

In the same chronicle we read about this day:

At 8 a.m. holy Mass was celebrated in the mission house as well as in the missionary sisters' and our church. After Mass, at about 8.45 a.m., the election was to take place. The missionary sisters, we and all the members of the mission house remained in church and prayed until the election was over. At about 9.15 a.m. we heard the bell of the mission house ring. Immediately afterwards the telephone rang. Fr. Director General [auf der Heide] informed us of the election result: Reverend Fr. Administrator Nicholas Blum was elected Superior General – as we had wished and expected. The missionary sisters and we sang the Te Deum (ibid.).

Fr. Blum was elected on the first ballot with 19 out of 22 votes (Bornemann, *A History of Our Society*, p. 21).

The chronicle of the cloistered sisters also tells us how the people of Steyl showed their interest in the election: "In Steyl many houses were flying flags. Soon after the election we heard a gun salute. The people of Steyl had done that. Throughout the day several more gun salutes could be heard. In the evening the Tegelen brass band came and played in honor of the newly elected Superior General."

December 9, 1909. Beginning of the first general chapter of the Servants of the Holy Spirit (in those days Missionary and Cloistered sisters).

December 11, 1909. At 8 a.m. holy Mass was celebrated in the church of the missionary sisters. The cloistered sisters participated from their own church which was connected with the missionary sisters' church by two doors. After Mass, in the presence of Fr. Superior General Blum and Fr. Director General auf der Heide, first the missionary sisters' chapter members elected Mother Theresia Meßner as their Superior General. Then the finally professed cloistered sisters elected Mother Maria Michaela Tönnies as their superior (Chronicle of the cloistered sisters, p. 230). Mother Maria Michaela had already been superior of the cloistered sisters since December 8, 1897 and Mother Theresia Meßner had been the leader of the missionary sisters since the death of Mother Josepha.



Mother Theresia Meßner



Mother M. Michaela Tönnies



## The Arnoldus Family Story

### COMING TO A DECISION

#### *Tensions between Arnold Janssen and Msgr. Dr. von Essen*

On Pentecost Monday, May 25, 1874, Arnold Janssen met the Prefect Apostolic of Hong Kong, Timoleone Raimondi who was visiting the parish priest of Neuwerk/Mönchengladbach, Msgr. Dr. von Essen. In the course of their conversation Fr. Arnold eloquently shared his thoughts about the necessity of founding a German mission house for German missionaries. To his great surprise Msgr. von Essen then told him: "The matter of founding the German mission house has already been taken up, it is in good hands," meaning his own hands. Fr. Arnold was shocked and he could only say: "Then you have undertaken a difficult project." When the Prefect Apostolic suggested that Fr. Arnold should team up with Rev. von Essen in starting the mission house, Fr. Arnold rejected that. One reason for his rejection was that he did not feel capable of being a founder. But then there was still another reason. Years later he recalled: "...I did not wish to work with Dr. von Essen. I also told him that quite bluntly. He insisted on knowing why not. After some hesitation I said to him, 'I will tell you quite plainly. You are too proud of yourself!' Dr. von Essen was a papal Domestic Prelate. Everyone knew how he loved to let people know about this" (cf. Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 44).

Msgr. von Essen didn't think much of Fr. Arnold either. "He felt that Janssen was lacking in humility; he sought only himself. He was also deficient in genuine scientific knowledge (von Essen bore the title of Doctor of Theology from the University of Tuebingen). Janssen did not have an adequate knowledge of the world; von Essen had travelled widely in England, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Palestine, Turkey, Africa. Most important of all, Janssen did not have the trust of his fellow priests. He could do only one thing, though he did it well; he could edit a small magazine [Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus]" (Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, English ed., 1975, p. 47).

In spite of these tensions Msgr. von Essen visited Arnold Janssen in Kempen in June 1874. He invited him to cooperate with him in founding the seminary. However, Fr. Arnold said "no"; he was good for a desk job and a few more things, but not for founding a mission seminary, he said (Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, German ed., p. 49).

On June 26, 1874 Prefect Apostolic Raimondi also visited Fr. Arnold in Kempen and in the following month, on July 27, he visited him a second time. Naturally, the

foundation of the mission seminary was the topic of their conversation. Fr. Arnold continued to reject cooperation with Msgr. von Essen. Furthermore, he was rather critical of Fr. von Essen's plans for the foundation of the seminary: *"Dr. von Essen himself could not come into question for the foundation for the simple reason that the archbishop would never release him at a time when a number of parishes had been orphaned of their priests. If Dr. von Essen thought of establishing the seminary in Neuwerk, that too was impossible as long as the State's laws regarding the Church remained in force. A foundation in Germany was out of question. Any day a law or police action could bring the undertaking to an end. Under the present circumstances, a German mission seminary would be possible only across the border in Holland"* (Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, Engl. ed., pp. 46-47).

