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Gripped by the Mystery

Arnold Janssen – Man of Prayer

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Arnold Janssen at Prayer
 Bas-relief by Franz Gutmann in the chapel at Gaesdonk where
 Arnold Janssen attended High School

Introduction

On October 5, 2003, Arnold Janssen, founder of the Mission Congregations of Steyl, and two other men were canonized and their exemplary Christian life proclaimed to the world: namely Joseph Freinademetz from South Tyrol, one of his first two missionaries to China and co-founder of the mission in Shantung, and the Italian Daniel Comboni, Vicar Apostolic of Sudan and founder of the “Missionaries of Africa”.

What is it about Arnold Janssen, priest-teacher from Germany’s Rhineland, that merits to be held up as an example of successful Christian life for the universal Church? There is nothing extraordinary that would strike one immediately, nothing special that set him apart from the companions of his youth except that he had a great love of prayer and a preference for mathematics and natural sciences. He was just a simple, “ordinary” man. He was born in Goch, in the Frauenstrasse, to unpretentious, good Christian parents. He had his strengths and weaknesses, natural talents and gifts, but also character traits that were not always easy to deal with. Perhaps we might say he was like us, just the way most of us are.

What is the secret that enabled this man to become the founder of a worldwide mission work that today, less than 100 years after his death, numbers more than 10,000 members throughout the world, on all continents and in around seventy countries? What caused him so to transcend himself, his natural limitations, and human talents and weaknesses that Church mission history can no longer overlook him and his work? Wherein lies the secret source of inner strength that gave rise to and nourished his many undertakings?

The purpose of this study is not to describe the beginnings and development of the three Congregations founded by Arnold Janssen. Much has already been written and published on that score. Nor will it treat the significant tasks he undertook almost alongside his life’s work, as it

were, and which by themselves would be sufficient to assure him a place in history, e.g. as director of the Apostleship of Prayer for the diocese of Muenster, zealous promoter of mission awareness in the German church, founder of the Steyl Mission Press, “refounder” and promoter of the modern retreat movement, especially for the laity, founder of the Association of Mission Congregations, and promoter of the study of sciences especially in the preparation of missionaries. The question is, what moved Arnold Janssen to create all these milestones in the Church, almost as “extras”, urged on from within, so that the external realization seemed to be a necessary consequence of an inner dynamic?

A first glance at the Steyl founder’s writings, especially the many prayers he composed, could give the impression that his prayer life was mainly on the level of oral prayer.¹ Does this first impression correspond to the facts? What is the spirit, the dynamic, that these prayers reveal? Where do we find Arnold’s secret, the hidden source, from which this richness ceaselessly flowed?

This study endeavours to trace this source and to penetrate the secret of St. Arnold Janssen, and in so doing to get in touch with our own inner mystery and the source of strength that flows within ourselves. If we manage to overcome the hurdle of the theological formulations and expressions of his times and penetrate to the spirit that speaks through these prayers, we will encounter a man gripped by the ineffable mystery of God’s presence in the life of every human being. Arnold was a man moved to the depths by the mystery of the trinitarian God who reveals and gives himself in inconceivable love to his people. In the power and dynamism of the Spirit and the incarnation of the Word, God enters human history and shares our life as a human being.

That is the great and incomprehensible mystery that gripped and fascinated Arnold and took possession of his life. It is the “world” in which

¹ For an appreciation of the content of Arnold Janssen’s prayers, see the published literature, especially Albert Rohner, *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, (*Analecta SVD* 56), Rome, 1982, referred to from now on as *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*. Other works are listed in the bibliography.

he moved as easily and naturally as we move about the created world. Arnold, totally at home in the world of faith, was equally firmly rooted in reality, in the historical situation of his times and environment. His keen sense made him aware that, deep in their hearts, many people were living far from the mystery of God’s love and goodness. Here we begin to discern Arnold’s hidden source: he wished to share with others what he experienced in such an overwhelming manner and what he saw as the meaning and purpose of his life, so that they, too, would be led to experience the mystery and share in that life.

That is the reason why Arnold’s prayers, formulated at different times during his life, all have a basic apostolic-missionary orientation. He wanted to help people transcend their own horizons and their own personal intentions and resonate with the heart of God, revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. His prayers are the expression of his own experience of the divine mystery which revealed itself progressively more through the various stages of his life. Rooted in the circle of his family and the religious movements of his age, he was already formed in early childhood in deep faith and great reverence for the mystery of the Trinity. The profound impression made on him by the miracle of the incarnation and the loving, dynamic action of the Holy Spirit in human life was a heritage of his father’s deep faith and his mother’s love of prayer.

As a student at the Gaesdonk diocesan high school, Arnold tentatively composed his first prayers and gave them to his family. The sacrament of confirmation bestowed on him an inkling of the importance of a personal response to God’s love. His open, searching mind pushed him towards a deeper awareness of reality and he dedicated several years to the study of mathematics and natural science.

Before his ordination to the priesthood, almost at the sanctuary steps we might say, letters to his mother and written resolutions give an insight into the inner sanctum of his soul; he was awestruck by the mystery of sharing in the priesthood of Jesus that was soon to be given him. As a young priest and high school teacher in Bocholt, he deepened his theological knowledge through self-study. That gave his spirituality a solid foundation which remained a valuable instrument all his life and

which he used with ease to express his religious experiences in words and pass them on to others.

Increasingly Arnold was fascinated by the truth that the human person is gifted with new life through faith, a life that enables permanent communion with God and participation in the dynamic of his love. Especially the miracle of God's presence in the human person, the indwelling of the Trinity in the deepest part of the soul, became the driving force that urged him to bring all people to participation in this mystery of divine love.

He saw in the prayer of intercession a means to achieve his wish to guide the faithful to transcend their own prayer intentions and needs, and to open their eyes for the intentions of God's kingdom, or of the Sacred Heart, as he put it. In the school of prayer, Arnold strove increasingly to take on the mind and dispositions of Jesus, and he became an apostle of prayer, making the intentions of Jesus his own, especially that of Christian unity.

In Arnold's dedication to this task, the horizon of the universal mission rose in his mind's eye, and he was urged from within and from without to begin the foundation of a mission congregation. Moved by the miracle of the incarnation of the Divine Word, he understood his own life as well as that of his community as a sharing in the life of Jesus, both in the proclamation of the word and in progressive identification with Jesus' life and suffering.

The mystery of the humanity of the Divine Word increasingly took possession of him and left him trembling in awe and adoration before this miracle of love. He saw in the human heart of Jesus the essential union with the Divine Word and the pre-eminent dwelling of the Blessed Trinity. It was his deepest wish to grasp the mind of the Sacred Heart, and with him of the entire Blessed Trinity, present in the hearts of all people.

In the final phase of Arnold's spiritual development, the Holy Spirit became the special focus of his prayer and striving. In the grip of this deepest dynamic of the divine love, he consecrated himself totally to the

"Heart of the Trinity", the Holy Spirit, surrendering himself completely to the Spirit. Transparent and docile to the presence and activity of this Spirit, his life at this stage was especially marked by missionary fruitfulness.

Two women's congregations founded by Arnold, both dedicated to the Spirit, are the fruit of this total consecration to the Spirit of Love. The apostolic and intercessory prayers, that ran like a thread through his life and testify to his missionary orientation, were inspired by his life in and with the Trinity. In this final phase they reached their ultimate maturity.

Thus he lived towards the completion of his life, filled with God's presence in which he felt totally in his element. Without a trace of fear he looked forward to the full vision of God and communion in the heart of the Trinity, like a child going home to the house of its father.

1 Religious Background

1.1 Wellsprings of Rhineland Mysticism

The background of Arnold Janssen's religious environment takes us back to the fourteenth century. The blossoming of the "Devotio Moderna" deeply influenced Germany and the Netherlands, especially the Lower Rhine region.² It was a movement that responded to the need of ordinary believers for an affective spirituality. A significant contribution of the movement is the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (1379-1471) which describes the basic teachings of the "Devotio Moderna", above all the importance of prayer and meditation, contemplation and spiritual exercises, as a means of spiritual growth.

Nineteenth century spirituality is part of the so-called "modern spirituality" that is characterised by an affective and devotional character. It is christocentric, based on the writings of St. John the Evangelist, the Apostle Paul and St. Augustine. It began in France and spread from there.



Shrine of the Miraculous Image, Kevelaer
Kevelaer - a spiritual centre of the Lower Rhineland had a formative influence on Arnold Janssen's spirituality

In 1645, at the request of the Bishop of Roermond, the Oratorians went to Kevelaer to take care of the pilgrims at the shrine of Our Lady, Consoler of the Afflicted. They remained there until the beginning of the nineteenth century and greatly influenced the spiritual life of many Christians in the area that was home to Arnold Janssen. Their spirituality is christocentric and trinitarian, with an emphasis on the Incarnate Word. Main aspects of this spirituality are:

- The Incarnate Word as adorer of the Father.
- The Word as mediator, under three aspects:
 - 1) Glorification of the Father
 - 2) Surrender of himself
 - 3) Our sanctification and our total self-surrender.
- The incarnation of the Word is a journey of renunciation and self-emptying.
- Devotion to the Infant Jesus – the crib as a school of selflessness.
- Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word of God.

This spirituality, following as it did on the austere Jansenistic piety and the dry, speculative character of the Enlightenment period in the second third of the nineteenth century, gave rise to a more affective and devotional religiosity, recommending more frequent reception of the sacraments. This form of piety was more oriented to the compassionate Christ pointing to his Heart "that loved humankind so deeply". Pilgrimages, that had lost much of their significance in the eighteenth century, regained popularity.

The influence of Pius IX played an important role here; he strongly promoted the gaining of indulgences and increased the opportunities of gaining jubilee indulgences. This orientation left a great deal of room for the miraculous, for prophecies, reports of stigmatisation, and the revelations or visions of Anne Catherine Emmerick. Through the orientation to the Christmas crib, the cross, the Sacred Heart and the Eucharist, the essential content of Christianity once again became central: Christ as true God and true Man, the incarnation of Divine Love calling for the loving response of every person.

² The initiator of this reform movement in the Netherlands was Gerard Groote (1340-1384). He gathered around him a group of "Brothers of the Common Life".

The eucharistic piety centred on communion as a source of special graces, and the Blessed Sacrament which was to be adored. Reaction to the strict Jansenistic view regarding frequent reception of communion grew stronger. The emphasis of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was on reparation. People were more drawn to union with the suffering Christ than to the mysteries of the paschal message.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was especially vibrant during the French Revolution. It greatly influenced the West European spirituality of penance and reparation that focused on the glorification of the Sacred Heart and the cross. The central aspect was reparation and atonement for offences against the Sacred Heart, especially during the carnival season.

During the Revolution, Sacred Heart mysticism as an expression of reparation created a bridge between contemplation and action: contemplation as perpetual adoration. Under the reign of terror, the “holy hour” began to grow up in secret prayer communities in long night watches. Adoration became the silent apostolate. The mysticism of adoration led to a spirituality of mission activity and that, in turn, led to the need for ‘perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament’. Subsequently a large number of women’s and men’s congregations grew up, most of which devoted themselves to mission.³

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is mainly affective in nature and that is what attracts so many people. Some theologians, however, began to incorporate the concept of the Sacred Heart devotion into the doctrine of the incarnate Word. Two French Jesuits initiated the Association of the Apostleship of Prayer.⁴ The members of the Association met once a month to pray in union with the Sacred Heart for a specific intention and to receive communion. Each month the intention was proposed with the approval of the Pope and from 1861 on appeared with a commentary

³ Cf. Bernard Pongeron (ed.), *Aufklaerung, Revolution, Restauration (1750-1830)*, Freiburg, 2000, pp. 596-599.

⁴ F. X. Gautrelets began in 1844 and in 1861 P. H. Ramière succeeded him.

in the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. The *Messenger* was imitated and propagated in a number of countries. A consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart took place on June 16, 1875; Arnold Janssen and his first companions also made the consecration on that day.

Devotion to the Virgin Mary experienced a revival, especially following her various appearances. She had appeared to Catherine Labouré in Paris in 1830, in La Salette in 1846, and to Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes in 1858. The solemn proclamation of the dogma of the “Immaculate Conception” in 1854 gave additional impulse to devotion to Mary. The intensity of this devotion in the nineteenth century can be seen, among other ways, in the number of new religious foundations that incorporated her name into their title.⁵



From early childhood Arnold Janssen drew from these well-springs that were nourished by numerous, small tributaries. Streams of living water did indeed flow from his heart (cf. Jn 7:37-38). In him they grew to be a river, a torrent whose water gave life filled with meaning and hope to countless people all over the world.

*Madonna of Kevelaer
Consoler of the Afflicted*

*St. Arnold often prayed here for insight
and clarity for his path in life.*

⁵ Roger Aubert (et al): *Die Kirche in der Gegenwart*, first half volume: *Zwischen Revolution und Restauration*, Freiburg, 1971, pp. 662-672.

1.2 The Parental Home

The Rhineland mysticism found expression in the deep, pithy piety of the Janssen family. It was already said of Arnold's great-grandfather that he was a man of prayer. On Sundays and feast days he remained in the church, still fasting, from early morning until after High Mass at 11 o'clock. At the age of 85 he was still going on frequent pilgrimages to Kevelaer, fasting and walking for two hours to reach the shrine of the miraculous image of the Madonna. He watched for hours at the cradles of his grandchildren, rocking them, rosary in hand. He died on the feast of the Holy Rosary after receiving communion early in the morning. His neighbour was convinced that: "For the sake of this man, his children and children's children will be blessed."⁶

1.2.1 The Father's Legacy

The blessing first appeared in the form of Gerhard Janssen, Arnold's father. Like the grandfather, he was a man of prayer and loved the ro-



Image of the Blessed Trinity in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Goch where Arnold was baptized

⁶ Hermann Fischer, *The Life of Arnold Janssen*, Steyl, 1919, (transl. 1925) referred to from now on as *Life*; pages indicated refer to the German edition *Lebensbild*. It is not clear from the sources whether it was Arnold's great-grandfather or his grandfather. See Josef Alt, *Journey in Faith, the Missionary Life of Arnold Janssen*, Rome, 2002, p. 6.

sary; it accompanied him on his lonely freight hauling journeys and assured him of God's protection and blessing. He began every task with the prayer: 'All with the Lord God'. On Sundays he attended two Masses. He offered the High Mass in honour of the Blessed Trinity in thanksgiving for all the graces and benefits received. In the afternoon he went again to the church. Whenever possible he also attended Mass on Mondays especially in honour of the Holy Spirit to whom he had a great love and devotion. It was said that his outer appearance was full of reverence, while his face reflected the devotion and inner stirring aroused by God's greatness and sublimity. He lived in the presence of God, in union with God, and his entire being and attitude expressed the conviction that the eternally ineffable, triune God overshadowed his life.

Gerhard Janssen often spoke with great warmth and enthusiasm about God and his works, his omnipotence and love. It was no ordinary event when, every evening during Lent, he read aloud the first reading and the gospel of the following day and gave an explanation. The letters of St. Paul were his especial joy. He frequently pointed to the individual divine Persons and encouraged his family to venerate the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity.

In later years Arnold recalled a childhood experience that made a deep impression on him and set the direction of his spirituality and prayer life. His father gave him an idea of the greatness of God by recounting the legend of St. Augustine to try to explain the mystery of the Trinity. When writing his treatise on the Trinity, Augustine saw a child (or an angel) trying to pour the whole ocean into a hole in the sand and this experience taught him how impossible it was to express the fathomless mystery in human words. In a letter to his brother John in 1884, Arnold reminded him how often their father spoke of St. Augustine and the child who tried to pour the great ocean into a small hole.⁷

⁷ AJ to John Janssen, Vienna, 10 July 1884, in Alt, *op. cit.* p. 715.



St. Augustine with the Angel. This helped him to sense the greatness of the mystery of the Trinity.

Window in the upper church, Steyl

A proof of how deeply affected he was by this legend and its teaching about the unfathomable mystery of the Trinity is seen in a window in the sanctuary of the upper church in Steyl, the first church Arnold built. He had the legend depicted in the glass: An angel kneeling in front of St. Augustine is trying to pour the ocean into a small hole.

Gerhard Janssen spoke about the incarnate Word of God and about devotion to the Holy Spirit, his gifts of peace and joy and his fruitful presence in fields and meadows. In those days without radio and television, the prologue of St. John's gospel was read by the light of a petroleum lamp. Arnold's father spoke about it with passion and considered it a prayer of great power with God. It was also prayed when a severe thunderstorm arose or at other times of trouble. This gospel, telling of the Word becoming human, became important and decisive for Arnold; it was literally "prayed into his soul" from his earliest childhood.

Arnold's father was a great admirer and friend of the missions. In the evenings he read from the "Annals of the Propagation of the Faith" and spoke of the missionaries with warmth and admiration. He had a great respect for priests and insisted on the same from his children.

On his deathbed he made his children promise to attend High Mass every Sunday and offer it in honour of the Blessed Trinity, and to go to Mass on Mondays in honour of the Holy Spirit, to implore the Spirit's blessing on the coming

week. When Arnold asked his dying father, who had received holy communion that morning, whether he was afraid of death, the father responded, "No, Jesus is with me. What is there to be afraid of?"⁸

The upbringing given by the father was earnest and strict. He especially required punctual obedience. To a great extent Arnold inherited his character; that can be seen in his earnest attitude towards life, his strict discipline, unbending when it came to principles, his indefatigable capacity for work, deep spirit of piety and love of devotion to the Holy Spirit. A letter with birthday congratulations for his father written by the sixteen year old Arnold testifies to the love and veneration the children had for their father. After many words of thanks and respect, it continues, "we wish you silent joy of heart, gentle peace of soul, which far surpasses earthly goods."⁹

Nine years later, already a young priest and writing again for the birthday, Arnold spoke of his special love for the Evangelist John, pointing out that it was especially the simplicity of heart, his forgetfulness of self and his love of truth that was so attractive.¹⁰ These words allow us a glimpse into the heart of the young Arnold Janssen. In him, too, we sense peace and joy of heart, his love of truth, simplicity of heart, a desire for total self-surrender, and his love for the incarnate Word.

1.2.2 A Prayerful Mother

Not only did Arnold have a father whose deep faith imprinted itself profoundly on his soul, giving him his most precious heritage, he had above all a prayerful mother. Anna Katharina, Arnold's mother, had a great love of prayer and especially of the holy Eucharist. During the "Forty Hours Exposition" she remained there praying almost the whole day. On Sundays she arrived at the church around 4:30 in the morning so as to attend the first and all following Masses. Later, especially when

⁸ Fischer, *Life*, p. 13.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 14-15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 15-16.

a daughter-in-law took over most of the housework, she spent the greater part of Sundays and holy days in the church.

Even on weekdays she was able to arrange her work in such a way that she was always able to attend a Mass. Once, when the entire family had to go out to the fields to take care of pressing work, the mother was left alone with the housework. At the noon meal her husband remarked that she surely had not been able to go to church, whereupon she replied, "If I had not gone to Mass, I would never have been able to finish my work... After taking care of the cattle, I closed the door and went to the church."

Every Sunday she went to confession and communion. That is particularly noteworthy as it was not the usual practice in those days. At the age of seventy-two she became a Franciscan tertiary. When her

grown sons jokingly said, "Mother, you will pray your way right through heaven," she replied with deep conviction, "Boys, something that is to shine eternally has to be very beautiful. And to pray, to talk to God, how can you get tired of that?"¹¹

The example of their prayerful mother made a deep impression on her children, one that stayed with



*Baptismal font
where Arnold Janssen was baptized.*

*The font is now in the modern Arnold
Janssen church in Goch, an SVD parish.*

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

them for life. One of Arnold's brothers, the Capuchin Brother Juniper, related how he prayed his first Way of the Cross with his mother. He knelt with her in the stone corridor of the parish church in Huelm, a nearby village, and looked in wonder from the images to his mother's great devotion. The experience laid the beginnings of a love for this prayer in his heart that remained his whole life long. Later on, when the Stations of the Cross were installed in the parish church in Goch, the mother prayed them daily after holy Mass. We can surely see here the first roots of Arnold's great love for the Way of the Cross meditations.

