

Fr. Bill could not forget Steyl. In March 1877 he wrote to Arnold Janssen: "...With my statue of the Sacred Heart I left part of my heart at Steyl..." (*ibid.* p. 205).

Franz Xaver Reichart

Franz Xaver Reichart joined the diocese of Salford in England and was ordained priest on June 29, 1876. The bishop of the diocese at the time, Herbert Vaughan, was the founder of the Mill Hill Mission Society; Reichart had met him when he visited Steyl in 1876.

Like Fr. Bill, Fr. Reichart also maintained contact with Arnold Janssen. In 1902 he visited Steyl; unfortunately Fr. Arnold was in St. Gabriel's (Austria) at the time. Fr. Reichart was deeply moved by the development he saw at Steyl. "And he had been called to be a co-founder of this great work! The remembrance pained him deeply" (Hermann Fischer, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. Frederick M. Lynk, Techny 1925, p. 211). On May 13, 1903 he wrote a letter from England to Arnold Janssen, "full of sorrow and sadness over the events of that time when he took part in the earliest beginnings of Steyl. Father Janssen hastened to console him, and wrote to him the following letter [May 19, 1903]: "I received your very humble letter of the 13 inst [of this month] and was deeply touched by it. Regarding the past, however, I beg you not to worry. I will tell you how I feel about it.

"By joining us in the summer of 1875, you contributed essentially to the founding of the Society. This merit remains yours before God and all the more so, since you have written me such a humble letter as to make me hope that, if you so desire it in your heart, you will find a place with us in eternity.

"You were, as I assume, called by God to have an essential share in the initial steps of the founding. It would seem that you were not called to continue with the foundation, and therefore you did not have the necessary light from above: thus all those things happened which you now regret so very much.

"But all this was, if not directly intended by God to cause me sorrow, at least permitted by Him. He helped me to succeed, nevertheless; and ... I learned in those days of affliction to bow my head, to pray, and to confide in the Lord, despite the greatest difficulties. How often did I say at that time: 'My Lord and God, how can this work ever succeed! But if it is to succeed, Thou must do it!' And He did it beyond all expectation. ... In conclusion, farewell, dear good Father Reichart!... Cordially, your spiritual confrere in the Lord, Arnold Janssen (see *ibid.*, p. 212, changes in the translation by JO).

Fr. Reichart died in 1920 in his home country of Austria.

***I hope that, if you so desire it in your heart,
You will find a place with us in eternity!***

Arnold Janssen to Franz Xaver Reichart, 1903



The Arnoldus Family Story

Fr. Bill and Seminarian Reichart leave Steyl

A second German Mission Society beside Steyl?

On April 1 and 6, Arnold Janssen had told seminarian Reichart and Fr. Bill that they were dismissed. However, they did not leave Steyl immediately. We will now see what they did to save their missionary vocation until they finally left Steyl.

April 6-9, 1876: A new mission society

On April 6 Fr. Bill and Reichart visited Msgr. von Essen. Together they came up with the plan to found a true mission society under the leadership of Msgr. von Essen; they believed that John Baptist Anzer would also join them. Leaving Msgr. von Essen, Fr. Bill and Reichart travelled to the Dutch town of Bredevoort to discuss their situation with Fr. Smorenburg, who had been connected with Fr. Arnold and his plans for the mission house from the beginning. At the end of their deliberations, a hesitant Fr. Smorenburg "insinuated that the three of us should constitute ourselves as a society (under Msgr. von Essen) and leave Fr. Janssen to himself" (Bill, *Erinnerungen* [memoirs], p. 91).

April 10, 1876: Return to Steyl

In the evening of April 10, Bill and Reichart returned to Steyl. Fr. Arnold told them immediately that they would be considered guests of the house. "The community had been told (that we had been dismissed); not a single word were we allowed to speak to any member of the house. Our meals would be served in the library. Everything was also duly carried out like that" (*ibid.*, p. 92).

April 11, 1876: Msgr. von Essen writes to the Bishop of Regensburg with regard to Anzer

Back in Neuwerk Msgr. von Essen wrote a letter to the bishop of Regensburg and asked "whether Anzer might return to the diocesan seminary for a time to be ordained and then join 'our missionary congregation'" (Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. John Vogelsang, Manila, 1975, p. 92).

April 18-19, 1876: The answer of the Bishop of Regensburg and Anzer's attitude

On April 18, Fr. Bill and Reichart were back in Neuwerk with Msgr. von Essen. There a letter had arrived for Anzer from his bishop in Regensburg (as answer to Msgr. von Essen's letter). "The Bishop would accept him back into his diocese on

condition that he promised to remain in the diocese and to be employed there. The next day, 19 April, Reichart took that letter to Anzer in Steyl. He, Anzer, was undecided about what to do. He had also written to Fr. ... Leitner in order to be accepted into the diocese of Munich and was waiting for his answer" (Bill, *Erinnerungen* [memoirs], p. 93).

