

letter on January 11, 1874: “I welcome with great joy the above proposed project of establishing a German mission house for the foreign missions and I express my congratulations; however I believe that the present times are not opportune for the execution of this project because of the serious disagreement between church and state and because of the lack of priests in various dioceses caused by the expulsion of religious priests” (ibid., p. 56).

In spite of the difficulties mentioned by Archbishop Melchers, on January 14, 1874 Dr. von Essen sent a letter to Cardinal Barnabo, the Prefect of the Propaganda in Rome. He described his plan to found in Germany or Austria a mission seminary for China, modeled on the mission seminary in Scheut, and he added: “In case that the Holy See should give its approval, I am willing to get this project off the ground for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls” (ibid., p. 58). He sent this letter to Rome via the Apostolic Nuncio in Brussels / Belgium. The Nuncio added a few thoughts of his own: “The present times are not favorable for this project; however, right now Dr. von Essen just wishes the papal blessing and the Propaganda’s approval for making the more remote preparations, in order to begin then later when the right moment has come.” Superior General Vranckx was also active in Rome on Dr. von Essen’s behalf and he first of all wrote to the Apostolic Prefect Raimondi who was in Rome at that time and who as Procurator for China should be interested in a new mission seminary for China. Raimondi then spoke about the project to the Secretary of the Propaganda, Simeoni. Fr. Vranckx also notified his own agent in Rome, Fr. Gennevoise, of Dr. von Essen’s plan who then discussed the plan with the Propaganda’s secretary, Simeoni, and its Prefect, Cardinal Barnabo. Since the Cardinal died in February, it took until April 8 that his successor, Cardinal Franchi, answered Dr. von Essen’s letter from January 14. “Franchi’s letter said that he had not failed to inform the pope about von Essen’s project. ‘Although His Holiness knows that such a project can hardly be realized now because of the present difficulties, he nevertheless feels obliged to welcome your Reverence’s plan warmly, since such an institute can only benefit our holy religion. In order that you may bring this work to a happy ending, His Holiness gives you from his heart his Apostolic blessing’” (Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The founding...*, p. 505).

In a letter from April 25, 1874 Superior General Fr. Valckx informed Dr. von Essen that Prefect Apostolic Raimondi would come to Scheut / Belgium and he added: “It will be most useful if you make his acquaintance. Later on, when you are going to look for a mission in China, he can be of great help for you” (Bornemann, *Der Pfarrer von Neuwerk...*, p. 65).

On May 22, 1874 Prefect Apostolic Raimondi did visit Monsignor Dr. von Essen in Neuwerk.



The Arnoldus Family Story

Arnold Janssen’s interest in China

In January 1874 Arnold Janssen founded his mission magazine “Kleiner Herz Jesu Bote” – “Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. At that time he was director of the Apostleship of Prayer for his home diocese of Muenster. Being a member of that Apostleship he made the intentions of Jesus his own (see ‘The Arnoldus Family Story’, No. 12, January 2008). In the April 1874 issue of the “Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” he wrote that those intentions in a very special way referred to China.

“China arouses the interest of Jesus in a very special way” he wrote, and that is because of the multitude of people living there. With 555 million people China, so he continues, is “the most populated country of the world.” Amongst them there are a few million Moslems and about half a million Catholics. The number 555 million must have attracted Fr. Arnold’s attention very much, for he wrote:

“555 million, what a huge number this is! According to the most exact statistics which the writer of this article was able to find, in 1872 the number of all the Catholics throughout the world was 200 and a half million. And now there are 555 million people living in this country who are not Christians, almost three times as many as Catholics all over the earth. 555 million! an enormous empire. That is more than one third of the world’s population, whose number we calculated as 1588 million.”

Fr. Arnold made the intentions of Jesus his own and as China, “the most populated country in the world”, had aroused the special interest of Jesus so it had aroused his own interest as well.

In May 1874 he learned from a newspaper article that the Apostolic Prefect of Hongkong, Giovanni Timoleone Raimondi, was visiting Mons. Dr. von Essen, the parish priest of Neuwerk near Mönchengladbach. Since Neuwerk was not far from Fr. Arnold’s own residence in Kempen he went to visit him. Fr. Arnold had already studied the mission in China; he nevertheless still felt the need to get to know more about that mission.

However, before we hear more about that and subsequent visits we need to get acquainted with Mons. Raimondi and Dr. von Essen.



Timoleone Raimondi

Giovanni Timoleone Raimondi was born in Milan/Italy on May 5, 1827. Having been ordained priest in 1850 he became a member of the Lombardy Foreign Mission Seminary in Milan which had been founded on July 31, 1850 [in 1926 Pope Pius XI combined this seminary with the 'Pontifical Seminary of St. Peter and Paul for Foreign Missions'; the new institute was named 'Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions – P.I.M.E.].