When his mother thought she was alone, she spoke half aloud. An attentive listener would notice that she was praying ejaculations and short prayers. It was the same during the winter months after the evening prayers, when the mother was at the spinning wheel and the rest of the family sat chatting. She could often be heard speaking, as if to herself. She was praying and was so recollected and united with God that she was hardly aware of her surroundings. When the others retired for the night, she generally stayed up spinning until ten o'clock. Finally she got up from the spinning wheel, knelt down and was soon lost in prayer.

She was a great venerator of the Virgin Mary and placed her children under her protection time and again. In May she loved to set up a May altar in the house; after a May meditation had been read, the family evening prayer was prayed before it. During the winter months, from October until the end of April, the family prayed the rosary together after the evening meal.

Mother Janssen witnessed her son's work in Steyl growing and developing over many years and she accompanied it with her prayer. From time to time she went to the Mission House to visit Arnold. Just two weeks before her death she was there to attend the ordination of new priests. Unfortunately Arnold was not at her side when she died. The poor means of travel in those days meant that he could only reach Goch the day after she died, but he conducted the funeral.

Throughout his entire life Arnold had a deep-seated love for his mother. Even when as superior general he was overburdened with work, he wrote to her regularly, telling her of his plans and undertakings. In

the letters to his mother he opened his heart, revealing moods and feelings that he otherwise carefully hid and that others, perhaps, did not consider him capable of.

At the age of nineteen he wrote for her name day. In moving words he expressed his gratitude to the one, “who stood beside the cradle and looked down on her small charge with the loving eye of a mother, watching, caring and praying, nourishing him with her milk and filling his soul with the even better milk of good teaching and counsel to love God and neighbour. At the thought of this beautiful scene my soul grows warmer, my congratulations more intense and the sigh that rises from my soul grows more passionate as it recommends you, my beloved mother, to God, the Lord of all, imploring his grace and protection for you.”¹²



*Mother and Son
Arnold in 1904*

Arnold became the image of his prayerful mother. Looking at a photo of him in the last phase of his life, we can see how the facial expression has changed from that of his younger years, where it was marked by the harshness of life’s struggles and challenges, to the one of translucent, motherly kindness seen in his mother.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 21.

2 Childhood and Youth

2.1 The Seed begins to Grow

The seed sown by the faith of the parents in their son’s heart began to grow and develop. We know very little about Arnold’s prayer life at that time. “Much bread grows in the night of winter,” says the poet.¹³ The seed germinates silently, hidden in the heart. Speaking little and keeping his thoughts to himself, as do the people of his home area, Arnold did not speak about what lived within and touched him. The small, delicate boy did not attract much notice, except that he excelled above everyone else in his knowledge of the catechism. He was already an altar server during his first year at school. When he was ten, a Latin school¹⁴ opened in Goch. Arnold’s parents thought they could not afford to send him there but the parish curate Fr. Ruiters persuaded them to change their minds. To learn was his delight, especially mathematics which became his most preferred subject. About a year later the diocesan college opened in Gaesdonk and Arnold completed his high school studies there.

Before transferring to the high school, he made his first communion in his home parish. Arnold was then eleven years old. According to contemporary custom, first communion was preceded by a test: the children had to know the entire catechism by heart. Thanks to their preparation and upbringing at home, Arnold and his brothers and sisters were among those who could answer all the questions. Alongside this intellectual preparation came the inner preparation which was given mainly by his parents. Nothing is said about Arnold’s spiritual experiences on the day of his first communion. He spoke very little about his religious feelings

¹³ Friedrich Wilhelm Weber. In his poem Weber uses the imagery of winter and spring, during which seeds slumbering under the snow will come to life in the spring sunshine and produce grain, as an analogy to encourage people in times of trial and trouble.

¹⁴ A kind of junior high school in areas that could not afford a proper secondary school or were too far away from one. The curriculum corresponded to the first five classes of the secondary school – see Alt, *op. cit.* p. 9, footnote 21.

and inner experience. Two letters, however, written eight years later to his younger brother Peter for his first communion, give us some idea of what that event may have meant to Arnold. In these letters the otherwise reticent Arnold opened his heart to his brother, sharing with him in the form of loving counsel his own feelings of reverence and love for the Eucharist. A few, brief excerpts allow us a glimpse into his soul as he opened it to his brother:

“I was filled with joy at the news that this year you will really have the happiness, the incomprehensibly great good fortune, to approach the table of the Lord, to share in food that is the desire of the angels. Oh if only you could recognize what it means to receive the Body of the Lord! Do you really know who it is, whom you will receive? It is the King of heaven and earth, the Lord of eternity, who always was and always will be the Mighty One who rules the earth according to his will. And this God, who came down to earth out of love, now wishes to come to you as the good Jesus, glowing with love. Oh give him glowing love in return, offer him a pure and innocent heart so that he will find a spotless dwelling when he comes.

“Prepare your heart already. And then, when the dear Saviour takes up his throne in your heart and asks: ‘My son, what do you want me to do for you?’ pour out your heart before him; recommend to him your joys and sorrows, your whole life and especially your life’s end. Ask whatever you will, he will refuse you nothing in that holy moment... Oh, do this. You will never regret it as I now regret having done so little to prepare...”¹⁵

In a second letter dated four days later, Arnold wrote: “The most beautiful and happy day of your life has finally come; the day to which even the hearts of grey haired priests think back with longing, and the memory of which constantly fills them with silent joy. You approached the table of the Lord and received him who is our life and our all into

¹⁵ Fischer, *Life*, p. 28-29.

your heart that trembled with blissful awe. Oh brother, let me congratulate you a thousand times! The Lord of heaven and earth now dwells in your heart. You are now the sanctuary of the Lord, his inheritance and his love.”¹⁶

We sense here something of the heartbeat of Arnold’s own life. He was gripped by the mystery of the incarnate God whose presence caused his heart to tremble in holy awe, God who allowed him to taste his love, filling him with inexpressible joy, and who made his heart into his sanctuary. With all his spiritual might, Arnold wanted to respond to that incomprehensible love and to avoid everything that could separate him from it. And he wanted others to share in this indescribable happiness, at that moment his younger brother especially.

Yet another aspect of Arnold’s interior longing became apparent when his brother William informed his parents of his decision to become a Capuchin lay brother. On that occasion Arnold wrote to their father, “I must say that it is a long time since anything gave me such great joy as this. The vocation to religious life is such an exceedingly great grace, and as much as I feel that I do not have it, I envy those who are called by God to serve him alone in the silence of the monastic cell. What William says is true, everything on earth is vain except to love God and serve him alone. ...”¹⁷ His own longing for silence and interiority shines through here, the desire to serve his God alone and to surrender himself totally that became ever more apparent in his later years.

We must go back, however, to his school days in Gaesdonk. Arnold was there from October 1849 to July 1855 and graduated from the high school with success. His favourite subject was mathematics. He had a distinct talent for it and was always the best in his class in that subject. Dr. Clemens Perger, director of the school for twenty-five years, had a great influence on Arnold’s spiritual development. Every evening he

¹⁶ *Ibid.* A poem Arnold composed in 1896 testifies to this same love for the presence of Jesus in his heart after holy communion, still intense in his later years. See Appendix.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 30.

gave a spiritual talk to the students with a view to forming not only the intellect but also the souls of those entrusted to him and to arouse their enthusiasm for the ideals of the priestly life. Later on Arnold maintained friendly contact with his former Rector and asked several times for his advice regarding his academic studies.

While at the school Arnold was confirmed after preparing carefully for the sacrament. He reported about it himself: “The Reverend Rector called us to his office after the evening talk and admonished us to prepare well for confirmation. I believe he also told us to make a special daily visit to the church; anyway, I went once or twice a day and I took the preparation very seriously. Later I had the impression that if I had not done this, I would not have achieved all that the Lord God later gave me through his grace. So I feel very grateful to Dr. Perger for the sound advice he gave me.”¹⁸

Arnold regarded his confirmation as a great gift of grace, a source of blessing that continued to flow throughout his entire life. At the same time he discovered something that is characteristic of his prayer life, namely how important one’s own preparation and cooperation is. Intercessory prayer remained a source of grace for him all his life. No doubt it was a heritage from his home that came to full flowering in his work and foundations.

2.2 Composing his first Prayers

During his years at the school in Gaesdonk, Arnold composed an evening prayer for his family. Both his own and other families prayed it for many years. It was very long and took about 25-30 minutes.¹⁹ Prob-

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 36.

¹⁹ The complete text could not be found in the available sources. Part of it can be found in Hermann Fischer, *You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirituality of Blessed Arnold*, transl. Paul Laforge SVD, 2nd edition, Philippines, 1999, pp. 6-7, referred to from now on as *Temple*. What is available of the text of the evening prayer is given in the Appendix.

ably he used an existing text as a model, but it is certainly uncommon for a youngster of that age to compose such a prayer. The choice and use of the texts give some insight into his own attitude towards prayer. Characteristic traits, especially of his intercessions, that come up again in many of his prayers are already in evidence. They reveal something of the source that welled up within him. His formulated prayers allow us to sense the orientation of his prayer life. The length of the prayer recalls the words of his mother quoted earlier: “To pray, to talk to God, how can you get tired of that?” When we immerse ourselves with all our heart into something spellbinding, we do not notice the passing of time.

The clear structure of the evening prayer reveals the clarity and logic of the mathematician: 1. Praise and Thanksgiving; 2. Examination of Conscience and Contrition; 3. Petitions; 4. Intercessions. The external form and the nineteenth century language sometimes cause us to overlook the rich content. The prayers are a testimony to an unusually deep interior life expressing itself in the homely, contemporary style. Or, better perhaps, in the simplicity and homeliness of expression we see something of Arnold’s character. He was concerned with the content he wished to transmit, so he used the instruments at hand. The first and longest part of the prayer is devoted to praise, adoration and thanksgiving to God. It begins:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, God of hosts,
Earth is full of your glory!
Glory be to the Father!
Glory be to the Son!
Glory be to the Holy Spirit! Amen.

In this first formula it is not difficult to recognize the heritage of his home, as well as to sense how taken Arnold was by the mystery of the triune God, already prominent in his prayer life at that time. To give glory to God, adore, praise and thank him for all his goodness to us, was the heart of Arnold’s prayer, its beginning and its end. That was his genuine wish and he wanted to transmit it to others, even at that young age.

This homage to the Trinity is repeated three times during the course of the prayer. There follow praises, acts of thanksgiving, and offerings, which later found an echo in the intercessory prayers of Steyl. Here, too, the mystery of the three divine Persons always recurs:

Let us praise and adore God in all his works.
Let us pay homage to God for his creation.
Let us praise God for redemption.
Let us bless him for our sanctification.

At the end of the first section we find the first invocations of what later became the “Quarter Hour Prayer”: “Lord God, because of the truth of your words, I believe in you – Increase my faith. Because of your fidelity to your promises, I hope in you – Strengthen my hope. Because of the greatness of your goodness, I love you – In flame my cold love.”²⁰

The examination of conscience and act of contrition are followed by prayers of petition. Here a few examples:

For the sake of the precious blood of Jesus, we ask the following:
to ever fulfil the will of God;
to be in union with God;
to think of God alone;
to love God alone;
to do all for God;
to seek only to honour God;
to sanctify ourselves for God;
to become more aware of our nothingness;
to know the will of God better.

These prayers afford an insight into Arnold’s prayer disposition as a young man, a student in fact, at Gaesdonck High School. Even if he used an existing formula, his choice gives us a glimpse into his own intentions. Fulfilment of God’s will is in first place. In these intercessions we can already detect the seeds of surrender to the will of God

²⁰ Jakob Reuter SVD, *Proclaiming the Word in the Power of the Spirit – Character Delineation of Bl. Arnold Janssen*, Rome 1994, p. 19.

that became one of the foundations of his spirituality in later life. The petitions: "to be in union with God, to think of God alone, to do all for God, to seek only to honour God", allow us to sense the direction of his striving and prayer: In the depths of his heart he longed for union with God, wished only to be and to live for him.

This was followed by a fourth section with intercessions for others. There he was not concerned with personal intentions and we have to marvel at the broadness of his mind and heart. After intercessions for relatives and superiors, other intercessions follow for the poor and needy, the sick and lonely, the dying, the Church, for pagans and Jews who have never heard of the love and goodness of Christ, and for the souls in purgatory.

Finally there is a prayer for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and similar graces. The devotions end with the repeated plea for self-surrender and the fulfilment of God’s will by the one praying.²¹

2.3 Academic Studies: Mathematics and Science

The sources say little about the development of Arnold’s prayer life during his higher studies. When he gained his high school diploma he was not quite eighteen. He moved to Muenster to study philosophy and theology. During the first three semesters he devoted himself mainly to his beloved mathematics and natural sciences alongside the philosophy subjects. He intended to become a priest-high school teacher. After finishing philosophy, Arnold was still only nineteen and a half. He decided to study mathematics and natural sciences for another two or three years and only then go on to theology. Consequently he transferred to Bonn where he studied for another five semesters.

A letter to Dr. Perger, his former rector, gives information about his plans and the reasons that led to his move to Bonn: “As you know, I

²¹ Fischer, *Temple*, p. 7-8.

came to Muenster last autumn with the abundantly clear intention of staying here for some time to study mathematics. ... Now that the time has come to make a decision – whether I will start theology now or later – I have firmly made up my mind to study mathematics and the natural sciences in order to get a degree in these subjects and then go on to theology.”²² Arnold gave as further reasons for his move to Bonn the advantage of new professors and the possibility to mix with other people at the university and thus broaden his horizon, since up till then he had almost always lived in closed institutions and a rather restricted circle.²³

On 30 April 1858 Arnold entered a paper in a mathematics competition at Bonn university. His was the only one with the award-winning solution. In addition the paper was accepted as his examination paper for the teaching qualification he had to gain the following year.²⁴ On his personal life Arnold wrote in a letter to Dr. Perger:

“My life at the local university is extraordinarily simple and unvarying. I go to church every day, then study until almost nine o’clock. After that I walk through the lovely avenue to the college in Poppelsdorf and two hours later walk back again. At four o’clock I attend an afternoon seminar where discussions or lectures are held. I do not visit pubs or student gatherings. Our only relaxation is walking to a neighbouring village on a nice Sunday afternoon where we drink a cup of coffee and play a game of dominoes. I often fondly recall my time at Gaesdonck. Indeed, now that I enjoy total academic freedom here, its memory has become even more precious.

“Since I was a member of the Marian Sodality in Muenster, I also joined it here in Bonn. I had the pleasure of meeting my colleague Lambert Lamers... who came to Bonn in the fall of 1857. We became good

²² Alt, *op. cit.* p. 15.

²³ Fritz Bornemann, *Arnold Janssen, Founder of Three Missionary Congregations, 1837-1909*, Trans. J. Vogelgesang. *Analecta SVD* 35, Rome, 1975, p. 11. For still more reasons see also Fischer, *Life*, pp. 50-51.

²⁴ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 17.

friends during our student years. We went to Mass together every morning and every two weeks to the sacraments. In the Sodality we celebrated the six Aloysian Sundays.²⁵ Most of the time we lived with a good Catholic family where we were accepted almost as members of the family...”²⁶

In spite of all the external liberty, Arnold led a modest and secluded life in Bonn. He remained true to himself, to the principles inherited from his father and his training at home and at Gaesdonck. The social life of students did not attract him. He devoted all his energy and effort to his studies. It is noteworthy that a young student would attend Mass every morning and go to confession and communion every two weeks. Here, too, he was faithful to himself. He spoke little about his interior life or his prayer. He carefully concealed his feelings from those around him. He tended the fire burning within him and knew how to nourish it.

At the same time he did keep up a modest amount of social life such as he had seen in the style of his father’s small world. He was well informed about his surroundings and the academic life, as shown by his success with the mathematics competition. He let his old father share in the joy over that, inviting him for a boat trip to Bonn and Cologne.

After completing his diploma examinations to qualify as a teacher in high school and secondary school classes, he attended theology lectures in Bonn during the summer semester of 1859. Apart from the above-quoted letter, the sources say nothing about the development of his prayer life during his years in Bonn.

²⁵ It was a custom, especially recommended for the youth, to go to confession and communion on the six Sundays before the feast of St. Aloysius.

²⁶ Alt, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17. Arnold’s five letters to his former rector Dr. Clemens Perger give little insight into the development of his prayer life. Apart from the lines quoted, they speak mainly of his continuing studies in maths, for which he asked the advice of the Rector. The last letter informs Dr. Perger of his ordination to the priesthood on 15 August 1861, asks for his prayer for this intention, thanks him, and promises to remember him during holy Mass. *Verbum* 4, (1962), pp. 3-12.

3 Before Ordination

3.1 The Inner Sanctum of his Soul

After Bonn Arnold went back to Muenster where he spent another four semesters studying theology. During his final two semesters he resided in the seminary to prepare for his ordination to the priesthood. Once again he left no notes regarding his interior life. Two letters to his family from that time do, however, give some insight into his spiritual feelings and what moved him during that time of immediate preparation for the great event in his life. The first letter was to his mother, nine months before his ordination:

“Muenster, 25 November 1860

“Dearest Mother,

“You see, even in the seminary I do not forget your name day. I’m rushing off this note to you before eight in the morning when the lectures begin, so that it will reach you in time at the house on Frauenstrasse in Goch, so that I will be greeting you at the same time as the others.”

After this introduction we share with his mother a glimpse into what touched him that particular morning:

“It is still dark as I sit here alone in my little room. The candle is still burning and before me hangs a picture of Christ. My soul is silent, very silent. The sound of a church bell from somewhere near or far off is reaching my ears through the darkness. It is calling the faithful to rise from sleep and go to church where the most holy sacrifice is offered to God. I have a wonderful feeling. I’m thinking, soon you, too, will approach the holy altar, stand there in the place of Christ and celebrate the holy mysteries.”²⁷

The first hour of the day, still in darkness, was dedicated, alongside the greeting for his mother, to prayer and meditation. “The candle is still

²² Alt, *op. cit.* p. 15.

burning and before me hangs a picture of Christ.” In these simple terms Arnold endeavoured to depict the early morning atmosphere and the solemnity of his feelings. In the silence of the morning, he became aware of his inner silence: “My soul is silent, very silent.” Into this inner silence came a sense of the presence of the triune God, dwelling in the depths of his heart. His words allow us to recognize how that presence filled him, took possession of him and filled his whole being with holy awe and reverence.

“The sound of a church bell from somewhere near or far off is reaching my ears through the darkness.” The darkness and the sound of bells only increased the silence. The tones of church bells reminded him of what was taking place: the celebration of the Eucharist. “I have a wonderful feeling. I’m thinking, soon you, too, will approach the holy altar, stand there in the place of Christ and celebrate the holy mysteries.” Once again we sense his reverence and emotion as he thought of his priestly ordination, soon to take place.

Again he described the quiet in which he found himself: “Then my thoughts turn to the quiet, peaceful place where I have been for the past few days to prepare myself for that holy act.” In the rest of the letter he made a kind of review, in the presence of his mother so to speak, of his past life, his childhood and adolescent years, his studies right up to the time in the seminary, immediately before his ordination. His heart was filled with deep gratitude for all the blessings God had given him, and he also thanked his mother who had accompanied him with her loving prayers. The letter closes with wishes and sincere words of gratitude to his mother, asking her to continue praying for him.