Fr. Arnold's words seemed to have convinced Msgr. Raimondi that Dr. von Essen could not start the mission seminary, and, as Msgr. von Essen wrote to Fr. Arnold on November 16, 1874, the Prefect Apostolic had told him so. Since Msgr. Raimondi had at first approved of Fr. von Essen's plans, von Essen found the change in the Monsignor's thinking most astonishing. Msgr. Raimondi told Fr. von Essen also that Fr. Arnold was of the opinion that he, von Essen, pushed himself too much to the fore. In his letter of November 16 already mentioned, Fr. von Essen expressed his opinion about that accusation and he quoted in French the words he had said to the Prefect Apostolic: *"Oho, I say to myself! I push myself too much to the fore! Which reasons does he give that I push myself too much to the fore? I don't want anything for myself, but everything for our dear Lord and the salvation of souls. I took the matter into my own hands without knowing Fr. Janssen; on the other hand I was very much content when I heard that he publishes his "Little Messenger" in order to work for the missions. And I stick to my work as long as Rome lets me do it."* Continuing in German, he then wrote: *"This was the answer which I gave Msgr. Raimondi with considerable indignation"* (Bornemann, *Der Pfarrer von Neuwerk Dr. Ludwig von Essen ...* p. 212).

### **Raimondi sows the seed**

The topic of Msgr. Raimondi's conversations with Fr. Arnold was the establishment of a mission seminary; however he did not make an express request to Fr. Arnold to start the mission house independently of Msgr. von Essen (*ibid.*, p. 88, footnote 2). He rather sought to dispel the reservations Fr. Arnold had regarding a possible cooperation in founding the mission house.

Fr. Arnold thought: I cannot possibly take part personally in the founding of the seminary, because I myself do not have a vocation to the missions and I will not go to the missions.

Msgr. Raimondi laid that argument to rest by pointing out that it was also a vocation to work in the homeland for the mission amongst non-Christians, not only by praying, writing, speaking, and raising funds, but also by organizing and directing.

Fr. Arnold's second difficulty had been: In the proposed mission seminary, priests who [because of the cultural struggle] were unemployed in Germany were to be trained

for work in the missions. But his knowledge of the missions was mere book knowledge and was limited to the present. What could he do in a mission seminary?

Msgr. Raimondi, however, had a different idea of a mission seminary. He was thinking not only of priests, but also, and principally, of students who still had to finish their philosophical and theological studies. They should study, not at a university, but in a seminary set up especially for them. For such a seminary teachers would have to be provided. This mission seminary should also include a minor seminary, a Latin school. Perhaps an apostolic school of this kind for talented boys from poorer families who were unable to provide their own tuition would, in the long run, produce most missionary priests (on all this: Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, Engl. ed., pp. 47-48).

With his answers to Fr. Arnold's reservations and doubts Msgr. Raimondi had sown the seed which would eventually produce fruit. For the time being, however, Fr. Arnold saw in Msgr. Raimondi's words a call to pray in order to find God's will. And pray he did. Finally, around the end of August or beginning of September 1874 (*ibid.*, p.47), Fr. Arnold arrived at a decision and he said to himself:

*If already for quite a while it has been high time to establish a mission house for Germans, so this holy project has become more urgent right now. Because of the cultural struggle newly ordained priests cannot be employed in Prussia. Therefore they have to be given the opportunity to dedicate themselves to the work of the foreign missions. Who should take up the foundation of the mission house? Those pastors who are working in parishes must not leave them, because a successor would be barred by the government from taking up his duties. Newly ordained priests are too young for the job. Who should do it then? You have begun to write for the missions. Writing is good, but it is not sufficient; one has also to work for them; therefore do it yourself, take care of such a necessary project. You realize that the beginning has to be made with an apostolic school which, starting with Latin, will teach every subject. Since you have been teaching all high school subjects for 12 years, you cannot deny the fact: your life so far has prepared you quite well for such a task. Therefore, accept God's will and begin the work courageously* (cf. auf der Heide, "Die Missionsgesellschaft" von Steyl [The Missionary Society of Steyl], Steyl 1900, pp. 8-9).

### **ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO**

November 1, 1909. Opening of the fourth General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word in Steyl (Bornemann, *A History of Our Society, Analecta SVD* – 54, Rome 1981, p. 12). The chapter began with 22 members but the Regional Superior of Brazil, Fr. Jos. Schmid, died on December 12, 1909 (Nuntius SVD, No. 16, February 1910, p. 85).

November 5, 1909. On the birthday of the late Fr. Arnold Janssen, the election of his successor and new Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word took place. In the chronicle of the Cloistered Sisters we read: "For the election of the Superior General and his councilors, the picture of the late Very Rev. Fr. Superior General will be placed in the chapter hall for which Sr. M. Magdalene is making a beautiful wreath" (Chronicle of the Cloistered Sisters Steyl, p. 223).