Sannerz and the Rhön Bruderhof’ (1931), BHA. Coll. 0288\_05, Box 15, Folder 3.

<sup>22</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, BHA.

<sup>23</sup> Hardy Arnold, ‘Memories of Tante Olga von Hollander’ (1978), BHA. Coll. 00304.

<sup>24</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, BHA.



from inhaling smoke.<sup>25</sup> The life of the other child who died, ‘little Tabea’, brought what Eberhard called ‘a hidden revelation of God, a revelation of true childlikeness, of how the smallest child is united with the heart of God, and of how the child draws the hearts of the parents up into the perfect love coming from the Spirit’. In a letter to Tabea’s parents, he described how ‘this divine gift, giving rise to the deepest joy, stayed with you for a few short days only. In reality, this bright, warm beam of eternity remains with you and with us for ever, as a light connecting us and the world above.’<sup>26</sup> He believed that the community had gone through ‘a powerful Easter experience of death and resurrection, of dying and rising again’, and spoke of a work of God in which ‘we become true children and are united with the Church Above, the Church of childlike spirits, and become one with them.’<sup>27</sup> The sense of being close to ‘the Church Above’ became a familiar theme and suggests a way of thinking in the Bruderhof about the Communion of Saints.<sup>28</sup>

In 2015, Carole Vanderhoof wrote on Else von Hollander’s life story, with the title ‘That Small White Flame’.<sup>29</sup> In her 46 years, Else was like a flame that burned brightly and burned out early, as a result of tuberculosis. She had worked closely with Eberhard in his research on the early Christians, as she ‘tracked down obscure references from the writings of third- and fourth-century church fathers’.<sup>30</sup> She felt a strong connection with the Franciscans. After her death, Eberhard spoke of how she had been ‘an example to us - how there is a strong working of light that comes from a true womanly nature, and how self-forgetfulness (in which a person does not think of himself or herself) can bring about the most powerful working of love and of service’.<sup>31</sup> Annemarie Wächter, a young schoolteacher, who would later marry Heini Arnold, arrived at the Rhön Bruderhof on the day Else died. Annemarie later wrote in her diary: ‘When I came the impression of Else’s dying was very strong and very real. The effect of her death gave direction for the work of the entire community and to me personally. It gave us courage for big decisions and tasks as well as for personal concerns.’ Annemarie found the effect ‘went with us on mission; it renewed and strengthened us. It was as if the gates of eternity were opened and we were granted a glimpse into the wonderful glory of the Other World. Else is the very real and living connection between us and the upper Church.’<sup>32</sup>

The introduction to ‘That Small White Flame’ records that in her last days Else described having seen ‘a remarkable vision of light’. It can be described as a mystical experience. On the earth there was a smoky fire, neither bright nor clear, and she feared its

<sup>25</sup> Emmy Arnold, *Joyful Pilgrimage*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Eberhard Arnold to Kurt and Marianne Zimmermann, 24 April 1934, quoted by Hardy Arnold, Meeting Transcript, 24 November 1938, BHA. Coll\_0055.

<sup>27</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, BHA.

<sup>28</sup> See Jonathan Speegle ‘We Believe in the Communion of Saints: A Proposed Protestant Reclamation of the Doctrine’, Baylor University PhD, 2006, 197. He cites Eberhard Arnold, *Inner Words* (Rifton, NY: Plough 1975), 165: ‘In the flame of the Spirit there is living unity between those who have gone and those who remain on earth.’ See Speegle’s published work, *We Believe in the Communion of Saints* (Cleveland, TN: Parson’s Porch, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Carole Vanderhoof, ‘That Small White Flame: The Life of Else von Hollander’ (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>30</sup> Baum, *Against the Wind*, 167.

<sup>31</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, BHA.