3.2 Awaiting the Great Day

The second letter was addressed to both parents one week before his ordination:

“Muenster, 7 August 1861

“Dear Parents,

“The event for which you have been yearning so long is soon to take place.”

After some concrete details regarding his oral and written examinations, the beginning of the retreat and the date of his ordination, he continued:

“Rejoice with me and praise the Lord who has guided my steps so lovingly and now wills to do this great thing to me. He will show me the greatness of his love in even greater measure in the coming days. Pray fervently for me and offer up your good works that the Lord may grant that I will not be an unworthy priest in his sanctuary. See, his great goodness is already holding an outstretched hand to grant me many favours through my priestly ordination. Perhaps he is only waiting for you to pray that they become a reality for me. Do it, do it faithfully; ...”²⁸

In these words we sense the joy and gratitude that moved him as he thought of his coming ordination. It was not only his own longing that was soon to be fulfilled but that of his parents as well. He asked them to rejoice with him over the great blessings he had received. At the same time he again fervently asked them to pray for him, so that he would be able to receive all the graces that God wished to give him. He was well aware that all is grace. At the same time, though, these graces have to be implored in prayer. Human collaboration in the workings of grace came about, in Arnold’s view, above all through intercessory prayer.

The following prayers and resolutions have been preserved from the retreats before his ordination as subdeacon and deacon:

“Mass on Sundays should always be said in honour of the Holy Trinity in praise of creation, redemption, and my vocation to the priesthood.”²⁹

²⁸ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 22.

²⁹ Fischer, *Temple*, p.8.

Along with his father’s influence, this resolution shows something of Arnold’s innermost soul. He was not concerned with himself or his personal intentions but with the honour, praise and glory of the triune God, and with thanksgiving for the creation and redemption of humanity and his own special calling to consecrated life. For all these he wished to praise and honour God through the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the second resolution, the special devotion to the Holy Spirit, we also recognize his father’s influence:

“On Mondays, I will say Mass in honour of the Holy Spirit who is the life and support of my spiritual strength. I dedicate all studies and endeavours to him.”

Clearly the devotion to the Holy Spirit, especially on Mondays, that he introduced later into the three congregations he founded, originated in his family and the early years of his priesthood. The third resolution revealed his desire for total surrender:

“My intention at every holy Mass is to be: Lord, make me a faithful and useful servant of yours! One who knows no other wish than to be: Servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Or as Blessed Nicholas of Fluehe³⁰ said: Lord, take all from me that separates me from you; take me from myself and make me totally your own!”

It is worth noting that this was something that was to mould his whole life: At every eucharistic celebration he wished to give himself totally to his Lord and Master anew. The Lord was to dispose of him, so that it was no longer he who lived, but Christ living in him (cf. Gal 2:20). When we contemplate Arnold’s later life, totally dedicated to the incarnate Word, we can only marvel at how God accepted that prayer, the Introit to his priestly life.

Arnold was ordained on 15 August 1861 and celebrated his first Mass two days later in the Ueberwasser Church (“the church across the wa-

³⁰ Now Saint Nicholas of Fluehe, a Swiss saint who did much to unite his people in peace.

ter’) in Muenster. It was the octave of the feast of St. Laurence. The day’s readings were like a signpost for Arnold’s life and touched him deeply, as he later noted: “Anyone who sows sparsely will reap sparsely as well – and anyone who sows generously will reap generously as well (2 Co 9:6). Added to this came the words of John’s gospel: “Unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest” (Jn 12:24). “These words made a deep impression on me.”³¹ They gave orientation to his life and became the program of his priesthood. He sowed generously, dedicating his entire life and energy to sowing the word of God, and he reaped richly, a hundredfold, even a thousandfold. Doing so he became a wheat grain that fell into the earth and died and in that way became as fruitful as his Master.

His father went to Muenster for the celebrations and attended both the ordination and first Mass.³² Arnold only went home at the beginning of September and celebrated his first Mass there quietly on a weekday. In those days there was no public celebration of such events. Thus, Arnold, not yet twenty-four years old, had reached the goal he had prepared for so intensively. He was a priest forever, appointed to serve God and his people. This goal was the beginning of a new phase of his life and the beginning of his fruitful apostolic activities.

³¹ Fischer, *Life*, p. 56.

³² Nowadays we find it hard to understand that only his father went to Muenster for the ordination and first Mass; in accordance with the customs of the times, the mother did not go with him.

4 The Young Priest

4.1 Faith and Science

Before beginning his theological studies Arnold had gained a conditional qualification as a high school teacher. On 8 May 1861, three months before his ordination, he took a further examination that gave him the full qualification. It shows how well rooted he was in the matters of this world. A short time before his ordination he was thinking not only of his vocation as a priest but also as a teacher. Thus prepared, soon after his ordination he was assigned to teach at the secondary school in Bocholt. He took up his post on 15 October 1861 and taught almost every subject there for twelve years. His main subjects were mathematics and natural sciences. Generally he had twenty-four, at times even thirty, classes a week. He had a good relationship with his colleagues and he was also on good terms with the parish clergy, namely about nine or ten priests. He was always ready to help with hearing confessions and to take on services with sermons. He had a friendly relationship with his rector who esteemed his zealous, capable colleague and was not happy to see him go after twelve years of teaching.

Arnold took his duties as teacher and educator seriously. He prepared carefully for his classes and could explain lucidly to the students. Since he demanded much from himself, he also placed high demands on his students and required diligence, reverence and respect.

Alongside his tasks as a teacher, he used these years to further his theological knowledge through self-study, mainly of St. Thomas Aquinas. Several times he visited the theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben in Cologne, probably Germany’s greatest nineteenth century theologian, an expert on St. Thomas Aquinas whose work he had methodically published, translated into language more appropriate to the times. Arnold studied Scheeben’s works with great interest: *The Mysteries of Divine Grace* (1862) and especially *The Mysteries of Christianity* which appeared in 1865. The study and meditation of the great mysteries of faith continually increased his deep attitude of reverence

and surrender to the triune God. It is remarkable that Arnold also recommended that book to lay persons interested in the spiritual life, so that they would come to know the wonderful connection between the highest truths of our holy religion and the doctrine of the Trinity.³³ It was above all the Blessed Trinity that drew Arnold's special interest. *The Mysteries of Divine Grace* also corresponded to his tendency towards interiority and his desire to deepen his life of prayer.

Without doubt Scheeben's writings had a lasting influence on Arnold's spiritual development. It is not difficult to trace Scheeben's theology in his conferences, talks and many prayers. He had acquired his knowledge of the doctrines through laborious study and became able to move with ease in that world. "Faith and reason are like the two wings that raise the human spirit to contemplation of the truth," says John Paul II in his Encyclical *Fides et ratio*. Arnold moved in the world of faith with those two wings and expressed them in words that corresponded to the spiritual culture of his times and his environment. "Truth, finding meaning, and faith are interconnected. It is without doubt one of the great missionary tasks of our times to translate dogma into a language that is understandable today. We have to transmit a faith that is on the one hand settled in itself and on the other fully takes up and integrates the challenges of the present."³⁴ Arnold took up that challenge with the means at his disposal.

During his studies of mathematics and natural sciences, we can already sense that Arnold was searching for deeper recognition and understanding of reality; he sought truth in its fullest sense. Truth unites the most diverse elements into a greater, spiritual whole. Arnold found this union of truth and faith, and science and faith especially in Scheeben's works and throughout his life they gave him theological nourishment. Faith seeks intellectual understanding: "*fides quaerens intellectum*". The more Arnold began to search for truth, however, the more he reached not just mere understanding, rather he was increasingly gripped by truth itself. Cardinal Henry Newman spoke of the bold ven-

³³ Cf. Reuter, *op. cit.* p. 20.

³⁴ Henri Boulad, *Die Tausend Gesichter des Geistes*, Salzburg, Vienna, 2001, p. 271.

ture of faith and the search for knowledge as an adventurous undertaking. Arnold experienced that 'adventure' throughout his tireless searching. He was seized by what he sought. Truth took hold of him.

4.2 Mystery of Grace

For Arnold, who from his early childhood had revered and experienced God as the Triune One, enduring communion with God was a fundamental dimension of his spirituality. Scholastic theology coined the term 'sanctifying grace' to describe it. This is a dogma that is frequently incompletely understood by Christians and nowadays we find the term strange. Instead of being understood as the good news of the creative and saving love of God, it was seen as a frightening demand. If I do not have sanctifying grace, God does not love me and I am lost to him forever. Hence the anxious questions: Am I in a state of sanctifying grace or not?

Grace is a relational term; it has something to do with a relationship. From our own experience we know that if a person feels loved unconditionally, if he or she senses this person believes in me and in my abilities, I am important to him or her, then that love does not remain outside of me; instead something happens in the deepest part of my being. The love I experience transforms me from within the depths of my humanity; it releases unsuspected abilities in me and renews me. Love gives freedom and enables a loving response. I see the world with new eyes. Love gives a person wings, that is to say, it gives creative abilities which that person did not have by him or herself.

Similarly, but in an indescribably greater manner, God's love for the human person does not remain outside but enters into human reality. When God's love woos me, it forms me interiorly and frees me to respond in love, giving me verve, joy and hope. My creaturely, human reality is changed and given new form and I discover greater inner freedom, courage, faith in life, and readiness to work selflessly for others. When God accepts me radically and unconditionally, I become God's beloved partner and my life gains new meaning. The love I experience

becomes the root of my actions so that I can mould my life from this love and truly love God and others.

All this is not a result of human achievement but pure gift of the Holy Spirit, a 'being-taken-possession-of-by-God'. Thus the term 'sanctifying grace' actually means God's creative love for his people which gives me the ability to love God in return and to live from that love. Sanctifying grace must be understood in closest relation to God's giving of himself. In his unconditional giving, God does not give the person some *thing* but God self. It effects and is simultaneously the presupposition for the ability of the human person to live in communion with God.

In John's gospel Jesus says: "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" (Jn 3:3). This is the expression of the experience of the first Christians that with their faith in Christ, the risen Lord, they were given a new life, a new "birth from God". This birth from God was an experience that marked the whole of their further lives. It meant becoming a 'new person'. They saw this birth as a 'spiritual' process whereby the entire human existence is elevated to a new level of being.

This divine life in the human person is what Arnold called sanctifying grace, and the participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity it gives is the "sweet mystery", life in communion with the living God dwelling in us. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the constant guests of my soul. The holy, triune God lives and acts in me.

It was this mystery of faith above all that held Arnold in its sway, preoccupied him day and night, that he constantly recalled through his motto, and to which he wished to lead all people. That all people might share in this life of love and communion of the triune God, that was the driving force of his life and his ceaseless efforts for the work of spreading the faith.

The saints and doctors of the Church often struggle to find words and images to explain the mystery of grace. Arnold used the image of iron that becomes red hot and molten in fire. In sanctifying grace the Blessed Trinity penetrates the soul as light passes through crystal or fire penetrates iron.³⁵ The new life that is given us through birth in the Holy

³⁵ Draft prayer texts in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 127.

Spirit makes us capable of communion of life with God. The origin of this new life is God self. And God does not give just something, but God self, communion of life with the triune God.

Arnold himself was totally gripped by the fact that we receive this new life through baptism and are truly children of God. He wrote in a draft prayer text: "How consoling are the words: 'You received the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, *Abba*, Father! The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ' (Rm 8:15ff). Here on earth the children inherit the same property that the father possesses. And so it is with God. 'And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' " (2 Co 3:18).³⁶

4.3 The Major Lines of Arnold's Prayer Life

It is significant that Arnold presented this faith reality to the members of the Apostleship of Prayer, together with the demands it makes on practical Christian life and action. He called God's new self-giving 'the espousal of the soul with God'.³⁷ It gives rise to the requirement to realize this in life and attitude: "The Son of God is the Spouse of the sanctified soul. Just as two people love each other more deeply the more united they are in their disposition, the Son of God must also love tenderly a soul that is so one with him in disposition that it possesses the same Spirit as he. That is why we read: 'Anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him' (1 Co 6:17)."³⁸

For this the soul receives a threefold 'dowry': the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. "Every human heart is attracted to truth and happiness

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 68.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 76. Talk given on 8 December 1893.

³⁸ *Ibid. Handbook*, p. 93.

because every soul is the image of God, the highest truth and happiness.”³⁹
In the spiritual life with all its stages these capabilities given us by God come into effect.

Prayer for a deepening of faith, hope and love had an extraordinarily prominent place in Arnold’s prayer life. He saw growth in the spiritual life and progress in virtue above all as the increase of these three divine life-giving energies in us. In the first evening prayers that he composed for his family we already find the acts of faith, hope and love at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. In his devotions for the Way of the Cross he mentioned them at every station. Hermann Fischer once said that Arnold could be called the “saint of the three theological virtues”.⁴⁰

This immediate orientation to God led him increasingly to the centre of all truth: the mystery of the triune God. Subsequently the revelation of this mystery in human history and our calling to share in it became more and more the cornerstone of his thinking, praying and striving. The continued study of theology and fascination with God’s infinite greatness formed not only Arnold’s prayer but also all his thinking and finally also his activity. He took his spiritual life seriously. In 1863 he wrote to his father: “I made my retreat in Muenster in the Capuchin

Arnold Janssen at prayer

*St. Arnold spent many hours
at his prie-dieu,
sometimes whole nights,
in prayer.*



³⁹ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1879, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Rohner (ed.), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, p. 48.

monastery... I liked it a lot. I spent the whole day alone with some books and dined alone. But I had a nice bright room. I went to bed the same time as the Capuchins at eight in the evening and rose with them at 12 at night.”⁴¹

We sense here how Arnold’s own disposition towards prayer and spiritual life was increasingly taking shape. He became a man of prayer, often and gladly seeking communion with his God. In Bocholt he frequently arrived late for the noon meal with Rector Waldau and parish priest Fr. Vahrenhorst, because he had quickly prayed the Stations of the Cross between classes and dinner. His friend Rector Waldau said in that connection, “Arnold used to pray the Way of the Cross several times a day; sometimes he did have to make it quite short. He also urged us to read for a quarter of an hour during the midday meal, usually from the writings of Anne Catherine Emmerick or from the lives of the saints.”⁴²

His growing desire for total surrender to the divine will was expressed in letters to his parents. He felt strongly urged to live for God alone. “Like Mary we also have to offer ourselves to God with filial confidence and ask him to dispose of us according to his will. Moreover [we must] not waste our love on the things of this world but direct it to God from whom comes all that is good and beautiful and who wants our whole heart.”⁴³

One of Arnold’s resolutions dating from those years gives us a glimpse of his feelings and the prayer intentions that moved him. The special devotion to the Sacred Heart was already apparent and increasingly filled his prayers and reflections. In that connection he resolved to say Mass without accepting a stipend on every Friday of the year, in honour of the Sacred Heart, to give glory to his high priestly state, his love and all his virtues. In particular he wanted to do homage to the Trinity dwelling in that Heart, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in order

1 – that through the grace of Jesus the union of humanity with God might grow

⁴¹ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 26.

⁴² Fischer, *Life*, p. 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 60, Letter of 23 November 1865.

- 2 – that God might be well pleased with the prayers and works of the faithful
- 3 – that Jesus might unite priests more intimately with himself.⁴⁴

Reading these resolutions we cannot fail to notice the selflessness of Arnold's prayer. He intended to celebrate the Eucharist in honour of the Sacred Heart without a Mass stipend. God was to be honoured and glorified for God's own sake, with no other motive. He did not wish anything from this in the form of material gain for himself.

This is followed by what "devotion to the Sacred Heart" meant to him. The theological knowledge based on Thomas Aquinas and Scheeben that he had acquired through personal effort becomes apparent. For Arnold the Heart of Jesus was the human-divine Person of Jesus. The human face of God, his incomprehensible love for humanity, was revealed to him in Jesus. He wanted to glorify Jesus' love and all his virtues through the celebration of the Eucharist, and especially to pay homage to the Blessed Trinity whose principal throne is the Heart of Jesus.

In 1844 a group of French Jesuits founded an association called "Apostleship of Prayer in Union with the Sacred Heart". Its purpose was apostolic prayer to promote God's honour and the salvation of humankind, in union with the prayers and sacrifices of the divine Heart of Jesus. The movement spread rapidly throughout the world and had the privilege of many indulgences. The members received an information bulletin, the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. The first issue appeared in June 1861, shortly before Arnold was ordained.

The influence of this prayer apostolate on the development of Arnold's prayer life cannot be overlooked. The writings of the Director, H. Ramière, SJ, especially, had a lasting effect that caused Arnold to value and spread the apostolate.⁴⁵ The most important aspects of his devotion to the Sacred Heart can be traced back to Ramière, as is evident in his later writings. In particular:

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 61. To give away 51 Mass stipends every year is a gesture that testifies to Arnold's selfless attitude.

⁴⁵ H. Ramière, *Der Apostolat des allerheiligsten Herzens Jesu. Ein Weihegeschenk fuer die Befoederer und Befoederinnen des Gebets-Apostolats*, Trier, 1868.

- 1) The intimate union with the Sacred Heart and the exchange of his riches for our poverty;
- 2) Perfect oneness with the Sacred Heart and one another in our thinking, desiring and acting, in order to become one with Jesus, as Jesus is one with the Father.

The focus is on the dispositions of the Sacred Heart that ought to become the guiding principle for all thoughts and actions of the human heart. Inseparably connected to that is assimilation of the actions and virtues of Jesus or, as we would say today, identification with his life praxis. Prominence is given to the union of Jesus with his mystical body, such that the members of the body share in all the works of the Head, and especially in his suffering. Added to this is the idea of reparation, union with the bloodless Sacrifice on the altars of the world in reparation for all the offences against God, and union of our prayers and works with those of the Sacred Heart. Ultimately union with the dispositions of the Sacred Heart was the deepest motivation that led Arnold to his life's

work, so that all might come to faith in the holy triune God and to union with him.

With this a characteristic thought emerged that was to give form to Arnold's whole prayer life: the Sacred Heart as the dwelling of the Blessed Trinity. Added to that came the apostolic orientation of his prayers: glorification of the triune God and fulfilment of the salvific desires of the divine Heart of Jesus in the whole world; those were his prayer intentions and the intentions of his own heart, truly no everyday prayer



Tabernacle door in the Mission House Oratory

The room where St. Arnold worked and slept for 27 years is now an oratory.

wishes. We may compare them with the first petitions of the Our Father: May your name be held holy, glorified, your kingdom come, may it spread, your will be done. Arnold was concerned with God and his kingdom and that all people would share in the love and community of the Trinity.

It is not difficult to recognize here the broad lines of Arnold's prayer life, his characteristic trinitarian spirituality and apostolic orientation that prepared him for his life's task. Like Jesus, he did not develop a systematic treatise on it. What is expressed in his personal resolutions, however, and the prayers he composed betray something of the source that flowed within him, seeking form and expression. He himself became more and more a dwelling of the Sacred Heart. The purpose and intentions of that Heart became his own wishes: Glorification of the triune God and the achievement of his salvific will for all people.



Oratory Door

*Symbol of Arnold Janssen's motto:
May the Heart of Jesus live in the
hearts of all people.*

5 The Intentions of the Sacred Heart

5.1 Apostleship of Prayer

Until 1866 Arnold taught arithmetic, mathematics and natural sciences in all classes. Since the material remained essentially the same, as the years went on he was able to save himself long preparation. He only needed to deepen and complement the subject matter. That left him more time for himself and he was able to devote his attention, alongside his theology studies, to the new Apostleship of Prayer.

