

In the article just quoted, Bornemann calls Gottfried Himmels “the first Brother Postulant” or a bit more carefully “probably the first Brother Postulant of the mission house”; “that is his importance for the Steyl mission enterprise. The first postulant then also became the first of the mission house community to have died, the first “Steyl heavenly lily” (*ibid.*, p. 373).

Apprentices - Fr. Arnold had not only been looking for pious workers who could perhaps become Brothers, but also for apprentices. Hermann auf der Heide writes: “Already in the first year of the existence of our printing press, as the work-load increased, it became necessary to accept apprentices for it. The beginning was made on November 21, 1876. The first apprentice to join the printing press was a student whose talent for studies had shown itself to be not sufficient (auf der Heide, *Die Missionsgesellschaft von Steyl, Ein Bild der ersten 25 Jahre ihres Bestehens* [The Mission Society of Steyl, a portrait of the first 25 years of its existence], Steyl 1900, p. 522). The name of this first apprentice was Sebastian Brauneck who had entered Steyl as student in June 1876; he left Steyl in May 1877 (Bornemann, *Einige der ersten Bewohner ...*[Some of the first residents ...], *Verbum* 4, 1962, p. 374). From the apprentices, Fr. Arnold hoped “to get aspirants for the planned Brother Institute. However, at the time of his entering the apprentice did not have to have the intention to become a Brother. ... Vocation promotion only started in the mission house. In later years, however, the desire to become a missionary brother was demanded right from the beginning” (*ibid.*, p. 377).

THE FIRST STUDENTS OF PHILOSOPHY

Among the students in Steyl originally only the seminarians Reichart and Anzer had been students of theology. The majority of students had been Latin students. With the beginning of the new semester in October 1876, Fr. Arnold accepted students of philosophy for the first time: On September 29, 1876 the 29 year old Dutchman Hermann Averdonk entered Steyl. He had completed his humanistic studies. Two weeks later the 20 year old German Henry Müller followed who had just graduated from High School. With these two the first course in philosophy began.

Averdonk, however, left Steyl in April 1877. Müller was the first to do all his philosophy and theology studies in Steyl; he was ordained priest in 1880 and worked for many years as a teacher and writer in Steyl (*ibid.*, pp. 387f).

THE MISSION HOUSE GIVES THANKS

On the last page of the *Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote* [Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart] of November 1876, Fr. Arnold gives a report about the donations which had been given to the mission house and then adds: “Heartfelt thanks and God’s richest rewards to all our benefactors. Their works carry in themselves the reward through the good which they do. Nevertheless, we make it our sacred duty, that as a community at least 6 times daily we implore our very powerful patrons to protect our dear benefactors.”



Divine Word Missionaries
Secretariat Arnold Janssen Steyl

VOLUME 8 | NO. 4 | APRIL 2014

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

The Arnoldus Family Story

FR. ARNOLD AT THE GERMAN CATHOLICS CONGRESS IN MUNICH – SEPTEMBER – 1876

Arnold Janssen had been very keen to obtain broad support for the mission house. Before its opening, therefore, he visited bishops of the Netherlands, Germany and Austria to request their support and blessing. A year after the opening “he sought the support of prominent lay people at the ‘Twenty-Fourth Catholic General Assembly’ in Munich” (September 11-14, 1876) (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 164). He had submitted the following resolution for approval to the Congress’ ‘Committee for Mission and Christian Charity’:

“The General Assembly is pleased to salute St. Michael’s Mission House, which with the blessing of the Holy Father and of many bishops of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands was opened in Steyl near Venlo/Holland. It welcomes it with joy as the first attempt to bring about a greater personal involvement of German Catholics in the German Catholic Church’s mission work among pagan people through the establishment of a German Foreign Mission Seminary. At the same time, the Assembly warmly recommends to the interest and support of Catholics this training school for young people who wish to dedicate their lives to the missionary calling” (cf. Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, trans. John Vogelsang, Manila 1975, p. 103).

On September 12 Fr. Arnold was invited to speak on the resolution. He reminded his listeners that the matter of the founding of a German mission house had already been brought up at an earlier assembly. At that time, however, it was said, “that such a foundation could not originate with the General Assembly, but would have to wait until some priest could dedicate himself exclusively to its realization. What we have so long desired and waited for has finally become a reality with the help of God’s grace. On September 8 of the past year, on the feast of the birth of Mary, Mother of God and Virgin, a mission house was founded in Steyl near Venlo in Dutch Limburg... Since that time the project has grown inwardly and outwardly and presently I have the honour to stand before you as the Rector of the house and to solicit your support for it” (*Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote* [Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart], December 1876, p. 90 and Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. J. Vogelsang, p. 103).