<sup>32</sup> Vanderhoof, ‘That Small White Flame’; and Foreword by Anna Mow. *Youth Movement to Bruderhof: Letters and Diaries of Annemarie Arnold Née Wächter, 1926-32* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing, 1985), 228-29, citing Annemarie’s Diary entries, 31 December 1932, 1 January 1933.

power. But then, also on the earth, a very small, quite white, very clear, very pure tongue of flame burst out. She saw in this vision a little flame of light come down from heaven and join the tongue of flame on earth. When that took place, a great City was built out of the pure light. The sooty fire retreated. In the end, this City of Light became so bright that it seemed it had become ‘completely sun’, a single completely pure light. Else’s experience was of a flaming up of faith in the church, and a coming down of the Spirit of the Church to build the City on the Hill.<sup>33</sup> In 1934 Eberhard referred to this as among the ‘wonderful revelations of God’ that were given to Else. She saw ‘visions, most glorious revelations of divine light’, and she saw, as Eberhard put it, ‘the white fire of God and the agitated, flickering fire of the expectant and fervently longing Church, and she saw the Heavens opened and the Kingdom of God coming nearer’.<sup>34</sup> It was an experience of communion.

### The Holy Spirit and the Upper Church

As Else von Hollander was dying, she passed on a message (on 31 December 1931) to the community; she was too ill to attend the meeting that was being held. Her words offer a remarkable insight into her thinking about eternity. She wrote: ‘The year 1932 will be a very special one, and a year of great building up and great struggles. There is no life without struggle, just as new life must come through death.’ She said she could see quite clearly the expansion of the Bruderhof, and was glad she was ‘allowed to experience with you a small beginning of building up’. Her own commitment to mission had been wholehearted and she envisaged that this relatively small community would, through ‘mission outside’, come to have ‘influence on the whole world’. She then added something even more striking: ‘I shall experience this from eternity and shall certainly also be allowed to work a little too. As often as the spirit of the Church unites you completely and makes you strong for the task I shall be present: for in the Holy Spirit the whole Church of the Spirit is among you.’<sup>35</sup> The influence shaping this view of eternity might have come from Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880), a German Lutheran pastor whose writings were much read by Bruderhof members. Blumhardt wrote that ‘fighters are also needed in eternity’, and that those who died would get an ‘assignment’.<sup>36</sup>

The theme of the Holy Spirit has been prominent within the Bruderhof. At Whitsun in 1933, Eberhard gave an address on ‘The Gifts of the Holy Spirit’. He drew heavily from the book of Acts, but it is also possible to see the influence of Else’s visions. The community was urged to ‘concentrate completely and fully on the Holy Spirit’, to wait and honour the Spirit, ‘so that no gift of this Spirit may be despised and set aside’. Although he did not mention the Upper Church, the picture is of the Spirit coming down upon ‘all who wait and believe in full trust for Christ and His Kingdom’. Eberhard warned against refusing to believe in ‘lowly gifts’ from God. ‘What is important’, he continued, ‘is not the human criterion for gifts, but only the divine criterion of inner fire, divine love. And God wants to give us this ardour so that it may shine from one to another as the Holy Light in the various gifts and reveal God’s unity.’ In case this light was seen as confined to the Bruderhof,

<sup>33</sup> Vanderhoof, ‘That Small White Flame’, introduction.

<sup>34</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, BHA.

<sup>35</sup> Eberhard Arnold, A Second Printed Circular Letter, 1932, EA 32/03, 20126084\_41\_S, BHA.

<sup>36</sup> Charles E. Moore, ed., *The God who Heals* (Walden, NY, and Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 2018), 153.

Eberhard insisted that it was ‘not only for our little flock, but for the whole globe of earth, because we have the faith that this Spirit ranges over the whole globe like the sun and the wind and the rain’. He encouraged prayer for China, America, South America, and Europe, ‘where the nations and classes rage against one another’. He sought for ‘the spirit of perfect love’ to be present and to ‘kindle a fire and thus manifest Christ and His Gospel through deed and reality’.<sup>37</sup>

