

name: “Die heilige Stadt Gottes” – “The Holy City of God”. It is rich in illustrations, much richer than any other Catholic weekly so far published in Germany and costs 2 Marks every quarter, which means 8 Marks per year, post-free. The easiest way to subscribe to it is to ask the local agent of the ‘Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart’ if there is one, or the post office, or to order it directly from us.”

On **January 2, 1878** the “*Brixner Kirchenblatt*”, that is the diocesan newspaper for the Diocese of Brixen in South Tyrol (home of Fr. Joseph Freinademetz) published an article about the “The Catholic Mission House in Steyl.” In this article we read amongst other things:

“In Steyl, in Dutch Limburg, for just under three years a large mission house has been growing and flourishing well. The house was established in 1875 by the then Rector Arnold Janssen, priest of the diocese of Muenster in Westphalia. He had been inspired by Msgr. Raimondi, Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong in China, who had participated in the foundation of the Milan mission seminary....

The purpose of this foundation is the promotion of Catholic missionary activity in those non-Catholic countries in which it seems most promising, namely in the first place among the pagan peoples, particularly those in the Far East. In order to achieve this purpose, provided there will be sufficient personnel and means, mission candidates will be accepted into the house for their lower and higher studies and to be instructed in those virtues which a missionary needs in a very special way.... Only those students will be accepted who show willingness to become a missionary to pagan peoples. They renew this commitment in writing during the annual retreat not, however, in the form of a vow, but of a sincere resolution. ... Priests and those who are close to being ordained will be accepted if they wish either to work in the missions as missionaries or to educate future missionaries as teachers in the mission house.”

As a second purpose of the mission house the article mentions support for the missionaries once they have finished their training. The third purpose is mission animation (Bornemann, *Der selige P. J. Freinademetz, 1852-1908. Ein Steyler China Missionar. Ein Lebensbild nach zeitgenössischen Quellen* [Blessed Fr. J. Freinademetz, 1852-1908. A Steyl missionary in China. A biography according to contemporary sources], Freinademetz-Haus Bozen, 1977, pp. 1070-1071; see also Bornemann, *As Wine Poured Out*, Rome 1984, p. 30).

This article will surely have impressed the young assistant priest of St. Martin in Thurn, Fr. Joseph Freinademetz. It may be presumed (but is not proven) that it gave him the final impetus to apply in February 1878 for acceptance in Steyl (Bornemann, *Der selige P.J. Freinademetz*, p. 538).



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The Arnoldus Family Story

GROWTH OF ST. MICHAEL'S MISSION HOUSE IN STEYL

At the time of the opening of St. Michael's Mission House in Steyl, Fr. Arnold's first thought was for the training and formation of future missionary priests. Since they needed Latin, Latin was the main subject to be taught and the students were called “Latin Students”. At the start of the winter semester on October 15, 1877 there were 30 Latin Students. Since its opening on September 8, 1875 the mission house had developed extremely well, a fact which made Fr. Arnold rightly proud. How had such a development been possible? In the November 1877 issue of his mission magazine “*Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote*” (Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart) Fr. Arnold gave this answer:

“At the end of the year 1877 the ‘Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart’ had 10 000 subscribers. Next to God it is the most important support for our house. Without it, it would hardly have been possible to found or support the house. Obviously, a special blessing of God rests on this magazine. And when in these terrible times [cultural battle] our house has experienced such growth that everyone who notices it is astonished, it is particularly due, next to the supernatural protection of our holy patrons, to our little magazine which bears the name of the Divine Heart of Jesus.”

Fr. Arnold then asks his readers to support the “Little Messenger” also in future:

“May our esteemed subscribers, therefore, not become tired of supporting it also in the coming year. For such a long time people sought in vain for an institution for Catholics in Germany that would prepare them to participate in the great mission work, that is the salvation of so many souls in the foreign pagan countries.... Now, that it has come into being with the blessing of the Holy Father and almost all the bishops of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, after it has proven itself viable, indeed, after it has had such a surprising development in so short a time, it should not be left high and dry. How much is needed to maintain an institution where 50 people have to be provided with all that is necessary day in and day out! We hope that we will not be abandoned. ... Let us therefore help to make more and more a reality what the residents of the mission house pray for several times a day with these words:

Leader: *May the sweet light of the Divine Word shine in the darkness of sin and night of paganism and may the Heart of Jesus*

Response: *Live in the hearts of all people!”*

A VERY IMPORTANT VISITOR

In the December 1877 issue of the “Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart” we read:

“On November 5 and 6 we were honored by the visit of the Most Reverend Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa who had been ordained bishop in Rome on August 15 of this year, Daniel Comboni. Comboni is known almost all over Europe as a zealous missionary; a striking and strong figure, he has an unassuming, modest character and a marvelously fiery spirit.”

