

### For your reflection

Fr. Arnold writes:

From my youth on, intercessory prayer had always made a deep impression on me. I saw how necessary it is for other people ...Therefore it pained me that ... almost all prayers in prayer books, Ways of the Cross and public devotions turned around one's own poor person. Certainly, everybody has to think, I am poor and need prayers. However, if in spite of that he offers most prayers for others and thinks of himself only in the last place, not out of pride, but because of his love for God and neighbor, the good God will listen to that person's prayer for himself just as well as if he would want to pray twice or three times as much only for himself (Arnold Janssen, Persönliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1906 [personal notes from the year 1906], ed. P. Albert Rohner, Analecta SVD 55. Rome 1981, pp. 84-85).

### Arnold Janssen's consecration to the church's missionary work

Now that we reflect upon the last days of our founder, it may be appropriate that we remember the spiritual foundation upon which Fr. Arnold had built his missionary life. This, for instance, is shown very well in the two prayers of consecration of 1875 and 1876.

On June 16, 1876, Fr. Arnold and his first companions – each in his own place of residence – consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the missionary work of the new mission house which was about to be founded in Steyl. Having made that consecration, they added another prayer “which referred to the intended work. Later on the same prayer was changed a bit and then received the following wording with which in the mission house vows were made during the first years” (H. auf der Heide, Die Missionsgesellschaft von Steyl. Ein Bild der ersten 25 Jahre ihres Bestehens [The missionary society of Steyl, a picture of its first 25 years], Steyl 1900, p. 36). The following is a small extract from this prayer: “...With regard to the fervent wishes of Your Most Sacred Heart, which in such a special way are directed towards the spread of your holy kingdom upon earth, I, prostrate before you, my creator, redeemer and sustainer, make my poor person available to your divine heart with regard to the mission work of your holy church, insofar as participation in it is striven for in this house; and at first I do so for the next three years, beginning today... May the light of your divine word shine in the darkness of sin and the night of paganism, and may the Sacred Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people! Amen (ibid., pp. 36-37).

After Fr. Arnold and John Baptist Anzer had agreed on new statutes for the mission house, on June 16, 1876 both “took their perpetual vows on these statutes in the form of a prayer of consecration” (Alt, Journey in Faith, p. 126). Here now are extracts from this prayer:

“...Already truly prostrated before your face, for the increase of your honor and the greater spread of your kingdom on earth, in honor of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus... and for the salvation of souls we promise you the following: The wishes of your most holy Son are mine, and I will work insofar as I possibly can for the spread on earth of your holy gospel that saves, illumines and vivifies souls and destroys the kingdom of your enemy, the devil: particularly amongst those pagan peoples who do not yet know you as the Redeemer of all, who loves them so much, who shed your precious blood for all ... I want to be a servant of the Divine Word in the service of the King and Queen of angels .... All that I do should serve the Divine Word for the spread of his word; my tongue is to serve your divine words, and through my limited service – with the help of all angels and saints – may the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people. Amen ... May the light of the sweet Divine Word shine in the darkness of sin and the night of paganism (SVD Generalate, Arnold Janssen Archives. Nos. 3.720-3.721 – transl. from Latin - JO).



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Missionshaus Steyl | Postfach 2460 | D-41311 Nettetal ■ Missiehuis St. Michaël | St. Michaëlstr. 7 | NL-5935 BL Steyl/Venlo

## The Arnoldus Family Story

When Arnold Janssen suffered a stroke and his active life came to an abrupt end, he was not living in St. Michael's mission house, but – from November 1905 – in the former convent of the Mission – and Adoration Sisters, today's St. Gregory; he actually lived in that part of the convent which had belonged to the Adoration Sisters, and his room was their former dining room.



St. Gregory - room in which Arnold Janssen lived and died

With the exception of Fr. Blum, the General Councilors resided there as well. So the former Sisters' convent had become the SVD generalate. Furthermore, the postulants and their postulant master stayed there and lastly there was the infirmary for the sick priests, brothers and students.

### 100 years ago – December 1908

On **December 4**, Fr. Rector Craghs reported in the chronicle of St. Michael's mission house Fr. Arnold's praise – though with some reservations – of Fr. Blum who since November 1 had been in charge of the administration of the Society and the Sisters' congregation: “ ‘I notice you have good qualities and I would wish you would acquire those you do not yet possess.’ Later he said he wanted to write to Rome suggesting Blum be appointed superior general. Governing as assistant general was of little use. Then Blum objected: ‘But, supposing you get better again?’ Yes, he would also have to face that question” (Alt, Journey in Faith, The Missionary Life of Arnold Janssen, p. 1003).

Br. Cyriacus Lobeck remembers that during the month of December, Fr. Arnold's health improved slightly (Bornemann, Nachrichten über Krankheit und Tod unseres Stifters [Concerning the sickness and death of our founder], Verbum Supplementum 10, Rome 1969, p. 71). He must have felt strong enough to chair a general council meeting and, according to Fr. Rector Cragh's entry in the chronicle of St. Michael's mission house, on **December 9** Fr. Superior General “called a meeting of the general council; began as usual; they were all tense; began to explain his method of making the Way of the Cross; then asked for the New Guinea files; but soon gave up” (Alt, Journey in Faith, p. 1003).