Eberhard was, therefore, disappointed that a visitor to the community from Stuttgart, Hedwig Sander, had subsequently written to say that she had gained the impression that the Rhön Bruderhof’s belief was that the Holy Spirit was at work ‘only in your community’. In two talks in August 1933, Eberhard called such a view ‘an extremely grave error’. He suggested that the only explanation for ‘this false judgment’ by Hedwig was that her visit was ‘too fleeting’.<sup>38</sup> A restricted view was prevalent in the Hutterite movement in North America, but Eberhard did not mention that.<sup>39</sup> Instead he insisted in this talk that ‘we definitely do not believe that the Holy Spirit is at work only in our community, whether we think of our little individual Bruderhof or of the community of all Hutterian Brothers.’ He emphasised that ‘we confess, and have always believed, that the Spirit of God is cosmic and works everywhere: there is no spot on Earth and no human heart where He may not bring His work to bear.’ Linked with this, for Eberhard, was the Holy Spirit as the ‘Spirit of Unity’ and as a ‘childlike spirit’, in the sense that only those who become like children can reach God’s unity and also because the ‘childlike Spirit of the Church embraces all children in Heaven and on Earth’. He added a classic Anabaptist point on children: ‘They need no baptism, for they are in God’s Kingdom.’<sup>40</sup>

At a meeting during Advent in 1934, Eberhard directed the community’s attention to the Second Coming of Jesus. In an essay, ‘Why we live in community’, he had written of the Lord’s Supper or ‘Meal of Remembrance’ as a witness to Christ’s death and to his Second Coming and an occasion when ‘we receive him in ourselves’.<sup>41</sup> In his Advent 1934 message, Eberhard looked at the book of Revelation, in which the apostle John, on the island of Patmos, was ‘transported into the day of God’s future. In prophetic visions he beheld the approaching day of judgement and in contrast to it God’s throne of light, the throne of his world of stars, the throne of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the throne in whose midst the Son of Man, the Lamb of God, is revealed as the being of light, of all eternal light.’ Although the ultimate focus of his message was Christ, Eberhard also emphasised ‘the seven spirits of the Holy Spirit’, and ‘the throng of martyrs and the multitude of the glorified members of the Church’.<sup>42</sup> In his book (in five volumes), *Innerland*, Eberhard saw the Church taking shape only where the Holy Spirit brought about a life and faith ‘completely at one with the whole glorified band of

<sup>37</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, 3 June 1933, EA 33/41, 0000000109\_18\_S, BHA.

<sup>38</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, August 1933, EA 150, 20126128\_10\_S, BHA.

<sup>39</sup> For an account of the relationship, which broke down, was re-established and ultimately ceased, see Rod Janzen, ‘The Hutterites and the Bruderhof: The Relationship between an Old Older Religious Society and a Twentieth-Century Communal Group’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 79 (October 2005): 505-44.

<sup>40</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, August 1933, EA 150, 20126128\_10\_S, BHA.

<sup>41</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *Why we live in community* (Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 1995), 16-17. The essay by Eberhard Arnold on ‘Why we live in community’ was published in *Die Wegwarte*, October/November 1925 and May/June 1925.

<sup>42</sup> Arnold, Eberhard, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 318, 20126149\_35\_S, BHA.



martyrs and witnesses' throughout the centuries.<sup>43</sup> The Holy Spirit's work was central to the Communion of Saints.

It seems that in Eberhard's mind the Revelation to John was casting light on the 'four deaths in the community', which he spoke about in the same month. He believed that through these deaths 'it was our experience that the Heavens were opened for us and that the Kingdom of Heaven – the Kingdom which otherwise belongs so much to the World Beyond, the Kingdom of God's World, which seems to be worlds away – that this Kingdom came very close to us'. He saw this as the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit, he stated, 'comes down from the Upper City-Church, which is above us, and brings us new birth'.<sup>44</sup> At Advent he spoke of the sense, from Revelation, 'that what is powerful and great must be abased; that all injustice must be taken away; that all violence and all wickedness must be laid down and what is degraded must be lifted up'. Eberhard did not see Revelation as setting out a detailed programme of world events. Rather he saw the apocalyptic visions as portraying realities relevant to the present. 'We witness', he said, 'how the humbled throng of the believers is lifted up by the Holy Spirit through the future reign of God which flows out from His throne'. But instead of this being a future 'rapture', the 'lifting up' was in order to receive now, 'from this Church above', the experience of 'the life of Jesus Christ, the true life which is from God. It is from there that we receive the true forgiveness of sin, the true gathering and uniting in God's peace and in the love of Jesus Christ.'<sup>45</sup> The place of the 'Church Above' is given considerable and unusual emphasis.