In 1866 Arnold joined the movement and was admitted to the circle of promoters of the "Devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Apostleship of Prayer". At the Catholic Congress in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1867, he met Fr. Malfatti, SJ, director of the Apostleship of Prayer for Germany and Austria and from 1865-1882 editor of the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*. Malfatti asked him to head the association in the diocese of Muenster. From that time on Arnold promoted the Apostleship of Prayer with great dedication and began to recruit new members. At the beginning of 1869 he was formally appointed Diocesan Director. Up till then he had only had the right to recruit individual members, but from that time on he could also admit parish and convent communities. When he took up the office, the membership list for Muenster diocese numbered twenty-six groups. In the Easter and autumn vacations of 1869 alone he visited 160 parishes. He made many of the journeys on foot. By 1873 when he sent in his final report to Fr. Malfatti, of the 350 parishes in the Muenster diocese, almost 300 were entered as members of the Apostleship of Prayer. The list of members enrolled by Arnold during those years reached a total of 660.⁴⁶

His activities for this apostolate effected a great transformation in Arnold himself first of all. True as it is that grace builds on nature, in Arnold we can also detect the opposite: God's grace transforms and ennobles nature. Whereas Arnold was formerly taciturn, closed, not very

⁴⁶ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 32.

sociable or eloquent, to the extent that he preferred to present his desires even to his fatherly friend Dr. Perger in writing rather than orally, his service to the Apostleship helped him overcome his inhibitions. He did not hesitate to knock at the door of an unfamiliar rectory and appeal to the parish priest for his support for the Apostleship of Prayer.⁴⁷ He, the young priest and teacher in a small town school who, until then had spoken only in classrooms with around fifteen students and sometimes in a middle-sized church, began preparing to speak about the aims of the Apostleship of Prayer at the Catholic Congress in Duesseldorf and to recommend it for all the Catholics of Germany.

Two written drafts of his speech have been preserved.⁴⁸ In the second, especially, the convictions Arnold maintained throughout his life regarding prayer become tangible. In the course of the talk he stated that the promotion of good does not depend so much on hustle and bustle on our part, nor on our will, but on the will of God (cf. Rm 9:16). If God wills something, he can find ways and means to bring it about and we can move God's will if we pray intensely enough. Arnold spoke about ecumenism, the return of separated Christians, as it was expressed in those days, in the conviction that this great grace could be won if the Catholics showed sufficient zeal. The association's goal was to unite Christians in one, powerful alliance of prayer. It would be a power that derived its greatness from faith, hope, love, sacrifice and close union with the One from whom all works derive their efficacy. "Let us pray and help others to pray, and then we have no need to worry about the future. As truly as God's words are eternal, this promise will prove true: 'Anything you ask for from the Father, he will grant in my name' " (Jn 16:23).

In these words we can already detect the attitude that characterized Arnold when he founded his work in Steyl, namely his attitude of faith, one could almost say his boundless faith. He was concerned with God's kingdom, honour and glory: the growth of all good, reuniting separated Christians, spreading the faith.

⁴⁷ Bornemann, *op. cit.* p. 22.

⁴⁸ Alt, *op. cit.* pp. 32-35.

To attain that he relied solely on God and God's grace. And that had to be implored through prayer and sacrifice. If that was done, Arnold had no worries about anything else. God has ways and means of achieving his plan of salvation. This attitude of faith, the passionate love burning within him for God and his kingdom, led Arnold to transcend himself and grow beyond the constraints of his own nature. It gave him the inner freedom, in spite of his human limitations and faults of which he was aware, to work with courage and enthusiasm for the Apostleship of Prayer.

The great reality for Arnold was God, one and triune, dwelling in his heart. He identified more and more with the wishes of Jesus. That is why the intention to permeate the daily activities with the attitudes and mind of Jesus and to pray for his intentions particularly attracted him. In the admission booklet for the Apostleship of Prayer he wrote: "There are apostles who preach and who pray. ... The best preaching apostles were those who followed the example of our Saviour who spent whole nights in prayer, that is, those who prayed most fervently. ... We honour the Sacred Heart best when we make his mind our own, remembering the admonition of Holy Scripture: 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Phil 2:5)."

His proposal that the Catholic Congress recommend the Apostleship was unanimously accepted and with that the association could become more public throughout Germany.⁴⁹

After that Arnold also devoted his attention to promoting the rosary as the best prayer of intercession for the intentions of Jesus. In a letter to Archbishop Paul Melchers of Cologne in 1872, he wrote: "My efforts to promote intercessory prayer by offering up the rosary have been very blessed by God. I have visited nearly all the parishes of Cologne, in Bonn, Deutz and down along the Rhine...."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ After the recommendation of his proposal by the Catholic Congress, Arnold sent a prayer for the unity of Christians from the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom to all Catholics and also invited the separated brothers and sisters to join in prayer for reunion in faith. See Appendix.

⁵⁰ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 35.

These “missionary journeys” of Arnold often took weeks. “I have travelled for five weeks during the holidays to promote the offering up of the rosary according to the method described on the prayer card. The success of the project has led me through the dioceses of Cologne, Trier, Luxembourg, Metz, Strasbourg, German-speaking Switzerland, Augsburg, Munich, Salzburg, Passau, Regensburg, Mainz.”⁵¹

For this promotional work Arnold had special prayer cards printed with appropriate introductions and prayer intentions. In June 1873, for instance, he had 25,000 copies each of three different prayer leaflets printed. In addition he had already composed the admission booklet for the Apostleship of Prayer, a Way of the Cross devotion, a handbook of common prayer, and a *Friday Booklet*. In that way Arnold already reached thousands of people in almost all the dioceses of Germany and beyond, encouraging them in apostolic prayer.

Arnold’s tireless missionary activity “for the intentions of the Sacred Heart” allows us to conclude that his own prayer was also thoroughly apostolic and missionary. He identified with the intentions of his Master and made them consistently more his own.

5.2 May the Heart of Jesus live in the Hearts of all People

For Arnold the Heart of Jesus was the spiritual centre of the God-man Jesus Christ in whom the never-ending love of God the Father was revealed, and who invites us to share life and mission with him. In the Heart of Jesus he saw



A Heart of Flame

Window in a hallway of the Mission House

⁵¹ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 36.

the perfect dwelling of the Trinity, and God invites us to form our life according to this model. Arnold himself became a missionary and an apostle of the Sacred Heart in the school of the Apostleship of Prayer. In what did devotion to the Sacred Heart consist for Arnold and how are we to understand the above motto?

In the admission book for the Apostleship of Prayer he recommended to the members: “We honour the Sacred Heart best when we make his mind our own, remembering the admonition of Holy Scripture: ‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:5). The best form of devotion to the Heart of Jesus is to make our wishes conform to those of the Heart of Christ, that is, that we think about God and the affairs of the world and eternity as he does. We should live our lives not for our own honour and glory, but in accordance with God’s will for his glory. We should work industriously for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, just as Jesus did. God should be glorified in us as useful tools, and through us be glorified by others.”⁵²

Arnold referred there to the dispositions of the Heart of Jesus. Frequently he also spoke of the intentions or wishes of the Sacred Heart or of our Saviour. That clearly shows that he regarded the heart as a symbol for the entire person, the heart in the biblical sense. The Heart of Jesus, therefore, meant the Heart of Jesus in the broad and full sense of the word, his whole interior life.

The love and goodness of Jesus, his sincere compassion, his human virtues, his suffering and distress, his attitude of unlimited surrender, his emotions and inner feelings, all have their seat and centre in the Sacred Heart. Our litany of the Sacred Heart ascribes the love and virtuous life of Jesus to his Heart. It was these dispositions of Jesus that Arnold sought to love and venerate in the image of his Heart.

The three greatest “treasures” for Arnold in the devotion to the Sacred Heart were:

1. the divinity of the Eternal Word of God whose “tabernacle” is the Sacred Heart;

⁵² Arnold Janssen, *Admission Booklet for the Apostleship of Prayer*, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 124.

2. the holy soul of Jesus with its inner life;
3. the precious blood that flowed from the heart of Christ.

Concerning the second treasure, the soul of Jesus, Arnold wrote: “The second treasure of the Heart of Jesus is his human soul ... From the first moment of its being it existed in the state of sanctifying grace and in the vision of God. The Eternal Son of God united himself to this soul in the unity of a single person. Let us therefore venerate the holy soul of Jesus in the Sacred Heart with all its virtues and merits.”⁵³ With today’s understanding of grace we could say that in Jesus Christ God has given himself totally to human persons, accepted them and “lifted them up”, so as to accept them radically into his love. The meaning of grace as “the self-giving of God” is that in Christ we share in the divine community of life and love.

Just as important to Arnold as veneration and adoration of the divine Heart was to become like that Heart; our life has to become like his life. For him devotion to the Sacred Heart consisted in truly following Christ in his thinking and acting, his prayer, his love for the Father and his love for all people. To grow more christlike in this way was the guiding principle of Arnold’s life, prayer and sacrifice, his limitless trust and total surrender. In the final years of his life he could still write, “I will try to come as close as possible to the mind of Jesus, his life, teaching, deeds, sorrows, and death. During Holy Eucharist, together with Christ I will offer to the Father and the Holy Spirit all my sufferings, difficulties, and whatever God sends me.”⁵⁴

During his long, tireless travels through the dioceses of Germany, it was unavoidable that Arnold should be increasingly confronted by one of the “wounds of the Sacred Heart”, namely the Church. It demanded all his love and availability and at the same time prepared him still further for the real task of his life.

⁵³ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1974, p. 44, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 124.

⁵⁴ Albert Rohner (ed.) *Arnold Janssen: Persoenliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1906 [AJ, Personal Notes]*, with a commentary by Albert Rohner, (*Analecta SVD* 55), Rome, 1981. Referred to from here on as *Personal Notes*. This excerpt from No. 1 is quoted in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 126.

6 Zeal for Your House Consumes Me

6.1 Christian Unity

His activities for the Apostleship of Prayer, and the accompanying contacts and insight into many ecclesial situations opened Arnold’s mind to the great intentions of the Church. At the same time it brought him closer to the reality of division in the German churches.

In the Church’s self-understanding of the time, Christian unity meant the return of the separated churches to the Catholic fold. From then on this great, contemporary, spiritual question engaged Arnold’s interest and apostolic activity. It was clear to him that Christian unity could only be attained with the help of divine grace. Acting on his conviction, he took up the cause of imploring this grace through prayer and sacrifice. Once again he undertook long and difficult journeys throughout Germany to win bishops, priests and faithful for this intention. He tried to obtain the means to have a daily Mass celebrated in that intention in Fulda at the tomb of St. Boniface, the apostle of Germany.

The extremely difficult political and ecclesiastical situation in Germany, where the kulturkampf struggles were in full swing, was one factor that hindered him from securing an endowment for a daily Mass. Consequently the money he had collected was used directly to have Masses for Christian unity celebrated. Arnold’s efforts in that matter testify to his searching and striving to find ways of putting his apostolic disposition into practice.

When we look at the prayer intentions and their obvious apostolic outlook, we should not be surprised that he sometimes doubted whether he was in the right place in Bocholt, as he himself later confessed: “Formerly when I was in Bocholt, I thought, Why be a teacher? Why not be somewhere else where you could do more good? But my bishop said to me, Divine Providence is leading you. So I did not brood and did what was incumbent upon me. Later, when establishing the Mission House, it dawned on me that I had been in the right place after all to prepare me for my future work.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 28.

In the midst of the kulturkampf, however, a dispute with the school authorities regarding the installation of a statue of the Madonna brought things to a head. In March 1873 Arnold resigned from his post as a teacher at the high school so as to devote all his time to the Apostleship of Prayer. Many of his colleagues criticised the step, saying it was unwise and rash to give up his secure position. To him, however, it was a logical step that took him closer to his life's true task.

His tireless work for the Apostleship of Prayer and the intentions connected to it show that his interior world was no longer that of a small town mathematician. His activity for the Apostleship and for Christian unity, the many journeys and resulting contacts with large numbers of people had broadened his horizon. His gaze was directed to the great intentions of the Church; mission became increasingly the focus of his attention.



Sower of the Divine Word - In the background the Mission House

The kulturkampf itself, that was causing great distress to the Church in Germany, made him look beyond the horizons of his homeland and interpret the suffering and difficulties from God's viewpoint. At a time when he had to contend with a number of difficulties himself, he wrote, "God is most wonderful in all his ways. Even in the present distress he most certainly has his own loving intentions. It comes after so many prayers. For that reason it is impossible for us to regard it as a misfortune. Of course, some not insignificant abuses arise here and there. On the whole, however, they will prove to have been blessings."⁵⁶

It was not only the Church's difficulties that Arnold saw in God's light. In his personal life journey, as well, precisely at that time of searching and decision making, he entrusted himself to God's love and providence: "It is part and parcel of God's guidance that he only reveals his designs to us gradually. How otherwise would we learn to walk before him in the light of faith and unconditional trust."⁵⁷

Many years later Arnold spoke of his deeper motivation for giving up the secure position in Bocholt: "There in Bocholt I was animated by the thought of doing more for the spiritual well-being of the Church and especially the foreign missions. But the great amount of work did not leave much possibility for activities in that line. I wanted to take up a post that made it possible. In this I was mainly guided by the thought of gaining time to publish a popular, monthly magazine to promote prayer and sharing in the great intentions of our divine Saviour, especially for the propagation of the holy faith."⁵⁸

6.2 The Universal Mission

After his release from the school in Bocholt, Arnold found employment as chaplain at the Ursuline Convent in Kempen. His main duties there were daily celebration of the Eucharist and religion classes in the

⁵⁶ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1874, p. 46.

⁵⁷ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1874, p. 12.

⁵⁸ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1874, p. 63.

boarding school for young ladies run by the Ursulines. For that he received free board and lodging. He had to take care of all other expenses himself but his requirements were so modest that he managed well.

There he had time for his long-held wish to publish a monthly periodical that would take his ideas and intentions to a wider public, especially his thoughts on the “internal and external mission”. The first issue of the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* appeared in January 1874. He placed it under the patronage of that Heart because it had been founded in its honour. His style was simple and homely, directed at the widest possible circles. From the beginning news about the “pagan missions” were the main point of interest because, as the author wrote: “The goal of the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* is mainly to awaken interest in the external mission of the Catholic Church among the pagans... The work of spreading the faith is the first and highest goal of the Church on earth.”⁵⁹

Almost one hundred years later, during Vatican II, the Church said of itself: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. This decree flows from ‘that fountain of love’ or charity within God the Father” (AG 2).

Where earlier Arnold had regretted the fact that there was so little interest in Germany for the work of spreading the faith and had expressed his pain over that, he was now dismayed that his idea of the necessity of a German mission house to train missionaries fell on deaf ears. German men and women ought to be going to the “pagan missions” in great numbers. The *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* was an appropriate means for Arnold to gain broader publicity for his idea and also to serve such a mission house himself. Even for that intention, however, the most important aspect for him was prayer, especially to the Sacred Heart, and he recommended it time and again.

⁵⁹ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* 1874, p. 75, in Fischer, *Life*, p. 77.

He did not only recommend that others pray, he became more and more a man of prayer himself. In Kempen he slept little, went to bed late and rose early. Before celebrating Mass himself, he attended several Masses in the town. Every day more than once he prayed the Way of the Cross with outstretched arms. He fasted a great deal and kept four days of abstinence in the week. It was said that in the evenings he knelt in his room, unmoving and absorbed in God while praying. He remained like that for hours on end.⁶⁰

God answered his prayer by making Arnold himself into the instrument to found a mission house. As he struggled and his heart burned with zeal, the Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong, Mgr. Raimondi, challenged him: “Found a mission house yourself.” Those words fell into his heart like a grain of seed and began to germinate. It left him no peace. He thought he was not capable of such a task. Many others shared that opinion. “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Co 1:27).

His continual preoccupation with the thought of a mission house convinced him more and more of its necessity. He clearly realized that the project had to be taken up. In summer 1874 Mgr. Raimondi visited him twice and urged him not merely to write about the mission house that ought to be founded, but also to begin the undertaking. After some initial resistance, it appeared to Arnold with increasing clarity that the project was God’s will. In autumn 1874, after much prayer and thorough reflection, Arnold came to the conclusion that it was the will of God that he found a mission house himself.

That brings us to a significant characteristic of Arnold’s spirituality and prayer life: to fulfill God’s will. Once he had seen, after thoroughly weighing every aspect of a situation and praying about it intensively, that a matter was God’s will, the decision was clear: it had to be carried out. Then nothing in the world, no contradictions or hindrances, could keep him from following it through. And so he began his life’s work, in God’s name and trusting in God’s help.

⁶⁰ Fischer, *Temple*, p. 15-16.

7 Serving the Word

7.1 Steyl: Foundation of the Society of the Divine Word

Much has already been written about the external conditions, details and difficulties of the Steyl foundation, but what went on inside the founder himself? How did his prayer life develop during that time of opposition, resistance, and apparent lack of success? On 16 June 1875 Arnold and his first companions consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart. He regarded this consecration as the origin of his work. The prayer: “May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all people” was to be his motto and program.

His first efforts to purchase a suitable property failed because he lacked support and the necessary financial means. His urgent request for donations in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* brought only meagre results. At that time he was dogged by the temptation to give up the plan. The difficulties and resistance he could expect seemed to exceed his strength. Later he said of those dark hours:

“If I had not said to myself, you are a coward and are acting contrary to the will of God, I would really have abandoned everything. The hardest thing was to have to work among healthy men when I was sickly, as was necessary in order to carry out my duties. But the Lord gave me the strength to persevere and I am grateful to him for that... But God let me shake in my shoes and gave me just the amount of energy I needed so that I did not give up the decision made but carried on with the work I had begun.”⁶¹

The responses of bishops and priests whom he visited and asked for support for his work were mainly negative and none too encouraging. Most of them considered him totally unsuited to such a work and urgently counselled him to give up such hopeless plans. Many times he was laughed at and regarded as a fool. His conversation with the Archbishop of Cologne was typical: “We live in a time when everything

⁶¹ Fischer, *Life*, p. 100-101.

seems to be shaking and sinking. Now you are coming and want to start something new,” to which Arnold replied: “Yes, we live in a time when much is collapsing and new things must be established in their place...”⁶²

Arnold did not give up his plan. In prayer he struggled to feel God’s support and help. By means of letters and distant and difficult journeys to bishops and influential persons in civil society, he canvassed for support for his work. Little by little his requests met with success, giving him new confidence and inner strength.

On 16 June 1875 he signed the purchase contract of the land for the mission house. He chose the date specifically because on that day Catholics all over the world were consecrating themselves to the Sacred Heart. At his suggestion, he and his collaborators also consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart, especially for the goals of the new work. Arnold himself regarded that day as the actual foundation day of the ‘Society of the Divine Word’, although the inauguration of the new mission house took place on 8 September 1875 and that day was considered the official foundation day.

After that consecration Arnold wrote: “The Mission House will never forget its origin. And, since it has as its stated goal to work to fulfil the grace-giving intentions of the divine Heart of Jesus, still more does it feel compelled by its origins to call upon the Sacred Heart more forcefully and, as a proof of this, to make the following words its motto and standard: *Vivat Cor Jesu in cordibus hominum!* May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all!”⁶³

7.2 Sharing in the Humanity of the Word

This program prayer expressed the founder’s intention. It hung at the front entrance of the new mission house with an image of the Sacred Heart. In the early years, the members greeted each other with that

⁶² Alt, *op. cit.* p. 57.

