

Preface to the transcribed version of: Autobiography of a Catholic Anarchist.

Every spring, at the library of St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a book sale is offered to the public. On one such occasion, my daughter was ahead in the browsing and said, in voice everyone could hear, "Dad, here's a book about somebody like you, a Catholic Anarchist!" As people in that section of the library looked up at me, I was stunned that anyone would think of me in those terms, as an *Anarchist*, with images of bomb-throwing, assassinating thugs racing through my mind. She had already earned a bachelor's degree in History, and almost completed her Master's, so I knew she had an understanding of what an Anarchist meant. Perhaps, I thought, she had confused an Anarchist with a non-conformist, that would have made more sense. And the proper adjective Catholic? Yet, she said it with such conviction that I had to get the book; after reading it I took her label as a complement, although undeserved when compared to Mr. Hennacy.

So began my education on Tolstoy philosophy, on pacifistic Anarchism, and of Catholic Workers through the memories of Ammon Hennacy. Most important among these schools of thought is the centrality of the Sermon on the Mount. Through his writings, Mr. Hennacy conveys his innate understanding of those notions¹ put forth on that day by Jesus of Nazareth. Through his actions, Mr. Hennacy lives up to the conscious, and always difficult, decision to live by the Sermon. After some 2,000 years, there are extremely few among us who can honestly say the same.

The imitation of Christ is usually regarded to be in the domain of saints. Mr. Hennacy shows us that we do not have to be saints to *endeavor* to be Christ-like, that we can be responsible for ourselves and still, *at the very least*, not contribute to the machinery of war and other oppressions. That this can be achieved is the kernel in Mr. Hennacy's thinking. Crucial to this kernel is the individual responsibility to realize these Christ-like notions in thought **and** action. That this realization can be spanned across the space of the overall population, one by one, is what Mr. Hennacy (borrowed from Robert Frost) calls the One-Man Revolution².

Much can be said regarding the practicality of Mr. Hennacy's philosophy; usually it takes the form of a dismissal by those not willing to engage in this intellectual exercise. It is curious though, in a society which professes Christian heritage, that when someone not part of a religious order lives out the temporal persuasions of Christianity they are regarded, at the very least, as strange. Sometimes these societal misfits are seen, by those challenged by these notions,

¹Included in the Sermon are the Beatitudes, the Our Father, and the Golden Rule.

²The 20th century Japanese agronomist Masanobu Fukuoka proposed a similar label for his organic, naturally sustainable, agricultural methods called a "One Straw Revolution". Ultimately, for Mr. Fukuoka, sustainable agriculture will be achieved when an individual (rice) straw is in harmony with nature and is attainable by all straw; likewise for Hennacy (and Tolstoy) the Kingdom of God all around us will be apparent when the "One Man Revolution" is attained by all of us.

as a threat to society.

Setting aside the hypocrisies associated with those issuing these dismissals, there is a hint of truth in their arguments for governmental oversight; humans *do* possess violent tendencies, vengeful traits, false pride, greedy habits and power ambitions, to name a few undesirable attributes. Perhaps these and other attributes are traceable to a biological, possibly evolutionary, baggage we still carry around. In some sense, this load might be considered the “original sin” we are all born with. It becomes, therefore, our “cross” to overcome this load, wholeheartedly, *every day*, in order to follow Christ. To transcend these predatory attributes becomes the goal in achieving a near Christ-like existence in present day, when so much has changed since the days in which we probably needed them for survival.

However, for the first time in our existence as a species it is within our power to produce enough harm onto this Earth, a destruction so vast and extensive that it is usually reserved for the geological and astronomical scale. We are, at this point in evolution and more than any previous time, in possession of our own destiny, welcomed or not. It becomes, therefore, *our* responsibility not to allow the above flavor of original sin to be expressed through *predatory government and commerce*, leading us to perdition. The thesis here may well be that it is impractical for Humanity *not* to assume Mr. Hennacy’s philosophy.

From early on, civilizations have forged a relationship between wealth, power and government, and this paradigm still holds strong to this day. This book is an autobiography but it is put forth in the mantle of Mr. Hennacy’s thoughts regarding the above paradigm, it’s relationship to Christianity and how to live in a Christ-like manner with the reality of government. The understanding taken here is to have a navigational goal by which to set a direction in one’s life. Even if the goal itself is deemed unattainable we can, at a minimum, discern the appropriate direction to navigate toward. Christian and other religious teachings exemplify this for spirituality and pacifistic Anarchism thought exemplifies it for government. Mr. Hennacy synthesizes the two by living out the notion that both ideals are intertwined and the closer we get to these navigational goals the better off we will be, individually and as a society. This asymptotic approach should not be discarded because the goal is out of reach, as some might argue. Mr. Hennacy lives out this approach in his deliberation of Catholicism and in his interpretation of Anarchism to show by example that we can, as flawed humans, get “close enough”.

In congruence with Mr. Hennacy’s intentions I have transcribed his book using open-source GNU/Linux software³ and is freely available, asking only that if you use this material in other works that you acknowledge the original source,

³The text was scanned with XSane, OCR’ed with Gocr, edited with Emacs, and offset with Lyx. Open source *hardware* can also be a powerful tool for breaking the grip of predatory corporations (and banks) by decentralizing manufacturing and bringing it to local communities, where it belongs. This approach minimizes waste and surplus with “as needed production” through small, generalized, fabrication units (achievable with modern technology, such as open source CNC). Contrary to the current manufacturing system, and popular myths about patents and copyrights, this approach encourages innovation and brings robustness to both products and society.

on your honor and not under a governmental threat of imprisonment or fine. It is hoped that this edition will exceed the original 3000 prints made, so please copy and circulate this print, with or without this preface. I have included digitized renderings of the non-copyright statement and of the original salutation by Mr. Hennacy to Peter and Florence van Dresser (friends of Mr. Hennacy and are mentioned in the book for their pioneering efforts toward energy self-reliance). It is my guess that the van Dresser estate donated this treasure of a book to St. John's College which, in turn, let it slip through their fingers. Perhaps this is an example of Mr. Hennacy's "Celestial Bulldozer".

I thank the reader for your interest and hope you enjoy Ammon's book as much as I did.

Scott L. Williams
Santa Fe, New Mexico
July 11, 2007