### Worship above and Witness on earth

The understanding that was shared in the Bruderhof was that the 'Upper Church' was a worshipping Church but at the same time there was an empowering from above that gave power to witness on earth. The identification of special individuals as 'saints' was not part of Bruderhof thinking, but there might have been appreciation of what Stanley Hauerwas argues: 'Sainthood is about power', not about individuals 'reduced to being saintly people who are eternally nice'.<sup>46</sup> At a community meeting in July 1933, Eberhard offered a view of Mary as mother which went beyond traditional Protestant categories, although he did not use the language of 'saint'. 'Just as the Virgin Mary', he said, 'is the image of the heavenly life-giving mother, so we must also again and again receive in ourselves the heavenly virgin, the virginal mother who is the Church of the upper Jerusalem, as the emotional aspect of the existing power of the Church'. He was not encouraging prayer to the Virgin Mary, but he saw her, the mother of Jesus, as a life-giver.<sup>47</sup> The Church on earth is not, he continued, the heavenly Church, but 'we receive the heavenly and perfect Church. The more often we receive the heavenly Church, this life-giving strength of the Bride of Christ, the more we shall radiate in our lives - however weak they are – the wonderful unity and brotherliness

<sup>43</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *Innerland: Fire and Spirit*, 4 (Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 2020), 103.

<sup>44</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, BHA.

<sup>45</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 318, 20126149\_35\_S, BHA.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, 'On the production and reproduction of the saints', in his *Unleashing the Scripture* (Nashville, 1993), 100-101.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Eberhard Arnold, *Innerland: Fire and Spirit*, 103, where Eberhard suggests that like Mary, the Church, through the Holy Spirit, is the eternal mother.

that came from the birth of Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem.’ This community meeting included presentation of infants, and Eberhard suggested that ‘the souls of children did not come into being now; rather they have been called from eternity’.<sup>48</sup> On another occasion, again naming Mary, Eberhard spoke of ‘the mysterious motherly Church of Eternity, who was before all creation and will forever be’.<sup>49</sup>

In his 1934 address on the deaths in the community, Eberhard spoke of the Upper Church or ‘this Jerusalem’ (echoing Revelation) as ‘the Mother of all of us, and only through this Mary, the Church, can we be born again as a body, as the new embodiment of the Word, as the Body of Christ, as the life of the Church, as the manifestation of perfect love in the perfect childlikeness of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ’. The life of the Church on earth was, for him, ‘inconceivable except in complete unity with the spirits that have passed away, with the witnesses who have been called into eternity, with the little children who have been taken up into eternity, so that we really feel how Heaven is opened up and the light of eternity and the power of eternal life break in upon us’. For him, ‘the boundary of death is wiped out, and life is revealed as real, true, and everlasting life’. Although the boundary was wiped out, Eberhard always saw a distinction between the Upper Church, in this address also referred to as the ‘Other World’, and the present world – which needed the breaking in, as he put it, of the Kingdom of God. He continued: ‘We feel that the spirits who have passed away are united with us under the throne and altar of Jesus Christ and that they take a very active part in the destiny of the earth’, and he spoke again of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, ‘our Representative, who carries our inarticulate groans up to the throne of God in the City Church of the spirits glorified in Christ’.<sup>50</sup>

It is clear from a letter of 19 September 1934 from Eberhard to his ‘dearly loved Mama’, that he did not limit unity with ‘spirits that have passed away’ to those who were part of the Anabaptist tradition. He wrote: ‘For some days I have been with you constantly in my thoughts, looking into your dear eyes and your dear heart and thinking of your birthday. I know how often you must be thinking of our beloved father, your faithful Franklin.’ Eberhard’s father had died in 1927 and his brother, also mentioned in this letter, was killed in the First World War. Eberhard continued: ‘I believe that from eternity he [Franklin], together with your oldest son, my only brother Hermann, sees all things as Jesus Christ sees them. How he will be rejoicing with you in all that has been given spiritually to your children and grandchildren through the years!’ Eberhard concluded using his vision of the ‘Upper Jerusalem’: ‘From year to year may we follow his prompting ever more deeply, so that God’s city on the hill may be revealed to many people. To close, I also wish for you in your new year of life, my beloved Mama, the abundant rays from this city of light. To all who have faith, these rays come down from the Upper Jerusalem, the mother of us all.’<sup>51</sup>

