

A Few Words from Advocates of Radical Christianity

from William Lloyd Garrison

"We cannot acknowledge allegiance to any human government...we recognize but one KING and LAWGIVER, one JUDGE and RULER of mankind. We are bound by the laws of a kingdom which is not of this world; the subjects of which are forbidden to fight; in which MERCY and TRUTH are met together, and RIGHTEOUSNESS and PEACE have kissed each other; which has no state lines, no national partitions, no geographical boundaries; in which there is no distinction of rank, or division of caste, or inequality of sex..." --in 'Declaration of Sentiments' of the Non-Resistance Society

"Another motto we have chosen is 'UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION'...we shall use [this motto] in its widest latitude: the emancipation of our whole race from the dominion of man, from the thralldom of self, from the government of brute force, from the bondage of sin--and bringing them under the dominion...of the law of love..." --in 'The Prospectus of The Liberator, Volume 8', 1837

"It matters not what is the theory of government, if the practice of the government be unjust and tyrannical...In ceasing from oppression, we establish liberty. What is now fragmentary, shall in due time be crystallized, and shine like a gem set in the heavens, for a light to all coming ages." --in a speech in 1844

a few from Christoph Blumhardt

"There is absolutely no justification for war; and we can dare to trust his almighty arm even when that seems a very risky thing to do. We can believe that he will bring peace and, under any circumstances, send signs and wonders from heaven to help us. We need no swords or cannon. We should live and let live. So have mercy upon us, O Lord our God, that finally, thou wilt create the kingdom of peace which thou hast promised."

"The will of God came forth in Jesus' coming forth upon earth. And what is he? He is the friend of men and of human society. And in a very particular way he holds society by what might be called its lowest part--by the miserable, the despised, the poor, by the masses of mankind who go through life unnoticed--this is where Jesus takes hold with a firm hand..."

"Thus we find in the Bible a colossal freedom. There are none of the rules that were first formulated about the time of Jesus. Jesus goes completely beyond them; not even the law of the Sabbath is a rule for him. No sacrifice, no temple, no altar, none of them are rules for Jesus. Nothing of the outward but that of the spirit is God's law.... "

"Truly, within the human structures of sin, we have no lasting home; we must seek what is coming. But what is it, then, that is coming? The revealing of an earth cleansed of sin and death. This is the homeland we seek. There is no other to be sought, because we do not have, and there cannot come to be, anything other than what God intended for us in the creation."

all quotes taken from Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader, available in the Vernard Eller collection at House Church Central

from Nikolai Berdyaev

"Freedom of the spirit which itself gives birth to consequences, which creates life, is revealed to us a bottomlessness, baselessness, as a force from out the boundless deep. We cannot feel a base, a foundation for freedom, nowhere can we find some solid element which determines freedom from within. Freedom of the spirit is a bottomless well. Our substantial nature could not be the basis of freedom. On the contrary, all nature is born of freedom. Freedom proceeds not

from nature, but from God's idea and from the abyss which preceded being. Freedom is rooted in 'nothingness'. The act of freedom is primordial and completely irrational." --from Freedom and the Spirit

"The greatest temptation of human history is the temptation to exercise sovereignty and in it there is concealed a most powerful enslaving force...The whole disquieting and tangled problem of sovereignty is bound up with the fact that man has a natural disposition to dominate others. He is in search of his kingdom and he devotes his strength to the establishment of it, but his kingdom makes him a slave." --from Slavery and Freedom

"Egoism, self-seeking, self-conceit, pride, the will to power, hatred of others, violence, all become virtues when transferred from personality to the nation as a whole...National self-conceit and pride is a lie, just as much as it is by the way ludicrous and stupid...[nationalism precipitates] men into a fictitious and illusory life." --also from Slavery and Freedom

from Henry C. Wright (associate of Garrison's)

"...man is a man and that whoever would hold and use him as something else, is the vilest of robbers, and that those who claim a right of dominion over man, and enforce that claim by an appeal to physical force, and thus treat him as a brute, is a heaven-daring usurper of God's authority over us. For God, and God alone, has a right of dominion over man...the moment a man claims a right to control the will of a fellow being by physical force, he is at heart a slave-holder." --in a letter to Garrison, 1837

"National truth, justice, honor, justice, honesty, responsibility, are names--nought else. As well expect honesty and justice of wild beasts as of nations. No--let states and nations cease to meddle with individual intercourse--let men meet and deal, one with another, the world over..." --in a letter to Garrison, 1844

