

formed me later.” Many years on this priest visited Arnold Janssen in Steyl, and Fr. Arnold told him: “I have often recalled how you encouraged me that night at the railroad station when I was so depressed. Almost everyone else I had spoken to on that trip had discouraged me” (*ibid.*, pp. 50-51).

Arnold Janssen’s own brother, Capuchin Brother Juniperus, William Janssen, tells of the effect which all those critical remarks about his brother had on himself:

“With my own eyes I saw how people made fun of the *Sacred Heart Messenger*. If I so much as hinted that my brother Arnold planned to establish a mission seminary, people would laugh out loud. In those days the thought never entered my mind that whatever is good, or anything from which good is supposed to come, must suffer. I no longer dared to speak to anyone about Arnold’s plans. I even wrote a letter in which I related everything I had been forced to hear. He should not make a fool of himself. The project would gain him few friends. He was not the right sort of person to start a mission seminary. The head of such a project should be a man of learning. Big buildings would have to be erected, etc. The Jesuits, now, they were the right people for such an undertaking. They had learned men and they had money, etc. Arnold, however, did not even bother to acknowledge my letter” (*ibid.*, p. 55).

The many disappointments took their toll on Fr. Arnold. In later years he would say about the time leading up to the foundation of the mission house:

“I felt I was treading a very thorny pathway and if I had not said to myself, ‘God wants you to do it. You are a coward if you do not do it,’ I would have abandoned everything, especially since at that time I felt weak and sickly and was afraid of having to work later in such a state of health” (*Alt, Journey in Faith*, p. 52).

Fr. Arnold did not give up – for he was convinced: God wanted the mission house!

And therefore we, the Arnoldus family, at the beginning of this new year should listen to our “Pater – Dux – Fundator” / “Father – Leader – Founder” reminding us of the vision with which he began the Steyl mission work on September 8, 1875 and which should inspire us throughout this new year:

“It is the beginning of a holy enterprise, dedicated to God, which, even if it only partly reaches its goals, cannot fail to become a source of salvation and blessing for many thousands of people.”

(From the sermon during the opening Mass of St. Michael’s mission house)

GOD HELPS – THEREFORE, HAVE COURAGE! (Arnold Janssen)



The Arnoldus Family Story

In September 1874, in the middle of the cultural battle in Germany, Arnold Janssen became convinced that God wanted him to found the first German mission house. We have since accompanied him on his way to Steyl. On that way he had good and encouraging, as well as bad and discouraging experiences. Courage came from the support of Bishop Haneberg of Speyer for his plan of founding the mission house; the Bishop wrote: “Far from us be the thought that the present persecution of the church should stop the execution of such a plan; just the opposite must be the case: the present persecution must urge us to carry out the plan because it awakens in noble souls an unusual zeal and because the strength of the Catholic faith must show itself not just in negative remarks, but particularly in works of faith” (*Mit dem Segen der Kirche, Briefe an Arnold Janssen (With the blessing of the church. Letters to Arnold Janssen)*, Steyler Mission St. Augustin, 1975, p. 54).

On the other hand, the road to Steyl was full of critical remarks which had to do with Fr. Arnold’s person as well as the circumstances of the time, that is the cultural battle. In this issue of “The Arnoldus Family Story” we will recall the difficulties which Fr. Arnold met on his way to Steyl.

The cultural battle prevented Fr. Arnold from founding the German mission house on German soil; so he decided to go to the diocese of Roermond in the Netherlands, just close to the German border. Since he needed the permission of the Bishop of Roermond for the mission house’s foundation, on November 24, 1874 he visited Bishop Paredis in Roermond. Later the Bishop told the Dean of Roermond: “Father Janssen, the rector of the Ursulines in Kempen has just paid me a visit. He wants to start a mission seminary. Imagine that! And he doesn’t have a penny! He’s either a fool or a saint” (*Bornemann, Remembering Arnold Janssen, Analecta SVD – 42, Rome 1978, p. 53*).

On this very same November 24, Fr. Arnold’s own bishop, Bishop Brinkmann of Muenster, wrote to him: “This is certainly a very redemptive and meritorious work. But we should not be blind to the fact that the realization of this goal will involve great obstacles, starting with the cost alone. However, God is powerful enough to remove these obstacles. If, therefore, this is in the plan of

Divine Providence, he will make it possible. If he gives you a sign that he wants to use you for this work, I will certainly place no obstacle in the way. But the matter must be considered carefully and tested according to the rules of Christian wisdom to see whether God has really called you for this purpose. Not everything which is good in itself is necessarily the will of God for us” (*Alt, Journey in Faith*, p. 56).