⁶³ Albert Rohner, “Coram Lumine Verbi, the Society’s Program Prayer” in Peter McHugh, ed., *Arnold Janssen Yesterday and Today, Analecta SVD 63/III*, Rome 1998, p. 190.

prayer. The following words taken from his inaugural sermon during the official dedication of the Mission House on 8 September 1875 shed light on his inner disposition: "... the purpose of this house is nothing other than to help proclaim the Gospel among the peoples who do not know God at all or not in the right way ... The simplicity of this beginning should not discourage us. The mightiest tree starts as a single seed... we hope God will provide everything we need. And he may do with us what he wills. If the seminary succeeds, we will thank the grace of God. If nothing comes of it, we will humbly strike our breast and confess that we were not worthy of the grace."⁶⁴

His words made it clear: Arnold identified with the dispositions and mind of Jesus. Just as the Divine Word became human and dwelt in the Heart of Jesus so as to proclaim to all people the good news of the Father's incomprehensible love, the Mission House was to serve that sole purpose. The beginning was poor and insignificant as was the birth of Jesus, a tiny seed that was to grow into a great tree whose branches would one day reach all over the world.

Above all Arnold identified with Jesus' surrender to the Father: "He may do with us what he wills." These words on the foundation day reveal a great, inner freedom and total trust in God's providence and goodness. The founder was not concerned with himself. He transcended the insignificance of his own, human person, with his faults and weaknesses,⁶⁵ and his lack of talent and ability for such an undertaking. He trusted solely in God's grace. His only concern was to be worthy of that grace.

His first foundation, however, was not named for the Sacred Heart, but was called "Society of the Divine Word". Clearly, therefore, predominant in his spirituality, his prayer life and his zeal for the missions

⁶⁴ "Arnold Janssen's Inaugural Sermon, September 8, 1875" in McHugh, ed., *Analecta* 63/III, *op. cit.* p. 152-153.

⁶⁵ He was very well aware of his faults and lack of ability and strove tirelessly to overcome them. That is shown by one of his poems, "Have patience with yourself!" composed in September 1899. See Appendix.

was the mystery of the Trinity, especially its manifestation in human history as the mystery of salvation, reaching out to humanity in an incomprehensible way. Already in the evening prayer he composed, he invoked the individual divine Persons. In the various phases of his life, the emphasis on each of these Persons differed according to his interior development. At the time of his first foundation, the mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Word was the central focus of his thoughts and prayers. Thus, even before 8 September 1875, he wrote in the first draft concerning the basis and purpose of his work:

"Our general purpose is to serve God and neighbour by spreading the knowledge and love of the Blessed Trinity, of the sacred humanity of Jesus, and of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, by totally dedicating ourselves to the divine Heart of Jesus in those activities in which each one appears most capable of fulfilling his holy wishes.

"Of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, we wish to venerate the Word of God in a special way. He lives among us in the most Sacred Heart of Jesus in the tabernacle. He graciously wishes to give himself to us, to reside in our hearts, and to enliven our souls. The Word is the uncreated Wisdom and Light that enlightens every person who comes into the world.

"Our special purpose is firstly the spread of the faith in pagan lands. It is connected with our general purpose as follows: the spread of faith greatly promotes the salvation of souls and that is the deepest desire of the Heart of Jesus. But the words of the one proclaiming the faith can only bear fruit with the help of grace from that Divine Word that enlightens every person who comes into the world."⁶⁶

There follow more details regarding the second purpose, namely the cultivation of science, theology, humanistic studies and natural sciences, as well as the adoption of the Third Rule of St. Dominic. Differences of opinion on these points, especially regarding the cultivation of sciences and the Third Rule of St. Dominic, finally led to a break with the first

⁶⁶ Fischer: *Life*. See also McHugh, ed., *Analecta* 63/III, *op. cit.* p. 286.

companions. They had wanted the missions as the only goal and considered the Dominican Rule with its many prescriptions of fast and abstinence too severe for a missionary order. By introducing the Dominican Rule, Arnold wanted to give his work a proven ascetical foundation. In addition he was of the opinion that it was essential for a missionary order to cultivate scholarship. It is a sign of his openness and farsightedness.

In that first draft, the foundations of Arnold's spirituality show clearly: the mystery of the Trinity, the Divine Word whom he venerated especially in the incarnation, his presence in the Heart of Jesus and his dwelling in human hearts.⁶⁷ It is precisely the recognition that God dwells in human hearts, in the heart of every person including the poorest and most excluded, that makes Arnold Janssen's spirituality and

charism so tremendously important for our times. It is significant that he never said: May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of Christians, or May the holy triune God live in the hearts of believers or Catholics; it is always: May the Heart of Jesus / the triune God / live in the hearts of all people.

A hundred years later Vatican II said: "For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person... Linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope. All this holds true not only



Window in a hallway of the Mission House

Symbolic portrayal of the flames of love of the Trinity

⁶⁷ Although devotion to the Holy Spirit was also a heritage from Arnold's parental home, it did not have any special stress in his draft statutes at that stage.

for Christians but for all persons of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. ... The Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to everyone the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery." (GS 22)

Rather like an echo of Arnold's charism and the Council's proclamation, a book appeared recently with the title: "On a Pilgrimage towards an Encounter with the Trinity". In this book the author relates various encounters with street people, the poorest of the poor, in whom he experienced the presence of God in a unique way: "One night, after the 'Our Father' in the cold of the street and the night, in the darkness of this city [São Paulo], in the midst of society's despised and excluded people, a light shone out. In the light of a candle a silence fell, a silence born of a presence; a presence that the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, yet still a presence that each one experienced intensively. No one could break the silence of this presence. Christ was present there. Then, after a long pause, one of those in the group spoke softly and slowly: 'What we are experiencing here is a little piece of heaven on earth'."⁶⁸ To discover this presence and to help make it known was Arnold's great desire; it is part of our missionary charism.

For Arnold, identification with the incarnate Divine Word was not just a wish written on paper, he identified with his Master in his prayer life and, above all, in his suffering. Right on the day of his arrival in Steyl, he set out the order of prayer for the small community. True to his tendency, those prayers were uncommonly long. During the common morning and evening prayers, they knelt on the cold stone tiles of the corridor. Brother Juniper, who stayed in Steyl for some time because of the kulturkampf,⁶⁹ once pointed out that kneeling for so long on the cold stones was too tiring. Arnold replied, "Oh my dear brother, that all gains merit for the missions."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Henrique Peregrino da Trindade, *Peregrinando ao encontro da Trindade*, São Paulo, 1997, p. 276-277.

⁶⁹ Arnold's brother William, the Capuchin Brother Juniper, was sent by his superiors for a time during the kulturkampf period to help out in the new foundation in Steyl.

⁷⁰ Literally "the poor pagans", in Fischer, *Life*, p. 126.

Arnold was permeated with God's presence and based his whole life on this one aspect of surrender to God and his kingdom; consequently there was no such thing for him as too much or too long when it came to prayer and prayer intentions. In the school of the Apostleship of Prayer he had led an exceptionally ascetic life. For that reason he was often not aware that he was asking too much of his co-workers or the community. At that time he lacked experience and had to learn from painful disappointments and setbacks how to adjust his demands to concrete human possibilities.

7.3 Surrender – Tested in the Crucible of Suffering

Just as was said of Jesus, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Arnold, too, had to experience what it meant to be insignificant, poor and misunderstood like his Master. Arnold was of middling height, thin and pale and looked unhealthy. His shabby clothing and sickly appearance aroused sympathy and pity. He was not eloquent and not versed in social etiquette. There was nothing about him that struck people and roused enthusiasm.

The material support that the young Mission House received came for the most part from poor and insignificant people. Arnold himself found that precisely the poor were open for the action of the Spirit. At the poor and unpretentious beginning of his foundation in Steyl, the donations that made the purchase of the property possible came from the Poor Clares and a servant maid.

So Arnold wrote in the January issue of the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*: "Up till now God has mainly helped our Mission House through gifts from poor and lowly persons. And we thank him for that; those are gifts that bring the greatest blessing. May they also help us to be quite poor and lowly in spirit ourselves; for heaven belongs to the poor."⁷¹

⁷¹ Fischer, *Life*, p. 132. But Arnold was also grateful for donations from the rich. In March 1875 he wrote in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*: "What a great grace God has

That was not just a wish; especially during the early years of the foundation Arnold had plenty of opportunity to experience and live poverty concretely. It was not so much the external privations and limitations of the first years, although they were also harsh and almost too much for his collaborators. He was satisfied with little and felt happy that way. It was harder to bear the disdain of so many educated and influential personalities who viewed his work sceptically and judged it negatively and, therefore, did not give him the necessary support. He was looked on with pity as a man who entertained eccentric ideas. Many saw the lack of material means as the greatest obstacle in the way of achieving the goal.



The Inn beside the River Maas

The Society of the Divine Word was born in this poverty.

Arnold's capital was his unshakable trust in God and the conviction that God had called him to this work. All the same he suffered sorely from the indifference and disdain from without and the storms within, which threatened to tear the young Mission House apart, although they could not destroy it. His words in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in June 1876 about surrender to God in times of suffering give us

given to those whom he allowed to be born in good circumstances. They, however, have the duty to pay God an appropriate tribute from their possessions. In the Old Covenant it was one tenth of the annual income. I do not wish to stipulate how much it ought to be now, because that will differ according to circumstances; I merely say this: where strict duty stops, love begins. What sweet consolation it is to be able to recall on one's deathbed the words of our Lord: 'Much is forgiven her because she loved much'.'

an insight into his own pain and the inner disposition with which he bore it: “God often strikes the pious; but he also anoints and heals and gives with the suffering even greater glory and grace. He gives us exactly what we need at every moment: light, consolation, strength, and raises us up, all in his own good time. So let us trust God and hold out our hand as a child does, so that he will take our hand and lead us! For it is he who says: ‘I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you’.’” (Is 41: 13)⁷²

Many years later (19 October 1975) the Decree of Beatification for Arnold Janssen testified that these words were not just advice but shared his own experience of life and suffering: “His strong faith overcame difficulties, bore hardships, humiliations and adversities; disillusionment did not break his spirit.”⁷³ The decree at the beginning of the beatification process already stated: “In his enterprises he met with innumerable difficulties and he had to suffer much and many painful things. But he overcame everything with unconquerable strength and unshakable trust in God, who by these sufferings tested his virtue in fire and purified it and thereby blessed his work in the richest and most wonderful way.”⁷⁴

Later, in his memoirs, Arnold wrote of that time of initial testing and suffering: “It is easy to understand how greatly I suffered under such circumstances. How often did I sigh: ‘O Lord and God, how can anything come of this?’ The situation lay like a heavy burden on my heart and it is not surprising that I became even more sick than I already was. I visibly lost weight.”⁷⁵ Although he normally did not speak about his own suffering and trials, once at a particularly difficult time it slipped out to his Brother Juniper: “Oh brother, I am being pulled through a hedge of thorns,” and he burst into tears.⁷⁶

⁷² Fischer, *Life*, p. 178.

⁷³ Reuter, *op. cit.* p. 63.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Fischer, *Life*, p. 149-150.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150. Brother Juniper went to his brother Arnold in Kempen on 18 August 1875 and travelled to Steyl the following day. He stayed there until 8 May 1877. So Arnold’s anguished words referred to the strife among the companions during the first months.

Brother Juniper reported that during that time Arnold took refuge in prayer more than ever. He often prayed the Way of the Cross in the parish church of Steyl with outstretched arms.⁷⁷ There he gained the strength to persevere and to continue his path. For many years Arnold had felt a desire to give himself totally to God. Since his decision to found the mission work in Steyl had matured, he felt that from then on he was only an instrument in God’s hand. He continually gave himself over to that loving hand anew. But as with the only begotten Son, that hand also led Arnold through adversity, suffering and death to the fulfilment of his mission and final glory.

The special surrender to the incarnate Divine Word was realized not only in the pro-clamation of the word but above all in identification with him in his suffering. That is why radical surrender to God in Jesus Christ, especially in the surrender of his passion, belongs essentially to Arnold’s spirituality. It is expressed mainly in his preference for the Way of the Cross that he prayed several times a day when things were difficult.

In his talks, sermons and articles, and especially in his 1891 rule, we frequently find reflections on the theme of the school of suffering that he experienced so intensively himself. Thus he wrote: “In all things, seek not your will but to fulfil the will of your Heavenly Father. Consider it as something



Tabernacle Door in the Upper Church

*The Son sacrificed for us,
held by the Father,
overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140-150.

great that God has seen fit to call you to his service, but not that you serve him. Offer all of your acts and sufferings to God in union with the merits and sufferings of the incarnate Word. In every way, strive to be conformed to Christ, the head, especially in poverty and patience.

“Seek in all things to have the best intention, which consists in love of the Holy Spirit, so that you love God solely because he is God, and through God, by uniting yourself to the divine love in whom the Trinity loves itself.”⁷⁸



*Symbol of the Trinity
on Arnold Janssen's
Sarcophagus*

*In the power of the Spirit,
the Father's hands
encompass the beloved Son
on the cross.*

Here, again, we encounter the centre of Arnold's spirituality, the mystery of the Trinity in practice in our lives: surrender to the Father, conformity with the incarnate Word in his suffering, and the love of the Holy Spirit. Constantly finding new ways of expressing this, he endeavoured to impress it on his sons and daughters:

“Surrender to God is the direct way to perfection. ... How happy are people who have surrendered completely to God! While others crawl like snails through many troubles and anxieties in spite of much prayer and many Holy Communions, those who have surrendered completely to God run like the deer, fleet and unswerving, down the road to perfection. That is no wonder, because it is not they that run, but God draws

⁷⁸ SVD Rule of 1891, p. 7ff, cf. Fischer, *Temple*, p. 77.

them. ... What joy is experienced by the person who surrenders totally and unequivocally to God!”⁷⁹

The source of strength and interior joy that enabled Arnold to persevere even in the face of tremendous difficulties and opposition was his deep rootedness in God, his radical surrender to the Father's will, and his unswerving trust. Trust in God and confidence, or we could say the divine hope given us by God, are the measure of how deeply a person is rooted in God. Arnold wished his sons and daughters to glorify God through their trust:

“Let us abandon ourselves to the loving God and place our entire trust in him. One who loves God trusts in him; one who does not trust in him, does not love him.”⁸⁰ “It is impossible for God to deceive someone who trusts in him; it is necessary to let ourselves be guided by the hand of God like a child.”⁸¹

This trust in God gave Arnold strength in every adversity and all suffering: “In all difficulties and failures, our confreres should cultivate a strong trust in the Lord who ‘is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him’ (Lam 3:25). They should not trust in human wisdom and human strength.”⁸² As if to confirm these words through his own experience, Arnold wrote in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*: “How often is pure human wisdom totally confounded through the wisdom and strength of a trusting love of God, which seemed like stupidity to the world.”⁸³

Time and again in different ways Arnold encouraged both his readers and the members of his Congregations to cultivate that unconditional trust in God in suffering: “It is a basic part of the providence of God that he reveals his will only gradually. How else would we learn to turn to

⁷⁹ *Loc. cit.* pp. 78, 79. From conferences and articles.

⁸⁰ *Loc. cit.* pp. 78-80.

⁸¹ *Loc. cit.* p. 79. Conference, 14 January 1894.

⁸² Cf. *loc. cit.* 1891 Rule, p. 25.

⁸³ *Loc. cit.* from the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1875, p. 35.

him in the light of faith and unconditional trust?" – "Let us trust him all the more, the more impossible a thing seems. ... Let us thank God for all sorrows ... Let us trust in the wise guidance of divine providence always, especially on dark days."⁸⁴

Poems Arnold composed give us an insight into his thoughts and the longing of his heart. Like everything else about him, the poems are impressive not so much for their literary value, which is in fact quite modest, but in the strength of faith and trust they express, especially in times of suffering.

Consolation in Suffering

When deep, deep sorrows
Churn through my mind,
It is the Heart of Jesus
Where peace awaits you.

When huge, great burdens
Are your lot on earth,
You must rest with Jesus,
Through him all is softened.

When you are so ill, oh do not complain
About it to any ear,
Bring it only to Jesus,
Only to your Saviour.

Wrap the harshest trouble
In the deepest silence,
And in the silence of the night
He will be your consoler.

⁸⁴ *Loc. cit.* from the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1874; from conferences, letters and articles.

May I always think of you
Who are always thinking of me,
May all my longing go out to you
Who have compassion on me.

May I never leave you
Who are my Lord and God.
I will remain true to you in life,
I will love you until death.

Arnold Janssen 1881 ⁸⁵

In these verses written in 1881, the suffering and trials of the beginnings echo through: deep sorrows, great burdens, illness, harsh troubles. He did not enumerate the individual sorrows and wounds. We can only guess what measure of suffering and darkness is hidden behind these words. But they show us the source from which Arnold drew the strength to continue along this way of the cross: the Heart of Jesus where he found the rest, peace and consolation that gave him the strength to go on.

⁸⁵ Arnold Janssen: "Poems of Father Arnold, 1874-1899". Collected (in 1908) by Br. Eugenius Wachter and Br. Bonifatius Gassmann. Steyl, 1949, p. 77.

8 Gripped by the Mystery

8.1 The Humanity of the Divine Word

Bishop Klaus Hemmerle of Aachen (d. 1994) once said in a talk on Arnold Janssen's spirituality: "Tell me to whom you pray, tell me what you pray, and I will tell you what kind of person you are. It is a form of life; that is the point."⁸⁶ In other words, people express their true self in their prayer. Bishop Hemmerle recognized Arnold Janssen as a man gripped by the mystery of the Trinity who allowed himself to become more and more possessed by this mystery of mysteries.

When he began his first foundation, the mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Word was the focus of Arnold's thought, striving, prayer and action. "Among the persons of the Blessed Trinity, the Divine Word should be singled out for special veneration. He is the model for the formation of the person in grace. We become his brothers through sanctifying grace. He is the person of the Saviour after whom we should follow on the path of surrender to God in our apostolic work. He is the light that enlightens every person and whom the missionary must trust. The missionary must know that his word has its strength only through the help of the Divine Word who made heaven and earth out of nothing."⁸⁷

As Arnold explained later, the name of his foundation was also intended to convey its main task, namely proclamation of the gospel, of God's Word. The name was the program for the members of his foundation, the following and sharing of life with the incarnate Divine Word, as the 1982 Constitutions of the Society of the Divine Word put it: "His life is our life, his mission is our mission." In his talks Arnold frequently referred to veneration and adoration of the Divine Word: in the bosom

⁸⁶ Klaus Hemmerle, "Toward a Spirituality of the Founder of the Society of the Divine Word, Arnold Janssen" in McHugh, (ed.), *Analecta* 63/III, *op. cit.* pp. 222-236, here p. 232.

⁸⁷ Fischer, *Temple*, p. 90.

of the eternal Father, in the mystery of the incarnation and holy childhood, in the veneration of the Sacred Heart, in the suffering and death of Jesus. It was to be realized especially through praying the Way of the Cross, in the celebration of the Eucharist and in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Arnold was awestruck and fascinated by the mystery of the incarnation. Constantly finding new ways of expressing it, he applied himself to this most incomprehensible of mysteries: the incarnation of God. In Jesus of Nazareth we encounter the absolute mystery, the presence of God in a human being and his sharing in the history of humanity. It is not only the mystery of God's love that is revealed in Jesus but also the mystery of the human person in whom we encounter the Absolute of the divine presence.