"Man is never to be sacrificed in his physical, intellectual, social, or spiritual nature, to preserve an institution. The man should never be merged in the citizen, the individual in the organization; but the organization, whether political or religious, should be merged in the individual, and the authority of all governments be in subjection to the authority of each individual soul. How can any man, who respects the nature he bears, sustain an institution, in Church or State, that requires the sacrifice of human life or liberty?" --at the 1857 meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society

from Jacques Ellul

"What constantly marked the life of Jesus was not nonviolence but in every situation the choice not to use power. This is infinitely different." --from What I Believe

"My point is simply this. Among the political options, [Christians] should not rule out anarchism in advance, for in my view this seems to be the position which in this area is closest to biblical thinking...the Christian faith does not bring us into a world of duty and obligation but into a life of freedom." --from Anarchy and Christianity

"And the extraordinary thing is that according to [the Gospels] all powers, all power and glory of the kingdoms, all that has to do with politics and political authority, belongs to the devil. It has all been given to him and he gives it to whom he wills. Those who hold political power receive it from him and depend upon him...[Jesus] refuses the offer of power because the devil demands that he should fall down and worship him." --from Anarchy and Christianity

from Adin Ballou

"One man may not kill. If he kills a fellow creature, he is a murderer. If two, ten, a hundred men do so, they too are murderers. But a government or a nation may kill as many men as it chooses, and that will not be murder, but a great and noble action. Only gather the people together on a large scale, and a battle of ten thousand men becomes an innocent action. But precisely how many people must there be to make it so?, that is the question. One man cannot plunder and pillage, but a whole nation can. But precisely how many are needed to make it permissible? Why is it that one man, ten, a hundred, may not break the law of God, but a great number may?" -- from 'How Many Men Are Necessary to Change a Crime Into a Virtue'

"We are Christians...We belong to that kingdom of 'righteousness, peace, and joy,' which is 'not of this world'; whose throne is holiness, whose scepter is truth, whose greatness is humility, whose pre-eminence is service, whose patriotism is love of enemies, whose heroism is forbearance, whose glory is self-sacrifice, whose wealth is charity, whose triumphs are salvation. Therefore, we can make no earthly object our chief good, nor be governed by any motive but the love of Right, nor compromise duty with worldly convenience, nor seek the preservation of our property, our reputation, our personal liberty, or our life, by the sacrifice of Conscience. We cannot live merely to eat, drink, sleep, gratify our sensual appetites, dress, display ourselves, acquire property, and be accounted great in this world; but to do good." --from 'The Standard of Practical Christianity', in Ballou's Autobiography

"...[non-resistance to evil] alone allows of the possibility of eradicating evil from one's heart, and also from one's neighbor's. This doctrine forbids doing the whereby evil has endured for ages and multiplied in the world. He who attacks another and injures him, kindles in the other a feeling of hatred, the root of every evil...Satan can never be driven out by Satan...True non-resistance is the only real resistance to evil...It can be put into practice like every virtue enjoined by the law of God...Non-Resistance is Salvation; Resistance is Ruin." --from 'Catechism of Non-Resistance'

from Martin Luther King Jr.

"Nowhere is the tragic tendency to conform more evident than in the church...The erstwhile sanction by the church of slavery, racial segregation, war, and economic exploitation is testimony to the fact that the church has hearkened more to the authority of the world than to the authority of God. Called to be the moral guardian of the community, the church at times has preserved that which is immoral and unethical. Called to combat social evils, it has remained silent behind stained-glass windows. Called to lead men on the highway of brotherhood and to summon them to rise above the narrow confines of race and class, it has enunciated and practiced racial exclusiveness."

"[Unenforceable] obligations are met by one's commitment to an inner law, written on the heart. Man-made laws assure justice, but a higher law produces love. No code of conduct ever persuaded a father to love his children or a husband to show affection to his wife. The law court may force him to provide bread for the family, but it cannot make him provide the bread of love. A good father is obedient to the unenforceable."