Although Eberhard saw the ‘Upper Jerusalem’ as encompassing ‘all who have faith’, he was not satisfied with the common Protestant view that the Church Catholic was ‘invisible’.<sup>52</sup> He argued that the Church on earth was a ‘second incarnation of the

<sup>48</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, 2 July 1933, EA 113, 20126123\_10\_S, BHA.

<sup>49</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, 20 January 1935, EA 331a, 20126150\_19\_S, BHA.

<sup>50</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 34/49, 0000000115\_03\_S, BHA.

<sup>51</sup> Eberhard Arnold to Elisabeth Arnold, 19 September 1934, BHA Coll\_0288\_02.

<sup>52</sup> See John Adam Moehler, *Symbolism or Exposition on the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003), 331. For Puritan and Separatist thinking, see Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

eternal Word', or (in other terms he used) a 'second embodiment' quickened by Jesus Christ himself. For Eberhard 'this incarnation cannot remain invisible, cannot remain in the so-called invisible Church'. In his discussion of this incarnational theology, he contended that 'all that is powerful and all that is great has to come from the invisible world to us in the visible world. For the Creator is not visible, and He is greater than the created being. The creative Spirit is not visible, and without the creative Spirit there is no creation.'<sup>53</sup> This emphasis on incarnation did not mean the cross of Christ was overshadowed. In November 1934, Eberhard insisted on the cruciality of 'Christ's love and the meaning of his death on the cross', but argued that they were 'not fully understood if they are restricted to the individual's subjective experience of salvation'.<sup>54</sup> The work of God was for the whole of creation. 'The Creator, then, is God; the Creator and His Spirit's activity is creation.' He concluded: 'Therefore all God's ways lead to physical reality and to incarnation. Therefore, too, the life of the church is an incarnation and personification of the deepest mysteries and of the utterly invisible spiritual realities.'<sup>55</sup>

It seems that Eberhard had sympathy with the Catholic Church's 'visible Church' understanding. In talks in August 1935, in which he reiterated that living in community offered the best way to serve 'in the present-day torn condition of the world and its injustice and suffering', he spoke of great movements that were drawing followers. He included Communism and Nationalism, but the religious movement which he saw as significant was the Catholic Church. In his view it had 'today again become a mass movement'. He admired what he described as 'the ecumenical vision' of the Catholic Church, ecumenical in the sense of worldwide, describing it as 'a community spread over the whole earth'. The Catholic Church, he continued, 'wants to embody the community of the saints as a Church in sacred corporeality'. Eberhard had witnessed believers from different places finding 'a tremendous joy in the existence of our common life', with deeply believing Catholics coming to the Bruderhof and saying, 'We in our village should live just as you do on the Bruderhof!'<sup>56</sup> Eberhard became a good friend to strict Catholics.<sup>57</sup> He also warmly welcomed Protestant contacts, but in one of his last addresses, shortly before his death, he spoke of the Reformed view of 'the Church as a state-constituted society based on law', contrasting this with the Anabaptists, 'a community of heart and life based on the Spirit'.<sup>58</sup>

## Communion continues

Eberhard Arnold died in 1935, after a failed operation, at the early age of fifty-two. He was at the height of his spiritual powers, authority and activity.<sup>59</sup> In his last letter to Emmy, he wrote of his fellow community members: 'I shall always remember them before

<sup>53</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 318, 20126149\_35\_S, BHA.

<sup>54</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *God's Revolution* (Rifton, NY, and Robertsbridge 1997), 42.

<sup>55</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, December 1934, EA 318, 20126149\_35\_S, BHA. See Mark Saucy, 'Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together: Is the Church the extension of the Incarnation?', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 2 (2000): 193-212.

<sup>56</sup> Eberhard Arnold, Meeting Transcript, 14 August 1935, EA 445, 20126204\_33\_S, BHA.