Probably around the end of 1874 Fr. Arnold went to Archbishop Melchers of Cologne to seek his support as well. The Archbishop’s – now famous – immediate reaction was: “We live in a time when everything seems to be shaking and sinking. Now you are coming and want to start something new?” To which Fr. Arnold replied with the by now even more famous words: “We live in a time when much is collapsing and new things must be established in their place” (*ibid.*, p. 57).

One of Fr. Arnold’s secretaries, Fr. Hilger, reports that in later years Fr. Arnold had often spoken of this visit “with great relish” and had given this interesting little detail: The Archbishop’s next visitor was the Bishop of Paderborn. “As soon as the latter entered the room, the Archbishop led him quickly to the window, pointed to the street below where Arnold Janssen was walking deep in thought. ‘Take a good look at him,’ the Archbishop said. ‘He doesn’t seem to be entirely normal in the upper story. With the Kulturkampf [cultural battle] raging around us, he wants to start a mission seminary.’ Both bishops had a good laugh at the pious fool’s expense” (*Bornemann, Remembering Arnold Janssen*, p.49).

A pious fool Fr. Arnold was in the eyes of many of his priestly confreres. A Holy Spirit Sister recalled this anecdote: “Our parish priest told us the following: ‘Rector Janssen is a saint. He had to take a lot of humiliations and much criticism when he began his foundation. Once when I visited a fellow priest he said: That crazy Janssen was just here. I gave him 10 Marks just to get rid of him’” (*ibid.*, p. 50).

It seems that the priests were of divided opinion about Fr. Janssen. A promoter of the Steyl magazines told this story: “We lived in Lobberich [a village in Germany, near the Dutch border, not far from Steyl], almost on the very edge of the village. Our neighbor, whose house actually formed part of the village of Hinsbeck, was a simple, pious man. ... He was a zealous promoter of the Associations of St. Francis Xavier [today MISSIO] and the Holy Childhood. As often as he came to visit us he would speak at length about these Associations. One day he told us: ‘In Kempen at the Sisters’ convent there is a certain Father Janssen who wants to establish a seminary for the foreign missions. I recently paid him a visit and I do not believe a more virtuous priest can be found anywhere. He received me very kindly and explained his plans to me. I was very much impressed. ... I gave the priest 200 Taler but later, when I mentioned this to our curate, he said: ‘Lommes, Lommes, stay away

from Father Janssen. He means well and you mean well, but nothing will come of his plans. You gave your money to no good purpose. That man is not altogether right in the upper story’ and he pointed to his head. Afterwards, when I told the parish priest in Lobberich what I had done, he said: ‘That’s a marvelous work! I believe this man has been inspired by God and that his plans will succeed’” (*ibid.*, p.56).

Fr. Arnold did not only receive donations from generous people like Mr. Lommes; he also had to beg for money and that was not always easy, yet it could succeed in some marvelous way. A priest recalls:

“One night in 1874-75 at the railroad station in Holzwickde [near the German city of Dortmund], I saw a priest I did not recognize. He seemed to be in difficulty as he paced up and down. I approached him and asked him whether I could be of any assistance. He said: ‘I got the wrong connection. I had wanted to visit Mr. von Boeselager but I doubt whether I can still reach him tonight.’

‘I said: ‘If I may, I invite you to spend the night with me. Then tomorrow you can call on him. Although my residence isn’t very large, it is big enough to accommodate the two of us.’ He gratefully accepted my invitation. It took us three quarters of an hour to walk to the rectory. As we walked along he introduced himself as Arnold Janssen from Kempen and he said he planned to establish a seminary for the missions. I stopped dead in my tracks and asked him: ‘Father, have you recommended the project to the Mother of God?’ ‘In a general way, yes, but not specifically. But I have prayed to the Sacred Heart.’ ‘Pray also to the Mother of God,’ I told him; ‘then your project is as good as realized.’

We reached the rectory and went on talking about his plans. He wanted to visit Mr. Boeselager in order to ask for some financial help. He had just come from the family of Count Galens but had been given nothing. The old Count had explained very clearly how much the family had to spend for the education of its three sons because, he said, he did not want Janssen to entertain false hopes.

I assured him that on the following morning I would accompany him to Mr. von Boeselager. ‘I am a friend of the family and will put in a good word for you.’

We talked for a good part of the night about his project which I encouraged him to launch. It was close to four o’clock when we retired.

We rose late, celebrated Holy Mass and then called on the Baron. He listened to what Janssen had to say but was reluctant to contribute any money to so uncertain a project. He sought excuses for not doing so. Then I spoke up. ‘Baron, you can make a donation. I know that only recently you sold a lot of wood, you have ready cash on hand. A donation will not hurt you very much.’ ... That helped. After Janssen returned home he did receive a donation as he in-