In his 1885 Rule the founder wrote: "Because of our veneration of the Divine Word, the beginning of St. John's gospel shall be especially honoured by us." Clearly the Prologue of the fourth gospel, which he heard every evening at home during the winter months, had a lasting influence on his thinking and meditating. Perhaps we might also say that Arnold's strong mystical tendency had its main source here: the Divine Word in his eternal origin and his temporal appearance in this world stood, as it were, at Arnold's cradle and drew him lastingly to himself. The Father is the home of the Divine Word, from where he goes forth and to where he returns. This mystery of faith was Arnold's hidden home, drawing him irresistibly, and providing his never-ending source of strength. He was constantly absorbed in this mystery of mysteries in adoration, wonderment, gratitude and love. In an evening prayer he wrote for the community he dedicated the night's rest as follows: "In order to honour the eternal rest that Jesus enjoys in the bosom of the Father..."⁸⁸

In Vesper devotions in honour of the Divine Word the founder wrote: "We praise you, O highest majesty of the eternal Son of God! Grant that

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 94.

all people know you and love you for all eternity. We adore you, eternal Son of the eternal Father. In his gazing at and expressing you, the Father begot you from all eternity before the morning star existed. You stand before him as the image and reflection of his immeasurable beauty, might, wisdom, and holiness.”⁸⁹

What particularly captivated Arnold is our participation in this mystery through grace, through the impression of the supernatural image of God in our soul. In the draft of a rule for the brothers he wrote: “The Eternal Word would like to give to his rational creatures the best gifts, namely, his divinity in the measure that they are worthy to share it. That comes about through sanctifying grace. Through grace we are in such a way transformed in the Divine Word that we become brothers of the Son of God.⁹⁰ The Holy Spirit carries out this transformation. The indwelling of the Son of God in our souls through grace and glory is so generous and intimate that it gives the soul the highest happiness.”⁹¹

Here we no longer have the words of a sober, calculating mathematician but the spirit of a mystic awestruck by the intimacy of a God-experience. Pointing to the sublime happiness the indwelling of God’s Son brings to the soul, Arnold shows that the accompanying graced knowledge of God represents the epitome of human fulfilment. Through the Word we learn to know the one who speaks it, the one who communicates himself to us, thereby allowing us to share in his own knowledge of God. It recalls St. Augustine who was so overwhelmed by the mystery of the Trinity and our participation in that life that he said: “God, you have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The Divine Word in our hearts is a divine Light, as St. Paul said: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Co 4:6).

⁸⁹ *Ibid. loc. cit.*

⁹⁰ Editor’s note: At the time inclusive language was not thought of, otherwise it might have read: brothers and sisters.

⁹¹ Fischer, *loc. cit.* p. 96.

We may presume that these words of Paul were the inspiration behind the formulation of the prayer: “May the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the Light of the Word and the Spirit of Grace.” This prayer already appeared in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in 1876, and in 1877 the founder wrote that the members of the Mission House said this prayer several times a day. The original form read: “May the sweet Light of the Divine Word shine into the darkness of sin...” It allows us once again to sense something of the deep and intimate experience of the mystery that Arnold was gifted with.

Dwelling in us as Wisdom, the Divine Word wishes to give us an understanding and taste of the divine, of God’s being and action, his majesty and loveliness. “In the communication of divine Light and the image of the divine nature in the soul, that is, in the imprint of the supernatural image of God, his true image, the Son, imprints our soul and begets us through a reconstruction and extension of his eternal generation.” The Divine Word wishes to be born again in us so that we will become more and more daughters and sons of God.⁹²

These words may appear strange to us, as if they come from another world, but for Arnold they were genuine reality. They describe the world in which he lived. The birth of God in history and, therefore, the birth of God in our soul, are the mysteries of the faith that touched him in the depths of his heart and gave meaning to his life.

8.2 The Miracle of “God’s Childhood”

A special devotion of Arnold’s, flowing from the intense manner in which the mystery of the incarnation stirred him, was veneration of the divine infancy. The verse, “and the Word became flesh and lived among us”, that was particularly dear to the founder, was embossed on a medal that his members were to wear, to remind them to venerate this mystery again and again in prayer. In the incarnation he saw the greatest work of the Trinity, the crowning glory of creation.

⁹² Cf. Fischer, *loc. cit.* p. 96-97, quoting Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity* (German edition, p. 137).

He addressed the incarnate Word with moving expressions of love, reverence and wonderment: “O divine Son, clothed in the poor garments of our flesh!” He called him “the outstanding instrument of the love of the Blessed Trinity, the Sun of Love!” “The eternal Word entered into our earthly life cycle so that we might become his brothers [and sisters] and enter eternal glory. Yes, the Son of God has become our brother.”⁹³

Simultaneously his attention was constantly focused on the mystery of the Trinity. To Arnold the incarnation was the revelation in salvation history of the Trinity that held him totally spellbound. He wanted to inflame others with this love and enthusiasm. In fact he literally implored his readers to allow this mystery to move them as it moved him: “If only we were aware of the great treasure of grace, salvation, and blessing we have in our divine Saviour so that we could depend upon him completely with all the strength of our spirit, and love him with all the love of our hearts in return, totally and unequivocally forever.”⁹⁴

When he wanted to express his love and wonder at this mystery, the sober scientist was transformed into an enthusiastic writer, always searching for new words to share the mystery with his readers: “How filled with grace, light, and joy is the birth of our Divine Saviour in Bethlehem! He was greeted by joyous choirs of angels at his entrance into this world. The King of Glory appeared on this earth surrounded by countless numbers of heavenly servants.”⁹⁵

In an early draft of the rule, Arnold used expressions of spousal mysticism. We would not expect to find them in his writings but they allow an insight into his heart that was completely possessed by the love of God: “Christ expressed his inner love for humanity by means of the image of a bridegroom who loves his bride. That is a tender image. Yes, he joined himself with human nature as if it were his bride.”⁹⁶ With these words Arnold could have meant Christ’s love for humanity, or for the

⁹³ Prayers, *loc. cit.* p.100.

⁹⁴ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1878, p. 26, in Fischer, *loc. cit.* p. 101.

⁹⁵ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1875, p. 81, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

Church, the bride of Christ. Some of Arnold’s poems, however, leave no doubt that he also meant Christ’s love for the individual person and for himself. The following expressive verses serve as an example:

The Name of the Beloved

Engrave your sweet name indelibly on my heart,
O my Beloved, with the stylus of your love.

Write it with tongues of flame, purple with love.
That I may never forget you, who gave your life’s blood for me.

Jesus, you my most dearly Beloved, chosen above all,
Let the whole world know whom I have espoused for all eternity.

May your name be impressed on my heart like a seal,
Telling everyone that you have looked on me, a sinner, in love.

No matter who demands entry to the heart’s bridal chamber,
It is no longer open to anyone, even if they knock day after day.

Only for One, whose golden name shines at the entrance to the heart,
To the chamber of the beloved, only for him the door stands wide open.
He is always welcome here, whether he comes by day or by night.
Day and night my heart waits for him with passionate longing.

Arnold Janssen ⁹⁷

The lover, however, wishes to express love not only in words but in deeds. And so Arnold challenged his listeners and readers to follow the incarnate Word: “The most perfect example for us is the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ Our Lord, who surrendered himself in generous love.”⁹⁸ “We cannot please God if we do not become humble; that is the great lesson of Christmas.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “Poems of Father Arnold”, *op. cit.* p. 251.

⁹⁸ 1891 Rule, p. 5, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 101.

⁹⁹ *Loc. cit.* Conference, 24 December 1903.

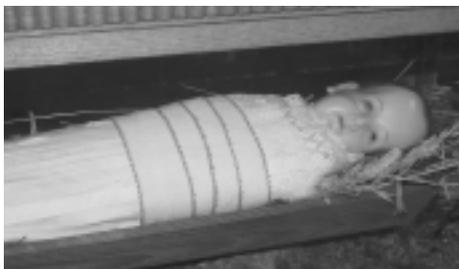


Figure of the Infant Jesus carried by St. Arnold in the Christmas crib procession

A characteristic expression of Arnold's extraordinarily great love for the incarnation, and in particular the divine infancy, was the Christmas procession he introduced and that is still customary in many communities of his Congregations today. All who took part in the Christmas night Mass gathered in a festively decorated

room, representing heaven where the Infant Jesus was lying. With great warmth and dedication, the founder led responsorial prayers composed by himself. They began with the acclamation: "The goodness and kindness of God our loving Saviour has appeared!" At the end of the liturgy of the word, the figure of the divine Infant was borne in a solemn procession to the church, while Christmas carols were sung, and in the church it was laid in the crib.

To Arnold this was no mere external act; he felt a need to give vital expression to the mystery that moved the depths of his heart and thus to express his love and lead others to the same love and veneration. We could compare it with the miracle plays of the middle ages which made the invisible mysteries of faith visible and tangible, so to speak. In similar fashion the presence of the resurrected Lord is given palpable expression in the sacred signs and gestures of the Liturgy. Hermann Fischer reported on the unforgettable impression the Christmas celebration made on those present:

"Anyone who saw him (the old priest) at that hour, kneeling on the floor before the Christ Child on its bed of straw, anyone who heard his fervent prayers and looked at his face, radiant with devotion and holy joy, could never again forget the hallowed impression. During the day he would be sure to refer back to the night celebration again and then his eyes lit up with a supernatural brightness and inner happiness. That

was truly Fr. Arnold Janssen; it was a manifestation of his simple, warm and deep piety."¹⁰⁰

Arnold himself explained the deep significance of this devotion: "The purpose of the incarnation is that we become like him and become united to God. The Christ Child is the gift of the compassionate love of the Most Holy Trinity."¹⁰¹ Vatican II said something similar: "An outstanding cause of human dignity lies in our call to communion with God. ... The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of the human person take on light." (GS 19 & 22).

In the face of this incomprehensible mystery of divine love, Arnold could not find enough expressions of wonder and adoration: "What a great and sublime example our Saviour gave us at his entrance into this world. He did not choose glory and wealth, as was his due, but contempt and poverty. ... Let us consider this well when we adore the divine Saviour at the crib, and let us engrave his example into our minds so that we can imitate his humility."¹⁰² A testimony of Arnold's great love for the divine Child is found in the Christmas poems he wrote at various times.¹⁰³

It is the reason why Arnold's veneration of the infancy of Jesus was not limited to the Christmas season. The entire month of January was dedicated to the veneration of the divine Child. Daily the community prayed the Crib Devotions. They prayed: "By virtue of your holy childhood, O Jesus, have pity on the poor pagan children." The salvation of all people, especially those who did not yet know God, was always before him and he offered prayers for them.

¹⁰⁰ Fischer, *Life*, p. 385.

¹⁰¹ Fischer, *Life*, p. 167.

¹⁰² Fischer, *Temple*, p. 104.

¹⁰³ See Appendix, "Christmas Wishes".

8.3 Church and Eucharist

The feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, often celebrated as a Marian feast, was a double feast for Arnold: Feast of the Incarnation and of the Motherhood of Mary. Here he found the fulfilment of his spiritual ideal: adoration and glorification of the Blessed Trinity. It was only through the incarnation that humanity came to know that God is triune, and we were given an intimation of the inner-divine fullness of life and love in which we are called to share. Glorification of the Trinity by the incarnate Divine Word is so very much the first and greatest effect of the incarnation that many Fathers of the Church and theologians share the view that the Son would have become man even if there had never been any sin.

“Christ, the Logos, in whom the universe is grounded, axis of evolution and its mysterious energy, goal and crown of the history of the world in whose depths he has written a meaning and to which he gave orientation through the Spirit, that same Logos comes as the Son of Man to us and reveals himself as the personal love of God! Who can grasp this? Who will ever grasp it? Whose imagination ‘understands’ that in this Jesus the Divinity and humanity, and we all in him, are united... The truth, present but hidden, the heart of the world, is Christ, ‘Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him’ (Jn 1:3).”¹⁰⁴

These words of a present-day mystic, in which we sense rapt wonder before the mystery of God and the human person, could give us a hint of what transpired in Arnold’s soul, what had taken possession of his whole life and thinking: In Jesus God becomes human – in this man the unfathomable mystery of the Trinity enters our history and becomes united with it forever.

In the Church, as well, Arnold saw the continuation of the incarnation: “The Church is not only the work of Jesus Christ, she is much

¹⁰⁴ Boulad, *op. cit.* p. 286-287.

more; she is the bride of Christ for whom he surrenders himself to death in love. The Church is the extension of the living Christ, flesh from his flesh, blood from his blood.”¹⁰⁵ For Arnold, therefore, suffering belonged as much to the Church as to the God-man: “We do not need to be surprised when the Church is persecuted, she is the continuing life of Christ. That is why his fate has to be repeated in her.”¹⁰⁶

“The times of Church persecution only look hateful from the point of view of the world because they are times of suffering and blood. From the point of view of heaven they are beautiful. They are times when glorious virtue is practised and great merits earned. The bloodstained Church is all the more beautiful and magnificent in God’s eyes and it is preparing itself for future victories.”¹⁰⁷ “Jesus, our model and most holy Redeemer, was never closer to his victory than when he appeared to be most defeated. Let us not forget that in times of trouble. The Church is the continuing life of Christ.”¹⁰⁸

Arnold’s love for and unconditional fidelity to the Church, even when he had to bear much misunderstanding on the part of representatives of the Church, have their deepest roots in this conviction. “Unity makes the Church strong and unconquerable for all her enemies. Every member shares all the more in this strength, the more closely united he or she is, through the Apostolic See, with Jesus Christ, the Shepherd of shepherds.”¹⁰⁹

The underlying image of the Church as ‘spouse’ and ‘bride’ in relation to Christ, and the resulting personal identification with the Church, was the reason for his love of the Church, because he knew he was supported by Christ’s love both in the joy and the suffering the Church caused him. Many of the great twentieth century theologians who pre-

¹⁰⁵ Retreat conference, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁶ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1874, p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1876, p. 84.

¹⁰⁸ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1874, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1878, p. 79.



*Interior of the Upper Church in St. Michael's
The first church built by Arnold Janssen*

pared the conciliar renewal of the Church were animated by the rediscovery of this patristic image of the Church.¹¹⁰

Above all, however, Arnold was filled with the conviction that Christ lived in him and in each of us: “We become temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ through baptism; we are incorporated into Christ and brought into closest unity with him. He who sins, transgresses not only against his own body but also against the body of

Christ. Let us show through our lives that we are temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Christ.”¹¹¹ His ability to bear and evaluate suffering grew from this faith and the inner experience of sharing in the life and suffering of Christ. He wanted to explain that to his readers, as well:

“How glorious and salvific are sufferings borne in union with Christ! They are proofs of God’s love for us. Let us remember the five wounds of our Saviour. Moses struck the rock with his staff and a spring of liv-

¹¹⁰ For more information on the image of the Church see Kehl, Medard, *Wohin geht die Kirche? Eine Zeitdiagnose*, Freiburg, 1996.

¹¹¹ Fischer, *Temple*, p. 108-109.

ing water gushed forth. In the same way springs have opened up in Christ’s body from which joy, light and glory flow for him and the whole of heaven. Let us follow Christ closely, our sweet, divine Saviour. It was for us he suffered, in order to make suffering purifying and sanctifying for us. He poured the sweet scent of his sacred Humanity into all.”¹¹²

Here, again, we cannot help but be struck by the language Arnold used. It shows the great inner emotion these truths of faith produced in him. For him it was “the sweet, divine Saviour”, who suffered for us and “the sweet scent of his sacred Humanity” that lived in him, making him feel more and more at home in the God-man as he increasingly identified with him.

This is a key to understanding Arnold’s extraordinarily great love and devotion for the Eucharist. The Church Fathers spoke of the Eucharist as a continuation of the incarnation. “As this body (from the Virgin) was united with Christ, so we are united with him through this Bread” (St. John Chrysostom). As he took a human body in Mary, in the Eucharist he takes a second, the Mystical Body, and expands it through new members. Through the Eucharist Christ multiplies his personal presence, extending it in space and time.

“This presence is multiplied only so that the body of Christ may grow and extend itself through the members that he himself has chosen and to whom he unites himself. Therefore, in transubstantiation the body of Christ is reborn only so that Christ can unite himself to every single person in Holy Communion, become one body with them, so that the Divine Word may be reborn and unite another human nature with his own in himself.”¹¹³

Arnold’s wonder at this presence becomes tangible in the following words: “Jesus lives in us as God and man at the time of Communion. His divine body touches us and we touch him. But how wonderfully the

¹¹² *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1876, p. 43; 1878, p. 26.

¹¹³ Scheeben, *op. cit.* p. 416, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 116.

body of Jesus works! Through his touch, the element of water was sanctified for holy baptism. The earth was sanctified when he walked upon it; all periods of life were sanctified because he lived them; even death was sanctified, since he underwent it. The whole of humanity was redeemed through the suffering and the shedding of the blood of this holy body. And now the holy body of Jesus sanctifies us in Holy Communion.”¹¹⁴

The founder often pointed out that in the Eucharist, the Father and the Holy Spirit are present together with the Divine Word, even though not in the same way. How deeply that conviction moved him and how important it was to him can be seen from the fact that he pointed to it twice in the SVD Constitutions: in Article 10 on Holy Communion, and in Article 12 on adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. There, with reference to spiritual communion, he especially stressed not only union with and adoration of the Divine Word but also the Father and the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁵

As we understand it today, we should widen the notion of “spiritual communion”. The Sacrament, the Eucharist, only has meaning if it sanctifies the whole of human life, if our entire life becomes a sacrificial offering, if we recognize that Christ is also present in every meal, every encounter, in fraternal and universal love. When we become aware that the water we drink is the bearer of life, then it has become a “sacrament” for us in which we taste God and his love. We see the fruit of the Eucharistic celebration in the recognition that we encounter God in every person, and perceive God in ordinary, everyday food. Similarly we can also say that the mystery of the presence of the Trinity permeated every dimension of Arnold’s life.

¹¹⁴ Conference, 24 July 1894, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 116. See also Appendix: “After Holy Communion”.

¹¹⁵ *Constitutiones Societatis Verbi Divini*, 1875-1891, (*Fontes Historici Societas Verbi Divini*; Vol. I) Rome, 1964, p. 238.

9 Blessed Trinity

9.1 Heart of Jesus – Tabernacle of the Trinity

Love and veneration of the Trinity form the essential element of Arnold’s spirituality. The foundations were without doubt already laid at home. The particular veneration of the Divine Word and, later, of the Holy Spirit, represent an organic development of this fundamental orientation and are inseparably integrated in it. In the early years of St. Michael’s Mission House, when veneration of the incarnate Divine Word was the principal aspect, the trinitarian dimension was already clearly present. From the first day on, the small community sang the ‘Veni Creator Spiritus’ every morning. Similarly in the phase of Arnold’s particular devotion to the Holy Spirit, his basic orientation remained trinitarian.

One mystery Arnold venerated especially was the indwelling of the Trinity in the Heart of Jesus. He saw his favourite idea of the divine indwelling in the graced human being brought to perfection in the Heart of Christ, as stated in the Letter to the Colossians: “For in him dwells the whole fullness of the divinity bodily” (Col 2:9). In the Litany of the Sacred Heart we pray: “Heart of Jesus, substantially united with the Word of God,” “Heart of Jesus, in whom dwells the fullness of divinity,” “Temple of God”. Arnold called this Heart “Ark of God”, Dwelling of God”, “Mysterious tabernacle of God among people”, “Throne of the Most Blessed Trinity”, and “Temple of the Most High”. All these titles and invocations refer to an indwelling of the divinity in the Heart of Christ.

This applies in first place to the divinity of the Divine Word. But because the heart is seen as the spiritual centre of the human will and love, we may say that the Heart of Christ is where the divinity of the Eternal Word dwells in all perfection. Arnold said: “The Holy Trinity has not given this heart to a human person, but to the person of the Eter-

nal Word. Therefore it has become a totally divine heart and a deep, mysterious tabernacle of God among people.”¹¹⁶

The eternal Word of God dwelt in this heart from the first moment of its existence and let it share in the divine sonship. It is, therefore, a truly divine Heart and the “Heart of the Son of the Eternal Father”. At the same time this Heart is a new instrument of love. Since the incarnation the Son of God has a heart: a heart of flesh and blood, a heart with the feelings, moods, and affections that yearn to love like any human heart.