<sup>57</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *A Testimony to Community* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing, 1973), 92.

<sup>58</sup> Eberhard Arnold, *The Early Anabaptists* (Rifton, NY, and Robertsbridge: Plough Publishing, 1970), 27.

<sup>59</sup> Baum, *Against the Wind*, 253.

God – into all eternity.’<sup>60</sup> In November 1936, and in repeated listings of community members and children, the names of those who had died were at the top of the listing, under the heading ‘in the Kingdom of God’.<sup>61</sup> Nazi pressure on the community had led to some (and eventually to all) members moving to England as refugees. One of the earliest British members, Arnold Mason, later recalled the sense of a new future for the Bruderhof – freedom to live in community away from Nazi oppression.<sup>62</sup> With a community established in England, the Cotswold Bruderhof, significant numbers of people from different parts of Britain began to join.<sup>63</sup>

As well as building up community life, there were continuing efforts to relate to wider streams of thought and action – typifying the whole Church in the world. The Bruderhof publication, *The Plough*, was widely circulated, with articles and reviews by a variety of writers. An example of its interests was a review in spring 1939 by Kathleen Hamilton, a newer community member, of *Heaven and Earth* (1938), by John Middleton Murry, a prolific writer.<sup>64</sup> This was a demanding book, which, as Kathleen put it, tried to ‘reveal the actual growth of the modern world through the minds of some great men who experienced in act or imagination the travail of its becoming’. Through them, she said, ‘we watch the change from the great wholeness of life of the Middle Ages to the rise of individualism in matters of religion, politics and economics’. This view of the Middle Ages was somewhat romantic, and Murry’s vision for ecclesiastical renewal focused on the Church of England, but Kathleen quoted with approval Murry’s statement that the Church was ‘the community of men and women who recognise an authority independent of the secular state... the communion of those who are called out from secular society to acknowledge that their final allegiance lies elsewhere’.<sup>65</sup>

Identification with the Hutterite tradition was emphasised in a talk which Hardy Arnold gave to the Cotswold community, ‘Review of our Connection with Hutterians’, at around the same time. Hardy noted that it had been almost 20 years since the community began in Sannerz. He made clear that ‘the urge to do this was that we wanted to follow Jesus and do his will. Right from the beginning it was clear to us that the only strength for such a life comes from the free working Spirit of God’. But Hardy did not want to foster a separatist outlook. He was adamant that ‘it had been the wish of this little circle not to stand alone, but to become completely united with whatever group there might be to whom the Spirit had spoken in the same way, and who were giving the same witness and living the same life.’ He explained that there had been ‘very close contact’ with the Quakers, but that increasingly the community at Sannerz and then at the Rhön was drawn to the Hutterites and books ‘about the Hutterian apostles, and accounts of the deaths of the martyrs’.<sup>66</sup> The reference to ‘apostles’ and ‘martyrs’ is consonant with the way early Christian emphasised communion with these witnesses.

<sup>60</sup> Eberhard Arnold to Emmy Arnold, 13 and 14 November 1935. BHA Coll\_0288\_02.

<sup>61</sup> Household listing, 22 and 23 November 1936. BHA Coll\_0288\_06).

<sup>62</sup> Emmy Barth, *An Embassy Besieged* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 249.

<sup>63</sup> See Ian Randall, *A Christian Peace Experiment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018))

<sup>64</sup> John Middleton Murry, *Heaven and Earth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938).

<sup>65</sup> Kathleen Hamilton, Review, *The Plough* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1939), 30–31.

<sup>66</sup> Hardy Arnold, Meeting Transcript, Cotswold Bruderhof, 31 March 1939. BHA Coll 0055.