In the chronicle of the Motherhouse of the Adoration Sisters we read about this December 9:

Fr. Director General [auf der Heide] phoned Reverend Mother and told her: "...Fr. Superior General was feeling better, and today he had been in the garden, accompanied by a brother. It might well be that he could recover so much that he could celebrate Holy Mass once again. But at this point in time there could be no thought of it yet (Chronik des Mutterhauses der Klausurschwestern [Chronicle of the mother house of the cloistered sisters] Steyl (II), p. 204). However, Fr. auf der Heide was wrong about this as the following story shows. From November 1 onwards Fr. Arnold had not been able to celebrate Holy Mass. In a letter to Bishop Henninghaus in China of December 21, 1908 he had told the bishop the reason why he had been unable to say Mass: It was actually only a very 'small matter'. "Since my hands were paralyzed, I was not able to bring the index finger and thumb of my hands together so that with these four fingers I could have broken the host" (Alt, Arnold Janssen SVD, Briefe to China [Letters to China], Rome 2002. vol. III, p. 280). But then a change for the better happened, for the paralysis had receded slightly. Fr. Bodems recalls:

*After evening prayers of December 17, he [Fr. Arnold] sent several Brothers to me telling me to come immediately. At once I wanted to go to him, but I already met him standing in front of the door of my room. Beaming with joy he said: "I can, I can." "What do you mean?" I asked him. He lifted up both hands, moved thumbs and index fingers and repeated: "I can, I can." When I once again asked, what it was that he could, he raised the hands up to his head similar to the priest during consecration. When I then said: "You mean you could celebrate Holy Mass", he answered jubilantly with joy: "Yes, yes! That is what I mean." Very early next morning Very Reverend Father stood at the altar and offered – with great effort, though – the holy sacrifice. In the course of the day he repeatedly spoke about the great joy that today he had been able to once again celebrate Holy Mass" (Bornemann, Nachrichten... – Concerning the sickness and death..., p. 75).*

During this Mass Fr. Bodems assisted him. From now on Fr. Arnold was able to celebrate holy Mass every day, assisted by a priest. "Because of the abstinence regulation he did so soon after midnight. As Mass formula he used the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit which he knew by heart" (Alt, Journey in Faith, p. 1004).

According to Fr. auf der Heide, Fr. Arnold used to spend rather a long time praying in the Generalate chapel. At noon time, accompanied by a brother, he would go into the garden to pray the Way of the Cross, "repeating the indulgenced prayer 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph', which he had come to love very much." Other favorite prayers of his were "Veni Sancte Spiritus" [Come, Holy Spirit] and "O Domina mea, o Mater mea" [O my Lady, O my Mother]. It was touching to hear him say 'God have mercy on me, a sinner!', 'the Lord God is full of love and gentleness! I have to be so grateful to him!' (Chronicle of the mother house of the Missionary Sisters, 1908-1911, Sr. Paula Anna Jostock, p. 37).

Br. Cyriacus tells us something similar: "For a conspicuously long time Fr. Superior General used to stay in the Generalate chapel during these weeks. For hours at a time he knelt or sat there, gazing at the altar or [after Christmas] the crib. What he was

working out there with our dear Lord is beyond our knowing. But we might make a guess. He saw and felt and also spoke about the fact that he was approaching death, he was worn out. Since he could no longer work for the Society, he used the time to pray for it and to place the hour of his death into the hands of the Lord. I often felt strangely melancholic when I could see the dear, good, spiritual father of the whole society now so broken in body and partly also in spirit" (Bornemann, Nachrichten ...- Concerning the sickness and death..., p. 72).

So happy was Fr. Arnold that he was feeling better that on **December 21**, he had written the following to the confreres in Togo: "Because of the interest expressed in my partial recovery, I believe I owe you the following information. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for all your prayers for me; perhaps I owe to them the improvement that I am experiencing now. I have once again celebrated holy Mass..." (Arnold Janssen Archives, Generalate SVD, no. 42.672a).

On **December 24** Fr. Arnold tried to announce the daily order for Christmas; but he did not manage.

On **Christmas day**, accompanied by Br. Damian, he visited the sick Brothers in their dining room. On the second day of Christmas, so Br. Cyriacus tells us, "the Brothers' brass band played some numbers for Fr. Superior General which he enjoyed very much. Then he also said: "You know that one Brother, you all know him, turns 75 today and that is quite something." The Brothers looked at one another, then some remembered that Reverend Fr. Superior meant the venerable Br. Jacob, who was 75, and they said: "Yes, Br. Jacob, Fr. Superior General." – "Yes, yes, it's him, he must come here." ... When he came, Fr. Superior General took his hand and said: "So, now you must play a nice piece in honor of Jacob." Then he had three cheers given for Jacob. It was a beautiful picture: Fr. Superior General supporting himself with one arm on his daily guide, the white haired Damian, and with his right hand holding the hand of Jacob who looked so venerable (Bornemann, Nachrichten ... Concerning the sickness and death..., p. 72).

In the chronicle of the mother house of the Missionary Sisters we read about Fr. Arnold's last December days:

**December 31:** Having arrived at the last day of the year 1908, which is a rather cold day, we still get relatively good news from Rev. Fr. Director General [auf der Heide], since he is the one who most often can be with the patient. .. He still gets up every night to celebrate holy Mass. ... After Christmas he usually said Mass at the crib-altar which is his most favorite place. However, of late the news is not the best. Even though, because of the improvement in the health of our beloved spiritual father and founder, for the time being we can still have some hope, we are all rather depressed. The usual Christmas joy just cannot come through this year. And since nobody knows how quickly the new year will take our revered founder, father and shepherd from us, we cannot welcome it with a joyful heart. The sick father himself seems to feel best that the end is coming closer and closer. To a niece who visited him he said that he would not see the month of February (Chronicle of the mother house of the Missionary Sisters, 1908-1911, Sr. Paula Anna Jostock. Pp. 37-38).