Regarding this Arnold wrote in a draft rule for the brothers: “The Eternal Word was not satisfied to love us only in his divinity; he also wanted to love us in his assumed humanity, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This love is great and glowing, equal to the eternal love of the divinity. If you see molten iron flowing out of a melting pot, you would never think that a hotter glow was possible, but the sun is hotter by far. The sun is an image of the loving energy in the Most Sacred Heart. As the sun shines and glows and gives light and warmth to the whole world, as life and growth are possible under its influence, in the same way the love of the Heart of Jesus works in souls. And this furnace of love is limitless and never-ending. It is constantly active in the Blessed Sacrament and will last for all eternity.”¹¹⁷

It is as if Arnold were spellbound by the mystery of the presence of the entire Blessed Trinity in the Heart of Christ. He wrote in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*: “The mutual unity of the persons in the Holy Trinity is closer than the unity between the divinity and humanity of Jesus. The Father and the Holy Spirit are where the Son is, even though only the Son in his personhood is united to the humanity of Jesus. Thus, the whole Trinity resides in the Heart of Jesus: the omnipotence of the Eternal Father, the wisdom and beauty of the Eternal Word, the eternally generous love and wealth of the Holy Spirit. What a holy wonder! Because even so, the Heart of Jesus remains ever a created, human heart.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *Admission booklet for the Apostleship of Prayer*, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ Fischer, *Temple*, p. 128.

¹¹⁸ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1874, p. 44, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 128.

In all these explanations it is important to note exactly when Arnold wrote these words and to whom he addressed them. They were written in 1874, that is before the foundation in Steyl, and they are found in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*. They were addressed to readers of his magazine, simple people with no theological training. It is all the more amazing to see how Arnold endeavoured to describe the great mysteries of the Trinity, as far as that is possible in human language, and to communicate this mystery in simple terms to the ordinary faithful, a mystery that filled him to the brim. He wanted to motivate and lead people to love and adoration of this divine-human Heart.

He instructed the missionary brothers of the Society of the Divine Word to recite a short prayer daily before their work: “Jesus, be in my thoughts! Jesus, be in my words! Jesus, be in my work!”¹¹⁹ The whole person, deeds and activities, most intimate thoughts and motivation, was to be permeated and transformed by this mysterious presence of Jesus.

“The Blessed Trinity resides in the Sacred Heart, and through the Heart of Jesus you too should become a residence, according to the words of Christ: ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’ (Jn 14:23).”¹²⁰ In these words we touch on the mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in human hearts through sanctifying grace, the mystery that was dear to Arnold’s own heart.

It is this awareness of God’s presence, of the Trinity indwelling every person, that gives the spirituality and missionary charism of Arnold Janssen its importance for today’s world. Christian faith means to discover and proclaim the divine Absolute in the relative, in limitation, in weakness and powerlessness. Faith consists in the discernment of God’s presence in its hiddenness, in the weakness and mystery of the human being.

The incarnation, the mystery the founder of Steyl loved, is God’s identification with the human being. I encounter God in every person in

¹¹⁹ Albert Rohner, “Coram Lumine Verbi – The Society’s Program Prayer” in *Analecta SVD* 63/III, *op. cit.* p. 191.

¹²⁰ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1874, p. 45.

all his majesty and omnipotence and he says: I am this person, it's me! If you touch a hair of his or her head, you are touching me. If you hurt his or her heart, you hurt me. If you smile at this person, you reach me. When you accept him or her, you accept me, as when Jesus said to Paul: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4-5).

9.2 Trinitarian Life dwelling in Us

"May the holy triune God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people" – this motto and prayer can be seen as the embodiment of Arnold's spirituality and missionary charism. For more than twenty-five years as founder and superior general, he wrote this program prayer thousands of times at the head of his countless letters. "Seek to live from the fullness of faith, and, therefore promote in every way the veneration of the angels and saints of God, especially that of God's Mother and of St. Joseph. Over and above, however, we should give first place to the specific worship of the Blessed Trinity and of the individual Divine Persons and that not merely inclusively in that we honour God when we honour his saints but directly and immediately."¹²¹ He then explained further that devotion to the angels and saints of the Church is good and pleasing to God but that it only indirectly honours God: "Our confreres should seek to cultivate the direct worship and praise of God and the three divine Persons."¹²²

It is clear from this that, despite the multitude of prayers and devotions he composed and urged others to pray, Arnold never lost sight of the central mystery of the Christian faith. The invocation of and devotion to saints were taken over from the popular religiosity of his times. In the saints he saw models and intercessors whom he called on in spe-

¹²¹ Rohner (ed.), *Persoenliche Aufzeichnungen* [Personal Notes] no. 47. Quoted in Peter McHugh, *The Spirituality of our Society, A Theological Appreciation*, Manila 1975, p. 9-10.

¹²² Rohner, *loc. cit.* no. 61. McHugh, *Spirituality*, *loc. cit.* p. 10.

cific intentions or needs, and whom he revered because they were so close to God. He did not forget to direct all honour to God, even in his prayers to the saints, and he praised and glorified God as the sole source of all good.

Even the founder's characteristic devotion to the angels, expressed especially in the upper church in Steyl, did not cause him to lose sight of the centre. Rather, angels gather in adoration before the throne of the Trinity and are the servants of God in the fight against the powers of darkness. Arnold was convinced that all purely human efforts are too weak and ineffective in this fight which he saw principally in the work of spreading the faith. Consequently he regarded it as absolutely necessary to obtain the help of the heavenly powers through the fervent veneration and invocation of the angels.¹²³

He saw them as standing supportively alongside human beings, especially the guardian angels, as well as the archangels whom he chose as protective patrons of specific continents.

¹²³ Albert Rohner, "Die Engelverehrung unseres seligen Stifters" [Our founder's devotion to the angels] in *Verbum SVD* I, 1959, p. 241-259.



Archangel Michael

*Statue on the outside of
the upper church in Steyl*



Seraphim Picture in a Window in the upper church

Arnold regarded the seven spirits who stand before the throne of God as the special instruments of the Holy Spirit for the dispensing of the extraordinary graces of the Holy Spirit. In the 1891 SVD Constitutions he wrote: “Together with our patrons we wish to honour the Holy Angels as servants of the Holy Spirit and dispensers of His grace. Among the Angels let us honour in a special way the Holy Seraphim and the Seven Spirits who stand before the throne of God.”¹²⁴

We can truthfully say of Arnold, ‘The mystery of the Blessed Trinity took hold of him,’ as St. Paul says of himself: “I am still pursuing [my goal] in the attempt to take hold of the prize for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Phil 3:12). From this grew his fervour for the direct and immediate approach to God in

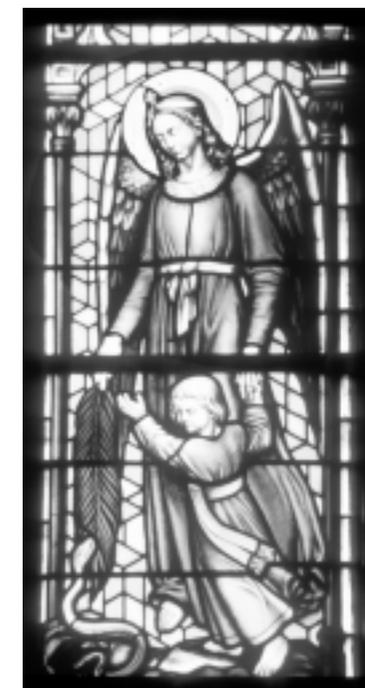
prayer and meditation, and his constant looking towards God. Surrender to the mystery of the Trinity and adoration of that mystery were the heart and centre of all spiritual life and of his prayer life. This centre brought unity and clarity to his life. Everything else revolved around that centre. Even the devotions to the Divine Word and to the Holy Spirit, that were foremost at certain times of his life, comprised for Arnold veneration of the Trinity. He always had the divine Mystery in its entirety in mind.

He asked the priests of his first foundation to proclaim in the first place love and veneration of the three Divine Persons, as well as the

¹²⁴ 1891 SVD Rule, McHugh, *Spirituality*, *op cit.* p. 206.

presence of the Blessed Trinity in the hearts of sanctified people, and to speak about the sublimity of grace that this brings about.¹²⁵ In the handbook for common prayer that he wrote as director of the Apostleship of Prayer, attention to the mystery of the Trinity also echoed throughout like the keynote. He turned to one divine Person, then named all three, and closed with a prayer to the Blessed Trinity. Even during the Way of the Cross he encouraged contemplation not just of the suffering of Jesus but above all his disposition, invoking the Trinity in union with him.

In his meditation he became immersed in this mystery like the great missionary Francis Xavier: *O sanctissima Trinitas!* Arnold wrote in the draft of a prayer: “O Most Holy Trinity, source of all that is good and beautiful, highest Love, Enlightenment and Sanctifier of the world, God of the Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Virtues, Principalities, Angels and Archangels.”¹²⁶ He could not find enough ways to express his love for this mystery, to adore and wonder at it, and he recalled the nine choirs of angels who constantly adore this God. In the 1891 Constitutions he appropriated the words of St. Augustine to remind his confreres to grow increasingly closer to this mystery in their lives: “To meditate on the Holy Trinity, to see it in eternity, to love



Guardian Angel Window in the upper church

¹²⁵ Cf. Fischer, *Temple*, p. 62.

¹²⁶ Cf. *ibid.* p. 63.

it, to look at it, to remember it, and to relish it, that is the direction that all things alive should take.”¹²⁷

To underscore this Arnold made the Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity the principal feast of his Congregations on which the Eternal Word and the Holy Spirit were to be honoured and adored together with the Father.¹²⁸ The liturgical texts and praises of this solemnity resonated with the founder’s inmost feelings and he strove to celebrate the feast as magnificently as possible. He also had the idea of requesting permission from Rome to establish a three-day feast with continuing exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in order to honour and adore the Blessed Trinity on its triple throne, the heavenly throne, the eucharistic throne, and the mystical throne.¹²⁹ The plan, however, was never realized.

Arnold regarded the Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity above all as a missionary feast. All his longing and striving had the one purpose: that all people might come to the knowledge of this wonderful mystery and share in the community of divine life. This is also shown by the opening lines of the “Prayer of Petition” that he introduced very early on in his three Congregations: “May the holy Triune God, the Omnipotence of the Father, the Wisdom of the Son, and the Love of the Holy Spirit, be known, loved and praised by all.”

The first forms of this prayer are found in the documentation of the III SVD General Chapter (1897-1898), where the confreres were urged to implore from God as often and fervently as possible: “Greater knowledge, love of and devotion to the Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and this prayer should be especially directed to the divine Consoler.”¹³⁰

Especially dear to the founder’s heart was veneration and adoration of the Trinity on its mystical throne in human hearts. “When a Christian

¹²⁷ 1891 SVD Constitutions, p. 9; Fischer *Temple*, p. 63.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 10. Cf. Fischer, *Temple*, p. 69.

¹²⁹ Cf. Fischer, *ibid.* See also McHugh, *op. cit.* p. 11.

¹³⁰ Rohner: *Analecta SVD*, 63/II, Rome, 1989, p. 152.

receives sanctifying grace, the entire Blessed Trinity, especially the Holy Spirit, comes to dwell in the deepest part of the soul,” he wrote in the handbook for the Apostleship of Prayer.¹³¹

This shows that the founder was grounded in the central biblical-christian message: the divine incarnation. The God of the incarnation is the God of daily life, the God of encounter. Christian faith means to perceive God in the other person, to encounter him in the other. Since his resurrection and ascension, the presence of the Absolute that resided in Jesus of Nazareth is in every person who believes in him.

9.3 Living from the Life of the Trinity

“Christian faith consists in discovering God in the human person. The place in the world where God is present is the human being. The person is the temple of God, the temple of the Spirit. The temple of God since then is the human person.”¹³² These words confirm from another angle how important the spirituality and missionary charism of the founder of Steyl is for today’s world. To believe in the incarnation, that is, to believe in Jesus of Nazareth, is to recognize the totality of God, the totality of the infinite God in a human being, a normal human being who eats and drinks. This is the centre of the Christian message. Because God is infinite love, he became human; God shares in the restrictedness and limitedness of the human being. His preferred presence, in which he allows himself to be recognized and experienced, is his presence in the human being. The human person is the sacrament of God’s presence, the temple of the Holy Spirit.¹³³

This truth permeated Arnold to the depths of his being; it was the focus of his life around which everything else revolved. God not only lives in us, he penetrates us in a living manner. And Arnold never tired

¹³¹ *Handbook of Common Prayer*, p. 41.

¹³² Boulad, Henri, *Mystische Erfahrung und soziales Engagement*, Salzburg, Vienna, 1997, p. 104.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 104-105.

of leading others to this living faith, encouraging them to love this divine Guest and Friend and to live in his presence.

He always had the triune God before him. He lived in the divine presence, inwardly united with him. "Looking towards God gives everything its true dedication."¹³⁴ This dedication marked Arnold himself above all; it was reflected in his appearance, and in his relation to people and situations. His constant concentration on God made him calm in the midst of activity, in the exercise of his office and his many tasks. With a glance he gave himself to God and God to him. He was not pulled this way and that by creatures; rather, they spoke to him of God and strengthened his gaze on God. Through this he grew in "indifference", that inner freedom which is needed in order to seek only God and his kingdom in every decision that has to be made.

We could also say that he is the saint who in all things lives from God, in God and for God, in faith and trust, hope and loving surrender. There is no separation between faith, hope and love. There is no faith without active love, no hope without faith and service to others. Faith is a new way of looking at a familiar reality, our ordinary everyday reality. Suddenly we realize that it is not just this particular person but Another, God, who is in us. Faith is seeing the invisible in what is visible (cf. Heb 11:3). So we speak of the eye of faith, the spiritual view.

The eye of faith that sees in everything the visible and the invisible at the same time, that sees the reality of the world and its own existence deeply rooted and grounded in the boundless love and goodness of God, that is what he wished to transmit to his confreres. That is why he gave to the Congregations he founded the so-called "Quarter Hour Prayer",¹³⁵ which consists in essence of the acts of faith, hope and love, the renewal of communion with God and the prayer for the Holy Spirit.

It was repeated every quarter of an hour when the clock struck. If several people were in the room together, the short invocations were

¹³⁴ Conference, 1891, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 59.

¹³⁵ See Appendix: "The Quarter Hour Prayer as it developed"

prayed responsorially. Thus, Arnold wished to guide the members of his Congregations to a spirit of prayer from the very beginning. Arnold regarded the frequent repetition of the acts of faith, hope and love as a fruitful means to promote interior recollection and life in God's presence. He wanted to lead the community that bore the name of the Divine Word to union with the Word through constant prayer. He was so full of the presence of God himself, experiencing God as present everywhere, that there was no such thing for him as "too much" prayer and he never found prayers too long.

In the course of time the Quarter Hour Prayer was given five different formulations. This development began already during the founder's lifetime.¹³⁶ The first form consists of the acts of faith, hope and love that were prayed by the Mission House community from the beginning. In the second form, acts of humility and spiritual communion were added. The third form is augmented by the prayer for the Holy Spirit. In its fourth phase the prayer kept the same acts as before, but the order of the words assigned to leader and community was reversed. That is the



Clock in the Missionary Sisters' Motherhouse, Steyl

Gift from the mother of Hermann auf der Heide SVD to the Missionary Sisters when their Motherhouse was inaugurated in 1904.

It strikes every quarter of an hour to remind the Sisters of God's presence.

¹³⁶ The first three forms were composed and modified by Arnold Janssen himself.

form found in the 1940 *Vademecum*. The fifth version is the one in use today and was included in the 1964 *Vademecum*.¹³⁷

This development already indicates how important this precious and living heritage was to the founder, as well as to the Congregations he called into being. We could say: What the “Jesus Prayer” is to the Eastern Church, that, notwithstanding all the differences, is what the “Quarter Hour Prayer” was to Arnold Janssen. He saw it as an incomparable means to remind himself and his members of the presence of the Trinity in their hearts, and to renew and deepen their faith and hope in and love for this greatest of all mysteries. He spoke to this trinitarian God in his heart every quarter of an hour and thus kept the experience of his presence alive. In the final years of his life he still stressed the importance of this prayer: “It would deeply trouble me if these prayers ceased to be prayed in the SVD.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Rohner (ed.): *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, p. 44-49. English version taken from the manuscript: “Prayers from the time of our Blessed Founder Father Arnold Janssen” requested by the SSpS 1968 General Chapter and authorized by the 1978 SSpS General Chapter.

¹³⁸ *Personal Notes*, p. 60.

10 Heart of the Trinity – The Holy Spirit

10.1 Sacred Heart and Holy Spirit

In early 1874 Arnold already wrote in detail about the relationship between the incarnate Word of God and the Holy Spirit. After initially stressing that Christ, the second divine Person and source of all graces, is also the dwelling of the Trinity, he pointed out: “Of course, the Giver of grace is the Holy Spirit, but it is the Spirit who is inseparably united to the Eternal Word and who, from the very first moment of its existence, filled the soul of Jesus with the fullness of grace.

“In Christ, united with the eternal Word, dwells the power and love of the Father and the love and strength of the Holy Spirit. Let us praise the entire Blessed Trinity, but especially that blessed Third Person through whom according to the language of the saints, the great God imprints on us the kiss of the holy love of a Creator, a Father, even a Spouse, by giving himself in sanctifying grace... ‘Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you’ (1 Co 6:19). Just as the eternal God united Jesus with himself in the Son, he loves and sanctifies and unites us with himself in the Holy Spirit. Therefore let us honour and love the Holy Spirit especially in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through whose mediation we receive him. O sublime Spirit, proceeding from the love of the Father and the Son and sent by them to the world!”¹³⁹

These words, especially the last exclamation, show how intimately these truths of faith enthralled Arnold, how he was increasingly possessed by them. And he wanted to communicate to others all that was dear to his heart and to bring them to the same love and wonder.

Just how far back the growth of the devotion to the Trinity and with it that of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit can be traced in Arnold’s life is apparent in the prayers of the Apostleship of Prayer that were

¹³⁹ Bornemann, *Verbum Supplementum* 4, p. 95-96.

partly taken over by the community in St. Michael's later on. Like almost all of Arnold's prayers, they are addressed to the three divine Persons. We can say it is a theology of the Trinity in prayer form. One such prayer, that is still customary in Steyl, although later shortened, is the "Offering of the Crucified Saviour for his most holy intentions".¹⁴⁰ In this the three Divine Persons are referred to with the names that Arnold most loved to use: "God, our heavenly Father; God, the eternal Son; God, the Holy Spirit".

It is striking that in the prayer to the heavenly Father, Arnold calls him our only true Sovereign who heals people of their infirmities, showing them his tender love. The eternal Son is addressed as our only true Life, with the plea that all may be cleansed of their sins and transformed into the image of his glory. The Holy Spirit is called our only true Comforter, with the request that his holy and unselfish love may find an abode in the hearts of all people.

The individual, external relationships of the three divine Persons are indicated by naming the Father as the only true Sovereign, the Son as the true Life, and the Holy Spirit as the only true Comforter. It is always concerned with the relation of the Trinity to human persons and their participation in this unfathomable mystery of love. That can also be seen from the healing effects that are mentioned and which are connected to biblical texts. The 'healing of infirmities and showing tender love' (cf. Jn 1:18) is ascribed to the Father, 'cleansing of sins and transformation into the image of his glory' (2 Co 3:18) to the Son, and 'becoming an abode of the holy, unselfish love of the Holy Spirit' to that Spirit (cf. Rm 5:5).

The part people have to play is to know and feel the power and love of the Father, humble submission to the commandments of the Son and acceptance of the graces of his holy Church, and openness for the treasures of the Holy Spirit.