Fr. Arnold pointed out the great number of people who had not yet joined the Church (*ibid.*). Then he said: “Even if we have many things to do, we cannot withdraw from such a great and marvellous task, that is the spread of the kingdom of God on earth.” He mentioned the other European countries which already had mission houses, particularly France. “Even the few thousand Catholics in England have their own mission house in Millhill near London.” The German Protestants had mission houses in Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden, Barmen, Basel. “And therefore... it is no honour to us as Catholics that Catholic Germany until now has been so far lagging behind that it does not yet have a single mission house for the training of missionaries. We must donate money. But donating money is not sufficient; above all Germany must produce missionaries who can join the other Catholic missionaries...”. After those words Fr. Arnold spoke about the mission house in Steyl:

“... the mission house was opened on September 8, 1875. It took place with the blessing of the Holy Father which he sent on the occasion of the opening day through His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda, as well as with the approval of very many bishops of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. A few months later the Holy Father granted the rector of the house the right to promote students of the house to the higher orders under the title of the mission. The institution accepts only those candidates who are willing to dedicate their lives to the pagan mission proper and it seeks to train them in the lower as well as in the higher studies.

“Even though the institute is poor it nevertheless accepts poor students who do not have to pay any fees and trusts that Divine Providence will look after it in future as it has done so far. Presently (December 1876), the institute has four priests, seventeen students, three “Sisters of Divine Providence” from the mother house in Muenster, to take care of the household and several, partly unpaid, partly paid workers for garden, printing press and carpentry. ...

“With regard to priests or those who are close to being ordained entering our house we say that not only those will be accepted who want to become missionaries themselves, but also those who want to dedicate themselves to be teachers and train missionaries.

May the Lord bestow his gracious blessing upon us so that we may grow in his holy love, in awareness of how weak and unworthy we are, and in zeal for the spread of his sacred teaching. To that may our holy patrons help us, the Divine Heart of Jesus, the holy Heart of Mary and the holy archangel Michael. Amen” (*Kleiner Herz-Jesu Bote* [Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart] January 1877, pp. 1-2 and Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. J. Vogelsang, p. 103).

The above-mentioned resolution was unanimously accepted.

Fr. Arnold’s talk “was rather long, but he took advantage of the unique opportunity to advertise the seminary and its goal. For the Catholic Press in Germany, as well as many leading Catholic journals abroad, would report the proceedings of the Catholic Congress” (see Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. J. Vogelsang, p. 103).

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE BROTHERS’ COMMUNITY

Pious Workers - The register with the names of the Brothers who entered in Steyl begins with the year 1877. Yet in “the first months of the seminary’s existence, Rector Janssen had already given serious thought to the possibility of religious Brothers” (Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen*, transl. J. Vogelsang, p. 112).

He first looked for pious workers. “They had to be men of faith, who would place themselves and their work at the service of the seminary for no other reward than the love of God.” He “accepted them with the idea in mind of eventually selecting some of them as aspirants to the Brotherhood, after he had personally tested them” (*ibid.*). In 1876 he accepted five such religiously-minded workmen (*ibid.*, p. 113). One of these pious workmen was Gottfried Himmels, “the young master weaver from Brueggen. He arrived in May 1876, with a character reference from his pastor that was given ‘for the purpose of admission to a religious community’” (*ibid.*). Gottfried Himmels is sometimes called the first “Brother Postulant”. Is that true?

There are a number of sources about the beginnings of the Brothers’ community; Bornemann lists H. auf der Heide, *Die Missionsgesellschaft von Steyl* [The Mission Society of Steyl], H. Fischer, Arnold Janssen, and Bro. Juniperus Janssen, the founder’s brother. From them Bornemann tried to reconstruct the story of Gottfried Himmels with the following result: According to auf der Heide, p. 516, the first men who wanted to become brothers entered Steyl in May 1877. Himmels had arrived a year earlier. “According to that it is to be ruled out that Himmels ... at his entry had the intention to become a brother; (against Juniperus). His intention was to work without payment for the mission house like Jos. Althoff who, however, right from the beginning had excluded the possibility of becoming a brother. ... G. Himmels wanted to live and work in the religious community of the mission house. While living and working in the mission house his character was judged to be suitable [to become a brother]. Asked if he wanted to become a brother he said “yes”. So the young master weaver, who had become a postulant, got new training as a bookbinder at the expense of the mission house for the tasks of the mission house.” Bornemann ends his reconstruction attempt by saying: “This reconstruction of what happened perhaps does best justice to all the sources with their peculiarities” (Bornemann, *Einige der ersten Bewohner des Missionshauses* [Some of the first residents of the mission house], *Verbum* 4, 1962, footnote 15, p. 374).

Gottfried Himmels began his retraining in November 1876 in Kevelaer. The founder had sent him there to be trained as a bookbinder by Anton Gieben who came from Goch (*ibid.*, p. 370). Unfortunately, Himmels soon became very sick and died on January 19, 1877. He was buried in Kevelaer. Fr. Arnold’s brother John Janssen represented the Steyl community at the funeral. An entry in the cash book of the mission house of January 22, 1877 says: “100 Mark given along with John Janssen to Kevelaer.” Bornemann interprets this entry as if the mission house had paid for the costs of the funeral. For the costs for the cross on the grave the mission house was later reimbursed by the Himmels family (*ibid.*).