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Tax Statement

Ammon Hennacy

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Autobiography of a Catholic Anarchist, Ammon Hennacy (1954)

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Now on Jan. 14, 1950 I mailed a statement to Mr. Stuart, Collector of Internal Revenue in Phoenix explaining why I was refusing to pay my income tax. It said:

As a non-church Christian Anarchist and a follower of Gandhi the man of the Half-Century, I refuse to pay my income tax for the seventh consecutive time. Enclosed find my statement of earnings in 1949. I have instructed my various farm employers that I am working for nothing on the day that you come to garnishee my wages, so that I receive nothing, and so do you. As in the time of Matthew, the tax-gatherer (aside from the hangman) has been the least honorable of the human species. However I hold no ill will against you personally. Your allegiance is to Caesar; mine is to God.

I believe that the state is immoral inasmuch as it lives by war and operates by the return of evil for evil in legislatures, courts and prisons.

I believe that the church un-Christian and immoral in upholding war and this return of evil for evil by the state, thus denying the Sermon on the Mount. There are millions of well-meaning Christian people who pay taxes for war. How, then, do I set myself up to judge them? In older times prophets came out of the desert who

warned the people of certain destruction awaiting them because of their evil ways. Today we cannot wait for leaders, but all of us who pay for the Bomb must take our responsibility. The extreme of the Atom Bomb brings the need for the extreme message of Christ: the Sermon on the Mount. The following ethical analysis leads up to such action as I and a few others have been and are taking. Love without Courage and Wisdom is Sentimentality, as with the ordinary church member. Courage without Love and Wisdom is Foolhardiness, as with the ordinary soldier. Wisdom without Courage and Love is Cowardice, as with the ordinary intellectual. Therefore, one who has Love, Wisdom and Courage is the one in a hundred million who moves the world, as with Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi. The people in this country who approximate this difficult ideal are the leaders of the Catholic Worker Movement who publish the Christian Anarchist monthly, the CATHOLIC WORKER.

The argument is an old one, old as Jesus driving the money changers out of the Temple and being crucified for His rebellion against the corrupt church of His time. It is as old as Socrates who drank the hemlock rather than cater to the corrupt politicians of his time. It is as old as Tolstoy who defied the Czar and the subservient Orthodox Church which enslaved the Russian people. It is as old as Gandhi, who by his non-violent Satyagraha campaigns overcame the great British Empire and his chief detractor, Churchill, who called him a “naked fakir.” I am acting in the tradition which Jefferson, Paine and Emerson gave to this country. I am acting in the tradition of the early Quakers who refused to pay taxes for war and openly broke the law by hiding escaped slaves. I am practicing the same idea as that of Thoreau who refused to pay taxes for the Mexican War and slavery.

The refusal of myself and a few others to pay taxes will not stop World War III, the continuance of conscription, and the fraud of the Welfare State now being slipped over on the American people. The question is not “Can we change the world?” but “Can we keep the world from changing us?” The Unforgivable Sin is that committed

by our politicians, clerical and intellectual leaders when they make pipsqueaks of young folk who start life with high ideals. In the past a few men like William Lloyd Garrison and Eugene V. Debs stood in the way of evil politicians and corrupt union leaders. Today those few who might speak the truth have been fooled into becoming leaders of pressure groups. If they get something for their group at the expense of the rest of us they have won their battle — and their own individual life pension.

The fallacy of seeking to change the other fellow and to get his name on the dotted line for some party, union, religion, or other pressure group has prevented people from doing the one thing which they are capable of doing which is to change themselves, to refuse to be a part of the dominant lie, to live the truth no matter what the consequences. In order to do this one must not have much baggage; one must live a life of voluntary poverty, of dedication to the ideal.

The validity of this proposed action is supported by the following analysis of events and trends in present day society. The great mass of people are kept busy gaining a living and in being victims of “escape” activities of their senseless world, rather than in trying to think matters through on the coming war and the Servile State. To those who are ready to question the acts and purposes of their lives this summary, though harsh, is essentially true.

The whole propaganda of the capitalist and high-up clergy against Communism is a camouflage; their cry for Free Enterprise and Freedom of the Will, for the American Way of Life, and against the Servile and Welfare State does not come with good grace. The capitalist who grew rich at the expense of the small business man, the farmer, and labor, now cries against subsidies granted to others than himself. The dominant clergy, whose churches pay no taxes on their immense holdings and who do not have an Inquisition and a state-supported church, or the old Puritan Blue Laws and Prohibition simply because they cannot get away with it, now wish released time for so-called religious education in the

schools and free bus transportation for parochial schools. The capitalist is not interested in Free Enterprise; he is interested in his freedom to exploit you. The dominant clergy are not interested in your exercise of Free Will but seek to enslave you to their dogma and will.

To oppose the enemies of Communism does not mean that I approve of Communism. The racket of the capitalist and the clergy has been exchanged for the racket of the Commissar. Real communism was practiced by the early Christians, who also refused allegiance to Caesar in the army and refused to go to court, one who did so being denied communion. There is no communism in Russia today, only state capitalism. They have not been used to freedom so do not miss it. In this country we are free to talk but few pay attention because of the noise of the Mammon Arts. Capitalism is doomed. It cannot last because its machinery produces more than the wages given to workers can buy back. Hence the depressions and wars. Despite the give-away Marshall plan (we fought two wars and are not free from England yet) and the talk of Christian missionaries about a Jesus whom they have, perhaps unconsciously, discarded for churchianity and worship of capitalism, the Communists are destined to rule the world as capitalism continues to fall. Whether the Christians will become true followers again when they are forced underground and whether a free civilization can emerge when the Communist dictatorship falls of its own weight of bureaucracy and tyranny is a question.

The efforts of the confused man in the White House with his deficit spending and election promises of increased income for everyone, and with his hypocritical quoting of the Sermon on the Mount will be of no avail. His one good quality is his loyalty to his fellow gangsters. The only part of the Sermon on the Mount he practices is where it says: "Give to him that asketh of thee and to him who would borrow of thee turn thou not away." Only it is not his increased income that is squandered but the heritage of the American people. The Republicans are not better for they advo-

cate such policies as pouring money into the dead-end of Formosa. Meanwhile big trust funds and Democratic politicians are relieved of full payment of taxes and the poor man has his taxes withheld to pay for the atom bomb and future and past wars. The only reason that the Fascist Franco has not been officially blessed is that our politicians do not feel that they can put it across.

There is a way of life that is not at the same time a way of death. (Armaments and war preparations have not saved any nation, but only aggravated wars.) It takes something more than conversation and prayers to attain this New Way of Life. If we believe in something differing from this dog-eat-dog system under which we live we have to act as if we believed it. This means that we cannot be a part of the system which lives upon Rent, Interest, Profit, and the weaknesses and vices of its members. If we mean business we cannot register for the draft, pay taxes for war, accept ration, social security, pension or subsidy from the government which we consider immoral. We will then have to simplify our lives and live on the land. We must be producers, not parasites. We cannot vote or ask for police protection but must know that "All things work together for good to those who love God." Despite our white man's arrogance, we must not permit ourselves to be deluded into thinking that we have something to offer the primitive people, such as the Hopi Indians, whose civilization without war and government can teach us many lessons.

I do not intend to pay any income tax now or in the future, and plan to picket your office on March 14th. in protest against payment of taxes, not only for war and the bomb, but for the support of an anti-Christian government which denies the Sermon on the Mount daily.

Sincerely, Ammon A. Hennacy