"In spite of the fact that the law of revenge solves no social problems, men continue to follow its disastrous leading...Jesus eloquently affirmed from the cross a higher law. He knew that the old eye-for-an-eye philosophy would leave everyone blind. He did not seek to overcome evil with evil. He overcame evil with good. Although crucified with hate, he responded with aggressive love...the lesson of Calvary will be a nagging reminder that only goodness can drive out evil and only love can conquer hate."

these quotes taken from King's famous book, Strength to Love.

some from Leo Tolstoy

"In spite of the obvious insipidity of the assertion that men are in danger from the attack of the government of other states, which assert that they, in spite of their desire for peace, are in the same danger; in spite of the degradation of that slavery to which men are subjected when they enter the army; in spite of the cruelty of the business to which they are called, men submit to the deception, give up their own money for their own enslavement, and themselves enslave one another." --from Two Wars

"The people of our time, especially the scholars, have become so gross that they do not understand, and in their grossness cannot even understand, the significance and the influence of spiritual force. A charge of ten thousand pounds of dynamite sent into a crowd of living men--that they understand, and in that they see strength; but an idea, truth, which has been realized, has been introduced into life to the point of martyrdom, has become accessible to millions--that is according to their conception not force, because it does not boom and you do not see broken bones and puddles of blood." --from Two Wars

"I renounced the life of [the upper] class, having recognized that it is not life but only a semblance of life, and that the conditions of luxury in which we live deprive us of the possibility of understanding life. I knew that in order to comprehend life I must understand the life not of the minority of those of us who are parasites, but of the simple working people, and of the meaning they give to life. The ordinary working people around me were the Russian people and it was to them I turned, and to the meaning they give to life. The meaning, if it is possible to describe, is as follows. Every person comes into the world through the will of God. And God created man in such a way that each of us can either destroy his soul or save it. Man's purpose in life is to save his soul; in order to save his soul he must live according to God." --from A Confession

"The Christian religion is not a legal system which, being imposed by violence, may transform men's lives. Christianity is a new and higher conception of life. A new conception of life cannot be imposed on men; it can only be freely assimilated." --from The Kingdom of God is Within You

"If we feel no astonishment at the contrast between our convictions and our conduct, that is because the influences, tending to obscure the contrast, produce an effect upon us too. We need only look at our life from the point of view of that [new convert], who understood Christianity in its true significance, without any compromise or concessions, we need but look at the savage brutalities of which our life is full, to be appalled at the contradictions in the midst of which we live often without observing them." --from The Kingdom of God is Within You

"The Christian is independent of every human authority by the fact that he regards the divine law of love, implanted in the soul of every man, and brought before his consciousness by Christ, as the sole guide of his life and other men's also." --from The Kingdom of God is Within You

"Every war, even the most humanely conducted, with all the ordinary consequences, the destruction of harvests, robberies, the license and debauchery, and the murder with the justifications of its necessity and justice, the exaltation and glorification of military exploits, the worship of the flag, the patriotic sentiments, the feigned solicitude for the wounded, and so on, does more in one year to pervert men's minds than thousands of robberies, murders, and arsons

perpetrated during hundreds of years by individual men under the influence of passion." --from
The Kingdom of God is Within You

"The most important thing is that Christianity proclaims the equality of all men, no longer merely as a basic teaching of universal brotherhood, but because all men are recognized as sons of God. It would therefore seem impossible to twist Christianity in such a way as to destroy awareness of equality between all men." --from What is Religion and Of What Does its Essence Consist?

"In order to prove that all men are equal and that it is better for a man to give his own life in service to others than to compel others to serve him, thereby trampling on their lives, the relationship to the world must be defined in another way: it must be shown that man's position is such that there is nothing else he can do, since the meaning of life is found only in fulfilling the will of Him who sent him here; and the will of Him who sent him is that he should give his life to the service of others." --from Religion and Morality

"The State is only a temporary thing and in no way a permanent feature of human life. Just as the life of an individual person is not static, but is continually changing, moving forward and perfecting itself, so too the life of the whole of humanity does not cease to change, to move on and perfect itself. Each separate individual has at some point in his life drunk from his mother's breast, played with toys, studied, worked, married, raised children, freed himself from passion and grown wiser with age...As with people, the main changes occur in the spiritual, invisible realms, so too with humanity the main changes occur, first and foremost, in the invisible sphere of religious consciousness." --from The Law of Love and the Law of Violence

"Understand, all of you, that you were born neither to be slaves, nor to be masters; that you are free men, but that you only become free and rational when you fulfill the supreme law of life. This law has been revealed to you, and you need only discard those lies which conceal it from you to be able to see clearly of what this law consists and in what your happiness consists. This law consists in love, and well-being is only found in the fulfillment of this law. Realize it and you will become truly free and acquire everything that you now vainly seek through those complicated means to which you are attracted by confused and corrupted men, who believe in nothing." --from The Law of Love and the Law of Violence

from various others....