April 20-22, 1876: Leaving Steyl

On April 20, Franz Xaver Reichart left Steyl and on April 22, Fr. Bill left as well. Fr. Bill remembers: "When I left Steyl, Fr. Janssen accompanied me, carrying my suitcase a good stretch of the way, almost as far as Kaldenkirchen. We were both serious and quite depressed. Fr. Janssen asked me repeatedly whether I would not stay after all; perhaps we could arrive at some understanding. Yet he was not prepared to change any of his plans. So with heavy hearts we parted in peace. Fr. Janssen gave me a nice reference with the remark that we had separated because our views about the basic nature of the house were so different and divergent" (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 114).

At the end of his story about the events of the previous weeks Fr. Bill added these words about Arnold Janssen: "His work was good in itself; and Fr. Janssen meant well. Despite some human weaknesses that even he was not without, he only wanted the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We did not want to wreck his plans but to realize the original goal, a German missionary congregation – if not with him – then beside him" (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 114). However, the plans made in Neuwerk for this missionary congregation never materialized.

Reasons for the separation

We may ask why it came to that painful separation. Three well known SVD personalities offer their explanation:

Fr. Nikolaus Blum SVD – Fr. Arnold's successor as Superior General SVD

Fr. Blum entered Steyl only a short time after these events, and stated "I was hardly eight days in the house when I knew everything" (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 115) He wrote: "Bill and Reichart were honorable men. ... The real reason for the separation can be found in the archival material dealing with superiors and other documents. Fr. Rector saw beyond pagan missions. Bill, Reichart and Anzer wanted only pagan missions. However, the main reason was that the personalities were so incompatible" (*ibid.*).

Fr. Hermann Fischer SVD – first biographer of Arnold Janssen

"All concerned had contributed to the cross which Rector Janssen had to carry when founding Steyl. The struggle was about questions, the solution of which largely depended on future developments. Only one thing was settled: the chief aim of the society was the pagan missions. It was a mistake to try to settle all secondary questions, about manner and means of attaining this aim, all at once. It was better at first to be satisfied with broad outlines. The idealism and noble enthusiasm of all concerned in the work sought to hasten the natural course of events. So disappointments were inevitable, for disappointments are the fate of all idealists" (Hermann Fischer, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. Frederick M. Lynk SVD, Techny, 1925, p. 200f). "Practical experience eventually brought about a society of which none of the first

founders could say: 'This is exactly what I wanted right from the beginning.' Each one would have had to sacrifice a good portion of his ideas and wishes in order to find a middle way acceptable to all of his co-founders" (Hermann Fischer, *Arnold Janssen*, German edition, p. 168).

Fr. Fritz Bornemann SVD – SVD historian

Bornemann explains the opposition to Fr. Arnold by the fact that "here were four clerics of varying ages, of different regional origins and educational backgrounds. They had not known each other prior to their being thrown together for several months in a small building furnished with only the barest essentials. Such a situation can easily produce mental depression. It is comparable to the case of a ship's crew thrown together for weeks and months without seeing another face. There had been no time to forge the bonds that arise from a common purpose and a sense of belonging together. Nor was Arnold Janssen suited by nature or prior experience to develop a family atmosphere in this difficult situation. Perhaps he did not even see the problem. His colleagues were eager for action but were frustrated. Students were few; the school program makeshift; it was necessary to make do with what could be improvised at the time; the rector kept a tight control over everything. On the other hand, as rector he had not only the burdens but also the position and status of superior, and particularly a variety of other tasks to divert his attention and energies time and again – teaching in the house, correspondence, the magazine, the press, the building plans, the representation to the outside world, pastoral work in the village church including First Communion instruction. The others might easily get irritated, but he was naturally serene and in that way the one who stood above the situation (see Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. John Vogelsang, Techny 1925, p.90f, changes in the translation JO).

The life of Fr. Bill and Franz Xaver Reichart after leaving Steyl

Fr. Peter Bill

Fr. Bill wanted to be a missionary, so on May 3, 1876 he joined the Seminary for the African Missions in Lyons; from 1877–1882 he worked in South Africa. Due to sickness he returned to Europe. From February 8-12, 1883 he visited Steyl. "The two priests, after a separation of seven years, faced each other with mixed feelings. Father Bill reports: 'Rector Jansen hesitated and seemed to wait to see how I would act; but soon he became very friendly and we conversed for a good while'" (Hermann Fischer, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. Frederick M. Lynk, Techny 1925, p. 208).

Having "more or less" recovered from his sickness, Fr. Bill was sent by his superiors to Egypt. "Here and in Lebanon he labored until 1891. Because his condition was one of constant illness, he begged for permission to withdraw from the Lyons Mission Society, and his request was granted. Afterwards, he recovered sufficiently to assume charge of the small parish of Ehlinger, in his native diocese of Luxembourg. He retired from active parish work in 1902, and died on January 30, 1911..., being exactly seventy-eight years old" (*ibid.*).