Bishop Comboni and his companions were “greatly astonished at the enormous development experienced by the holy work of our house in the short period of two years”. The Bishop told Fr. Arnold: “It is not a small or mediocre blessing that you have received from God, but a very great blessing; believe me, I know about such things.”

Bishop Comboni was the founder of a congregation of missionary sisters that worked in Africa. Fr. Arnold, therefore, spoke with him about the foundation of a congregation of missionary sisters which he had had in mind already at the time of the foundation of St. Michael’s. “When the house was founded we already considered the question whether a women’s branch would have to be added to the male branch later on. Meanwhile this was left aside because there was so much else to be taken care of and put in order first. At every possible opportunity, however, competent persons were asked for their advice about such a weighty matter,” Fr. Arnold recounted later (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 335). Fr. Arnold considered Bishop Comboni one such competent person. The Bishop, so Fr. Arnold continues, “firmly advised [me] to found [my] own institute. I could not make up my mind to make a start, however, until I had clearer signs from God” (*ibid.*, p. 336).

BISHOP DANIEL COMBONI

Bishop Daniel Comboni was born on March 15, 1831 in Limone (Lake Garda - Italy); in 1854 he was ordained a priest. On July 1, 1867 he founded in Verona (Italy) “the Institute for the Conversion of Africa”, which developed into the congregation of the Comboni Missionaries. On January 1, 1872 that was followed by the foundation of a congregation of Sisters called “Pie Madre della Nigrizia”; today the Sisters are known as “Comboni Missionary Sisters”. In 1877 Comboni was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa and was ordained Bishop. On October 10, 1881 he died. In 2003 he was canonized, together with Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz. (Cf. Reinhold Baumann, *Daniel Comboni, Leben und Werk in Bildern und Dokumenten [Life and Work, Documents and Pictures]*, Comboni Missionaries, 2003).



GIFTS FOR THE MISSION HOUSE

In the “Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart” Fr. Arnold regularly published a list of donations for the mission house and the names of the donors. This list gave some readers the impression that the mission house was well off and did not need any

further donations. That moved Fr. Arnold to write the following response in the December 1877 issue of the “Little Messenger”:

“Referring to our lists of donations, some have already said: ‘Those people in Steyl do not need anything; look at the gifts they get!’ To this we respond as follows: Those who speak like that either do not know the situation; or they do not know what they are saying. They should look through all the issues and add up all the donations which we have received and then they should compare that with the cost of 400 000 bricks for a building in which now around 50 people live. And then they should come and see for themselves all that has already been done with the money. Then they cannot be other than amazed and will have to confess that, indeed, the Lord God gave a great blessing along with those donations since they were given with such beautiful and pure intentions. By the way, until now we have lived mainly from the donations of the poor and little ones. It is they who have made the relatively greatest sacrifices for us. We are fully aware of this and therefore we honor those gifts all the more and we attribute the great and remarkable blessing connected with those gifts not to us but to them.”

“Incidentally, we do not wish to prevent anyone who believes he can make better use of his money for other things from doing so. We live and wish to let live and, as much as we are happy about the support given to us, we do not begrudge the support given to others who need it. We trust alone in God and in his heavenly treasurer, St. Joseph, and we hope that he will not let us starve if we fulfill our duties. But the kind of interest a newly started enterprise gets is a different matter. If it receives great and indeed active participation, it can develop much faster and much sooner and it can bear fruit according to its nature in much greater measure.”

THE MISSION HOUSE – GIVER OF A DONATION FOR INDIA

St. Michael’s mission house was not only the recipient of donations; in fact we read in the “Little Messenger’s” list of donations for December 1877:

“From the mission house in gratitude for the happy completion of the new building – for the needy in Madura, Apostolic Vicariate entrusted to the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in India,” 100 Marks. The new building referred to was the one which was blessed on September 8, 1877.

JANUARY 1878

In the history of the young St. Michael’s mission house, January 1878 is a special month particularly for two reasons:

On **January 6, 1878** the first issue of the new weekly family magazine “*Die heilige Stadt Gottes*” – “The Holy City of God” was published. This magazine still exists today.

How could Fr. Arnold find readers and subscribers for it? From the January 1878 issue of the “Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart” we get to know how he advertised his new magazine: “Together with this issue of the “Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart” some readers are receiving the first issue of a new weekly magazine with the