The first mission of the new Foreign Mission Seminary in Milan was the Apostolic Double Vicariate of Melanesia and Micronesia which had been founded in 1844 and entrusted to the French Marist Missionaries (SM). When the Marists gave up this mission Rome

entrusted it to the missionaries from Milan. From October 1852 on five priests and two lay men worked on the two islands of Woodlark and Rooke which today are part of Papua New Guinea; one of those missionaries was Giovanni Timoleone Raimondi. However, in July 1855 sickness, the death of one missionary and lack of success made the Milan missionaries decide to leave the islands. They wanted to recuperate in Sydney / Australia and wait for new orders from their superiors in Milan, hoping that one day they would be able to return to their mission. In February 1858 their return to Melanesia seemed possible. Thanks to the help of the Prefect Apostolic of Labuan / Borneo with whom they had spent some time, they had left Labuan in February 1858 in order to open a new mission in New Guinea. However, during a stop over in Singapore they received the news that the Propaganda Fide had transferred them to Hongkong. Raimondi arrived there on May 15, 1858. In 1867 he was appointed Prefect Apostolic of Hongkong. He was also 'Procurator for China'; in that position all "business matters and all problems of Propaganda connected with the China missions went through his hands" (Ralph M. Wiltgen, *The Founding of the Roman Catholic Church in Melanesia and Micronesia, 1850-1875*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2008, p.498).

In September 1873 Raimondi went to Rome where the Cardinal Prefect in charge of the Propaganda gave him "numerous tasks to be performed on behalf of the Propaganda, China, and Labuan" (ibid.). Raimondi was well acquainted with Superior General Vranckx of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (C.I.C.M.) or Scheut missionaries – so called after their place of foundation in Belgium. Their principal mission was China.

Fr. Vranckx on the other hand knew Monsignor Dr. Ludwig von Essen, parish priest in Neuwerk / Mönchengladbach in Germany.

Albert Ludwig von Essen was born on November 3, 1830 in Krefeld/Germany. 1853 he got his doctorate in theology from the University of Tübingen. On April 24, 1854 he was ordained priest in Cologne. From 1854-1859 he was principal

of a junior high school in Jülich and from 1859-1862 he held the same position in Kerpen. From 1862-1864 he was teacher of the three sons of Duke Rospigliasi in Rome. "As a souvenir of his Roman years Dr. von Essen took the title of prelate back across the Alps": "Papal Domestic Prelate", "prelate with purple cassock". Also in Rome he got the title of "Knight of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre " (Fritz Bornemann, *Der Pfarrer von Neuwerk, Dr. Ludwig von Essen und seine Missions-pläne*, Sankt Augustin 1967, p. 31). Back in Germany he was priest in charge of various parishes. From 1872 on he was parish priest of St. Mary of the Assumption parish in Neuwerk/Mönchengladbach (not far from Steyl).



Dr. von Essen

Dr. von Essen had a gift for learning languages. He said about himself: "I am able to speak almost 12 languages: besides my mother tongue I speak pretty well French, Italian, English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syrian and Arabic; I know a bit of Spanish, Polish and Dutch" (ibid. p. 40). He also had travelled widely: three times he had been in England, Austria and France. He had lived in Italy, visited Spain, Greece, Turkey and Palestine.

Dr. von Essen's plans regarding a Mission Seminary

During the last weeks of 1873 Dr. von Essen began to work for the foundation of a German mission seminary which would train missionaries for China. His model was the mission seminary in Scheut / Belgium.

Christmas 1873 Superior General Vranckx of the Scheut Missionaries wrote to him two letters and told him:

Since I had the honor to make your acquaintance I have often thought of you... More and more I am getting convinced that the good Lord wants to take you into his service in order to found a Mission Institute in Germany.

Such an enterprise is not easy, I tell you that quite frankly. However I believe that you are strong enough not to get frightened by the difficulties....

In the meantime, couldn't you get the recommendation of the bishops?

Monsignor, dare to begin with the foundation. And if our prayers and our experience can be of any use for you, you can count on them (ibid. p. 52).

Following Fr. Vranckx's suggestion, in January 1874 Dr. von Essen wrote to the bishops of Germany and Austria, informing them of his decision to work for the foundation of a mission house in Germany or Austria for the more immediate preparation and training of missionaries who are enthusiastic about doing God's work. He also asked the bishops "to give their blessing to these thoughts"(ibid. p. 55.56).

Dr. von Essen's own bishop, Archbishop Melchers of Cologne, answered the