The hope was that Bruderhof witness could have an increasing impact in Britain, but as *Foundations of our Faith and Calling* (2012) recounts, with the Second World War the British government advised the community either to accept the internment of German nationals (previously refugees, now ‘enemy aliens’) or leave the country. Determined to stay together, they moved, as a community of over 300, to Paraguay. In subsequent decades, after what was a very difficult period, there was freedom to establish communities elsewhere in the world. *Foundations* affirms that the primary example for the Bruderhof is ‘the first church founded at Pentecost in Jerusalem’, and in another link with Early Church tradition, *Foundations* has on its first page ‘The Apostles’ Creed’.<sup>67</sup> *Foundations* also values ‘the *Didache* and the writings of church fathers such as Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, Justin, Tertullian, and Origen’.<sup>68</sup> Not surprisingly, there is a sense of relatedness to communal movements: the Desert Fathers, Celtic Christians, the Beguines and Beghards, followers of Francis of Assisi and Clare, Anabaptists, early Quakers, and Moravians.<sup>69</sup> Although *Foundations* does not mention the ‘Upper Church’, that is still important for the Bruderhof. I was at a Bruderhof meeting in October 2021 and a member who was terminally ill received powerful assurance from all the members that they would be with him as he approached - and these were the words I remember - Eternity and the Upper Church.

## Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this article, a stress on the Communion of Saints might not be anticipated in the Anabaptist tradition. In 2014 a book on Baptist approaches commented on a historic determination to avoid Roman Catholic teaching in this area, but a desire to look at the question afresh.<sup>70</sup> In this context, the perspective that was developed especially by Eberhard Arnold – who was too radical to be concerned about being thought un-Protestant in his theology – is a significant resource. The themes outlined here have been the sense of community, of connection across centuries, of the ‘Upper Church’, the Holy Spirit, and witness. The early vision remains. *Foundations* has a concluding prayer that ‘through Christ what is great and eternal will take hold of us in such a way that it transforms what is small’.<sup>71</sup> When someone in the Bruderhof dies, members share their memories and give thanks. Whole communities are involved in the funeral services, as acts of reverence. Bruderhof graveyards are tended with much love, with gratitude for those who have gone before. Markus Baum writes that Eberhard believed and taught ‘that unity existed between the upper church of the brothers and sisters who had died and the visible

<sup>67</sup> Andy Alexis-Baker, ‘Anabaptist use of patristic literature and creeds’, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, no. 3 (2011): 477-504.

<sup>68</sup> *Foundations*, 23-4.

<sup>69</sup> *Foundations*, 24. Others mentioned include Meister Eckhart, Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Luther, Bach, Handel, John Wesley, Charles Finney, Hudson Taylor, Sadhu Sundar Singh, William and Catherine Booth, Dostoevsky, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, Sophie and Hans Scholl, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Oscar Romero.

<sup>70</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes and Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenanted Disciples* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014). See also Brian Haymes, ‘The Communion of Saints’ *Baptist Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2018): 50-60.

<sup>71</sup> *Foundations*, 81. This refers back to Eberhard Arnold, 20 July 1922.



church incarnate in the believers still on earth. Eberhard knew himself to be surrounded by a cloud of witnesses from every century'.<sup>72</sup> These witnesses (Hebrews 12.1), in the Bruderhof's understanding, are for the whole Church.

## Спільність святих і анабаптиська спільнота: дослідження Брудергофа

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Анотація: Увагу до спільності святих не можна було б передбачити серед тих, хто входить до анабаптистської традиції, оскільки анабаптизм, як рух радикальної Реформації та відокремлення, контрастує з православною, католицькою та протестантською традиціями, які надають чільне місце співпричастю святих. Однак Брудергоф у певний спосіб відрізняється від інших течій анабаптизму. Серед відмінних рис Брудергофа: значний акцент на спільному житті, що говорить про ідеї спільності; глибокий інтерес до писань ранньої Церкви та їх вивчення, відчуття зв'язку з минулим; досвід смерті членів спільноти та розуміння того, що вони є частиною "Високої Церкви"; живе відчуття роботи Святого Духа; і віра в те, що "Висока Церква" надає владу до свідчення. Саме ці теми розглядатимуться у статті. Основна увага зосереджена на перших двох десятиліттях існування руху, і, зокрема, на зверненнях Еберхарда Арнольда як співзасновника і мислителя Брудергофа, хоч у статті розглянуто і сучасне життя руху.

Ключові слова: Брудергоф, Еберхард Арнольд, Висока Церква, вічність.

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<sup>72</sup> Baum, *Against the Wind*, 253.