from Hans Denck, 16th century Anabaptist:

"...security will exist, also in outward things, with practice of the true Gospel that each will let the other move and dwell in peace...not submitting to a magistrate. Is there anything more to be desired?...Everyone among all people may move around in the name of his God. That is to say, no one shall deprive another---whether heathen or Jew or Christian, but rather allow everyone to move in all territories in the name of his God. So we may benefit in the peace which God gives."

from George Fox, early English Quaker:

"Friends, live in the seed of God, that destroys the devil, who is the author and cause of wars and strife, and bringing of men and people into the earth, where the war, pride and strife is; here the outward swordsmen have not yet learned to beat their swords and spears into ploughshares and pruning hooks...But he that killeth with the sword, must perish with the sword...there is a time,

when nations shall not learn war anymore, but shall come to that, which shall take away the occasion of wars, which was in the beginning, before the wars were."

from Peter Helchitsky, Taborite religious dissenter:

"Christ, by means of his disciples would have caught all the world in his net of faith, but the greater fishes broke the net and escaped out of it, and all the rest have slipped through the holes made by the greater fishes, so the net has remained quite empty. The greater fishes who broke the net are the rulers, emperors, popes, kings, who have not renounced power, and instead of true Christianity have put on what is simply a mask of it."

from René Girard, 20th century French philosopher:

"To recognize Christ as God is to recognize him as the only being capable of rising above the violence that had up to that point absolutely transcended mankind. Violence is the controlling agent in every form of mythic or cultural structure, and Christ is the only agent who is capable of escaping from these structures and freeing us from their dominance...A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence--by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence."

from Valentin Weigel, 16th century German mystic:

"The man who has the Christ-Life in him does not quarrel; he does not go to law for temporal goods; he does not kill...but now [Christ] is tender, kind, loving. He kills no one. The Lamb kills no wolf...Where the Life of Christ is, there is no war made with corporeal weapons...The world wars but Christ doth not so. His warfare is spiritual...We walk no longer under Moses but under Christ."

from Reinhold Niebuhr, 20th century American theologian:

"Politics always aims at some kind of a harmony or balance of interest, and such a harmony cannot be regarded as directly related to the final harmony of love of the Kingdom of God. All men are naturally inclined to obscure the morally ambiguous element in their political cause by investing it with religious sanctity. This is why religion is more frequently a source of confusion than of light in the political realm. The tendency to equate our political with our Christian convictions causes politics to generate idolatry."

Conclusion

While I no longer consider the term "Christian" appropriate for what I believe (for info on what I do believe, this page will be the source), the anarcho-Christian position has a rich and diverse tradition. From the overt anarchism of Ammon Hennacy, Jacques Ellul, and Leo Tolstoy, to the libertarian-inspired Christian visions of Søren Kierkegaard, Vernard Eller, and Nikolai Berdyaev, to the radical rejection of worldly/bourgeois politics found in William Lloyd Garrison, Henry Wright, and much of the early Reinhold Niebuhr (and even a little of Karl Barth's thought), many persons in history could be considered to be one version or another of the "Christian anarchist". I think that anarchism, like Ellul, noted is one of the positions most consistent with Christian ideas and beliefs. While I feel that Christianity--as it has been imagined since the time of Christ--needs a re-tooling of monolithic proportions, certain works in the anarcho-Christian and radical Christian traditions merit attention. They are:

writings of radical pre-Reformation heretics (Jan Huss, Peter Helchitsky, e.g.)

writings of the Radical Reformation (like Denck)

The True Leveller's Standard, by Gerrard Winstanley

writings of the Quakers (George Fox, John Woolman, e.g.)

writings of the radical abolitionists (William Lloyd Garrison, Henry Wright, e.g.)
Attack Upon Christendom and Fear and Trembling, by Søren Kierkegaard
The Kingdom of God is Within You and The Law of Violence and the Law of Love, by Leo Tolstoy
Freedom and the Spirit and Slavery and Freedom, by Nikolai Berdyaev
The Book of Ammon, by Ammon Hennacy
Strength to Love, by Martin Luther King, Jr.
Anarchy and Christianity, by Jacques Ellul
Christian Anarchism, by Vernard Eller