Arnold was around thirty when he wrote this prayer. The breadth and

¹⁴⁰ Rohner (ed.) *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, p. 31ff.

depth of his soul that becomes apparent in the prayer is impressive. It was first intended for lay persons, the members of the Apostleship of Prayer. Later it was also prayed by the community in St. Michael's and was variously amended and shortened. Nevertheless the basic concept of offering the sufferings of Jesus to the Blessed Trinity was retained. In the Prayer of Petition, which Arnold formulated towards the end of his life especially for his Congregations, the emphasis on the Spirit of Love is particularly noticeable. As always the prayer begins with the Trinity: "May the holy Triune God be known, loved and praised by all, and especially with the infinite love of the Father and the Son, the Spirit of their eternal, holy love, God the Holy Spirit, in all eternity. Amen." The formulation is difficult to follow; it is the first of seven petitions which, taken together, are like a development of the first three petitions of the 'Our Father'. Later on in the *Vademecum* the first part was simplified by attributing omnipotence, wisdom and love to the three divine Persons: 'the omnipotence of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit'. The third and especially the fourth petitions are fervent prayers for the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In an essay in the *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* written in 1874 on the "Treasures of the divine Heart of Jesus", there is a remarkable prayer to the Holy Spirit:

"O sublime Spirit, proceeding from the love of the Father and the Son and sent by them to the world in love, you love us not because we are lovable but because of your own lovableness! You do not give anything other than yourself, rather, in sanctifying grace you give us yourself as the greatest of gifts. You come to bend the obdurate, to warm the chill, to purify the stains of sin and to transform the children of sin and misery into children of light and love!

"May we fervently adore you with the Father and the Son as their greatest treasure and immeasurable love. We adore you in the gentle Heart of our divine Master. We pray that we may abundantly receive from this sacred Fount the grace we thirst for."¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, 1874, p. 45.

We can say of this prayer, as well, that it is theology of the Trinity and of grace in prayer form. Arnold is not afraid to express the most sublime truths in prayers so as, in that way, to make them accessible to the ordinary faithful. The warmth of language tells us something of his own disposition of prayer and his inner longing to share in the graces named. He wishes to adore the three divine Persons in the Heart of Christ and receive from that Heart the graces he implores. The germ of his spirituality and prayer life that would grow to full maturity in the subsequent ten years is already recognizable here.¹⁴²

In one of the invocations of the Litany of the Sacred Heart we pray: ‘Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit’. It connects veneration of the Holy Spirit with the devotion to the Sacred Heart. In a lengthy exposition, Arnold demonstrated the biblical foundation of that connection:

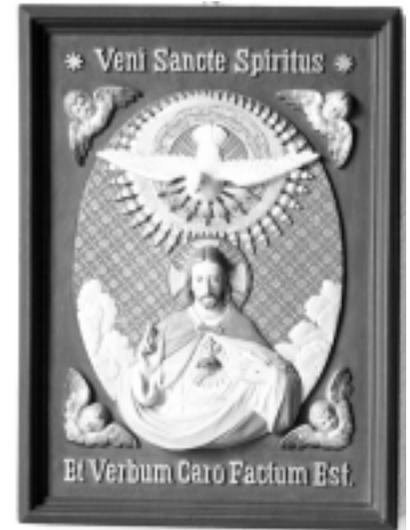
“The connection between the Divine Saviour and the Person of the Holy Spirit is not forced, but it is taught in many places of the Holy Scriptures and offers one of the most beautiful aspects of our religion. Jesus was created by the Holy Spirit, and anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus worked his miracles, suffered, and died with the aid of the Holy Spirit. He became the source of unceasing blessing through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Even during his earthly life, the Heart of Jesus was already a fiery furnace full of the love and grace of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus, now glorified at the right hand of the Father in heaven, opens his heart and confers all graces through the Holy Spirit. The first fiery tongues flowed down from heaven to earth on Pentecost Day. It will never cease as long as the Church lasts and the Holy Mass is offered, so that the words of St. John (1:16) are fulfilled, ‘From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace.’ O Divine Heart of Jesus, source of all the graces of the Holy Spirit, let us also partake in your fullness and teach us how to love him who enriched you so greatly.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² Rohner (ed.), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, p. 142.

¹⁴³ Arnold Janssen, “Komm Heiliger Geist hernieder” No. 22, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 158.

One example of connecting the Holy Spirit and the Sacred Heart is found in the “June Devotions”. In the first part the prayer is directed to the divine Heart of Jesus, asking to be purified of the seven capital sins and for the gift of the converse virtues. In the second part it turns to the Holy Spirit and prays for the outpouring of the seven gifts into our hearts through the mediation of the Heart of Jesus.

“But you, O Holy Spirit, are love itself and through love formed the Heart of Jesus and poured into It the fullness of your sevenfold gifts. Let your seven gifts flow from this Heart into our hearts that in and with this Heart we may honour, love, and praise you and the Incarnate Word, and that in union with you and the Heart of Jesus, we may on earth love and honour the Father more tenderly, and thus be rendered worthy of being his loving children hereafter. Amen.”¹⁴⁴



Picture that Arnold Janssen distributed in great numbers

Arnold sees a twofold movement between the divine Heart of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, it is the Holy Spirit who formed the human Heart of Jesus and took up his dwelling there as his most preferred temple. On the other hand, from the Heart of Jesus, which is the Heart of the incarnate Son of God, we receive all the graces of the Holy Spirit. That is, through the incarnation of his Son, God communicates himself to us in his unfathomable and unconditional love.

¹⁴⁴ *Vademecum* 3, p.137f in Rohner (ed.), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, pp. 150-152. (English SSs *Vademecum*, p. 636)

10.2 The Holy Spirit

During the final phase of Arnold's spiritual development, the special veneration of the Holy Spirit became more pronounced. It is not possible to determine the exact time from the existing sources with any certainty. The external stimulus was his acquaintance with the Vincentian priest Ferdinand Medits, whom Arnold met in Vienna in 1883, as well as with Miss Magdalene Leitner, whose spiritual director Medits was. Both of these persons influenced Arnold Janssen's spiritual life.¹⁴⁵

More significant than the external stimulus, however, is the inner development of Arnold's spirituality. It is the nature of trinitarian spirituality, stressing the indwelling of the triune God and especially the Holy Spirit, to lead to a greater veneration of the Spirit. There is no doubt that during his whole life Arnold was led by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the connection between the devotions to the Holy Spirit and to the Sacred Heart are characteristic of him. It was in the final stage of his spiritual life, however, that the ardent and passionate love of and surrender to the Holy Spirit took shape.

In a short invocation to the Holy Spirit that first appeared in Latin in the 1885 Constitutions, #133, the founder prayed: "God Holy Spirit, come into our heart and soul. Illumine us and strengthen us with your grace that we may faithfully follow your inspirations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

This short prayer also tells us something about Arnold's soul and his intentions. With the Pentecost call 'Come', he asked the Spirit to enter our hearts and souls, that is, the innermost centre of our being, the seat of our ability to love, from where our emotions and decisions arise. He prayed for enlightenment and strength, in order to be able clearly to discern the Spirit's inspirations and carry them out faithfully; in other

¹⁴⁵ This influence is described in detail in Fritz Bornemann, *Ferdinand Medits und Magdalene Leitner in der Geschichte des Steyler Missionswerkes, Verbum Supplementum* 4, Rome, 1968. [F. Medits and M. Leitner in the History of the Steyl Mission Work]

words he asked for an open and docile heart that conformed to the divine will.¹⁴⁶

In this and similar prayers the main thing is adoration, praise, thanksgiving and love of the Holy Spirit, as well as the grace to be able to respond to this love by a life modelled on the Sacred Heart. In this line we can quote another prayer of thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit that has as its specific subject thanksgiving for sanctifying grace:

"O Holy Spirit, Father of love! How highly you have elevated me by sanctifying grace! Forever will I bless your name because you have done great things in me. Let my spirit rejoice in you amidst all afflictions, for you have made me, as I confidently hope, your temple and with the Father and the Son have taken up your abode within me. Help me to guard faithfully this precious gift of love. Amen."¹⁴⁷

This prayer is also notable for its theological content, but even more because of the jubilation, love and wonder that it expresses. It is reminiscent of the Magnificat. As Mary praised God for the great things he had done for her in the incarnation of his Son, Arnold exulted over the gift of sanctifying grace by which the Holy Spirit had made him into his temple and the three divine Persons had taken up their dwelling in him. All throughout we sense Arnold's mystical soul that is gripped by the divine Love that gives itself to us in a special way in the Holy Spirit.

Thus it was in the nature of things that during the last and most mature phase of his spiritual life, Arnold turned increasingly to the veneration of the Holy Spirit without thereby neglecting the other two divine Persons. His continuing inner preoccupation with and his living in the mystery of the indwelling of the Trinity in his deepest soul led him to the clearer biblical character of this truth, namely of the indwelling especially of the Holy Spirit. Through this his spirituality received its unifying and animating spirit and became organically integrated: the in-

¹⁴⁶ 1885 SVD Constitutions.

¹⁴⁷ Rohner (ed.), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, p. 145; see also English SSps *Vademecum* 1948, p. 562.

dwelling of the Blessed Trinity, the world of grace, the treasures of the divine Heart of Jesus, the Church, the angels and saints.

Arnold himself asserted that he regarded the stimulus towards the strongly distinctive veneration of the Holy Spirit as one of the greatest graces of his life. He felt how the seed, that had already been planted in him at home, was now fully developing and giving his interior life unity, strength and divine fruitfulness.

Already before his ordination he had made the resolution: "On Mondays Holy Mass shall be offered up in honour of the Holy Spirit who is the Life and Support of my soul." On his deathbed Arnold's father made each of his children promise to attend Mass on Mondays in honour of the Holy Spirit, but Arnold had already put that into practice in his life nine years earlier.

From 1884 on, veneration of the Holy Spirit was placed on an equal footing with veneration of the Divine Word in the Society of the Divine Word. The revised statutes at the First SVD General Chapter stated: "The purpose of the Society is adoration of the Divine Word and spreading of the devotion to the Holy Spirit..."¹⁴⁸ In his many conferences, Arnold never failed to bring in some thought of the Holy Spirit. In his letters, as well, he mentioned this, his dearest intention, again and again. During the last twenty-five years of his life it was his great wish to lead his spiritual sons and daughters to this mystery and to rouse their enthusiasm for it.

In that intention he implored the Holy Spirit in a triple invocation to enkindle his fire in the hearts of the faithful: "Come, O Holy Spirit. Come, O Holy Spirit. Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your holy love; you who have united the people of all tongues in the one faith. Amen."¹⁴⁹ This fire of love filled Arnold's own heart above all, and he felt urged to do his part, through intercessory prayer, that this love might glow in all hearts.

¹⁴⁸ *Fontes historici, op. cit.* p. 43.

¹⁴⁹ *Analecta SVD* 56, p. 41.

10.3 Surrendered to the Spirit

A milestone on Arnold's path of personal dedication and surrender to the God of Love was his consecration to the Holy Spirit in the Vincentian church in Vienna on 3 October 1887. In his *Personal Notes* he wrote:

"How important is the special devotion to the Holy Spirit for the spiritual renewal of all stations of life, especially that of priests, and for the complete conversion of those wandering in error and infidelity! I have dedicated myself body and soul to him in sacrifice and have asked the following grace: to know the greatness of his love and to live and die only for him. May he be with me and enable me to live a life without sin and to respond to the holy will of God in everything. According to St. Augustine and Pope Leo XIII, the Holy Spirit is the Heart of the Church and at the same time the Heart of God himself through which he loves himself and all people. May he grant me the grace to live and dwell in this holy Heart and always to act in accordance with his most holy will."¹⁵⁰

The importance of this act for Arnold is shown by the fact that he gave the exact time and place of this consecration in his *Notes*, even though he had made it twenty years earlier. Even after so many years, the content was still clear in his mind: it was a total surrender and a prayer both to recognize God's love and for God to take complete possession of him. He added another prayer that he would always act in perfect accordance with God's will. Then he turned his attention to the greatness of the Holy Spirit, calling him the Heart of the Church and the Heart of God himself. This was Arnold's disposition until the end of his life, yet the mystery of the Trinity remained the centre of his spirituality. In one conference on the Feast of the Blessed Trinity he said:

"The life of the Blessed Trinity is perfected in the Holy Spirit: unity in nature, but trinity of persons full of grace, joy, and unending happi-

¹⁵⁰ *Personal Notes*, p. 26, No. 11, partially quoted in Fischer, *Temple*, p.151. Cf. McHugh, *Spirituality*, p. 141-142.

ness. The efficacy of the Holy Spirit's love is a powerful source of hope and confidence for us poor human beings because the Spirit in whom the infinite God loves himself is the same in whom he loves us poor creatures."¹⁵¹

Hermann Fischer commented: "The Holy Spirit is the perfection of holiness in the individual and the perfect return of the person to union with God. Only when he can reveal himself completely will the life of grace in the person become a representation of the unending, peaceful life of the Holy Trinity resting in itself. ... All religious striving, all progress on the road to perfection, remain unsettled, unfinished and laborious as long as the bond of Divine Love, that is the Holy Spirit, does not integrate and unite everything in God."¹⁵²

We may certainly say that Arnold's spirituality, his prayer life and his relationship with God had reached this degree of unity within itself and in God. He had attained such great familiarity with the divine truths that he was confronted with them at every step. And he never tired of pointing out their importance to others and encouraging love and devotion in others.

It was important to him that in the special devotion to the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity still remained central: "When people honour the Holy Spirit, they will necessarily come to love and honour the Father and the Son. In honouring the Holy Spirit, we must without fail also return to giving honour to the whole Trinity because the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Love of the Father and the Son. It is he through whom the Father and Son give grace to all people."¹⁵³

These statements are significant because they show that Arnold's thinking and prayer always was and remained trinitarian. Even when the Sacred Heart, the incarnate Divine Word or the Holy Spirit called forth his attention, love and wonder at different times, he never lost the con-

¹⁵¹ Conference on Trinity Sunday 1891, cf. Fischer, *Temple*, p.154.

¹⁵² Fischer, *Temple*, p. 152.

¹⁵³ Conference on 22 January 1897, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 156.

nection with the centre, the Blessed Trinity, from whom everything proceeds and in whom everything comes to completion.

In the *Personal Notes*¹⁵⁴ written three years before his death, numbers 16-31 are a compendium of his experiences and reflections regarding the action of and devotion to the Holy Spirit. He described the Holy Spirit as "Spiritus vivificans", and praised him as the Creator Spirit who hovered over the waters before the creation of the world, who gave life and form to all creation, especially the human race, and through that glorified the Father and the Son. He used the expression found in the Fathers of the Church: "The Father created human beings through the Son in the Holy Spirit."

In contrast to the Old Testament, where he saw the action of the Holy Spirit in the cloud and pillar of fire, Arnold described the Holy Spirit as the heart and soul of the New Covenant. He called him the sweet breath of love of the Father and the Son. In the Holy Spirit they reveal their love to humankind. By sending the Holy Spirit, they gift human beings with the sweet kiss of love. These words remind us of Gertrude of Helfta, a mystic of the Middle Ages. In her prayers of love to the Holy Spirit she used the names "consuming fire", "sweet light", "anointing of the heart". Without a doubt we can say that Arnold was aflame with this fire and wished to enkindle it in others.

In the subsequent numbers of his *Notes*, Arnold reflected on the necessity and usefulness of the devotion to the Holy Spirit; he wrote: "It urges us to come to know and love the two other Persons better and to move from an exterior Christianity to a true, interior Christianity." Yet again it is noticeable that he did not see devotion to the Holy Spirit in isolation but always emphasized the trinitarian mystery in its entirety.

There is another significant, brief *Note* in which Arnold stated his certainty that to give increased honour to the Holy Spirit would result in the grace of unity for the Church: "I have the strong conviction that if the Holy Spirit would be more honoured in the Church, he would also

¹⁵⁴ *Personal Notes*, *op. cit.*

glorify the Church with every kind of grace needed by the Church to overcome all error and create one flock and one shepherd.”¹⁵⁵

Words from a conference given by Dr. Klaus Hemmerle, Bishop of Aachen (✠1994) are like a commentary on this statement for our times: “I even dare to say that if we would learn to pray more to the Holy Spirit then a great part of all the inner problems we cultivate concerning the self, and the self-analysis of our background and problems would often be superfluous because the dynamics to break open the self are all there. ... It is rather the strength to accept myself as I am and in this acceptance to deal with myself in a different way. I heartily beg you to take this treasure which you have in your spirituality, this praying for the Holy Spirit, not only as a pious suggestion, but let the Spirit in as the most central part of your life.”¹⁵⁶

Arnold saw especially the significance of the Holy Spirit for concrete Christian life. We could attribute to him the words of Henri Boulad that express what Arnold wished to say about “exterior” and “true interior Christianity”: “Without bringing the mystical dimension of being into our existence, [our life] remains flat, defective, without any recognizable meaning and without purpose. Mysticism means the antecedent light, the burning centre of life and once again the Cause of this centre. There God dwells and his Spirit is the love relationship between him and us, revealed in Christ.”¹⁵⁷

With great ease Arnold could detect God’s presence and action in the events and situations of daily life, and he sought to discern God’s will in them. If, for example, he was invited to take up a new task, he studied it from the point of view of: Is this God’s will? He considered all sides of the matter thoroughly and at the same time took note of how external events and situations were developing. In these circumstances he saw the action of divine providence that was either preparing the way or closing it to him, agreeing to it or advising against it. If such pointers were

¹⁵⁵ *Personal Notes*, No. 28, in Fischer, *Temple*, p. 176.

¹⁵⁶ Hemmerle, in McHugh (ed.), *Analecta SVD* 63/III, p. 233.

¹⁵⁷ Boulad, *Die Tausend Gesichter des Geistes*, p. 174.

lacking, he normally held back, especially in important matters. He was so immersed in the awareness of God’s presence and his providence which orders and guides everything, that he felt at every moment that he was in God’s hand. He did not expect extraordinary or miraculous guidance, he saw divine providence at work in the daily events of life and the inner tendency of his heart.¹⁵⁸

Arnold’s prayer life, we could also say his mysticism, had a stable quality. With sensitive awareness of the movements of the Spirit, he detected his signs in everyday situations and events. The genuine mystic, and we can certainly say that of Arnold, consciously retains a well-grounded relationship to daily reality and has a very clear vision of the world and humanity. The mystic discovers God in the heart of the world, that is, in our hearts and in the hearts of all people. Deeply rooted in his own heart and in God, he wishes to lead all people to their own depths so that they will find the Spirit there and gain a new vision that also understands the nature of other people, as well as gaining a better understanding of things and events around them. The God-experience of the mystic is always somehow missionary, wanting to communicate to others what he experiences in himself as giving joy and meaning.

10.4 Two Communities of Women – Consecrated to the Spirit

The entire life of Arnold Janssen is characterised by missionary productivity. It is not surprising that in the third, most mature phase of his spiritual life, when his love and surrender to the Holy Spirit reached full bloom, his two last foundations received the seal of this development, namely dedication to the Holy Spirit. Even before the first foundation in Steyl became a reality, Arnold had in mind a missionary task also for women, as is seen in a “Call to Religious Women” in 1874. From the time of his special consecration to the Holy Spirit, however, the idea of founding a congregation of sisters came more to the fore in his heart.

¹⁵⁸ Fischer, *Life*, pp. 386-392.

Outer circumstances as well, for example, the witness of life of the first aspirants and co-foundresses, contributed to the realization of the foundation at that time. The situation of his foundations in Argentina had by then developed to the point that the SVD missionaries were increasingly in favour of the presence and missionary activity of a congregation of sisters; in fact they considered it urgently necessary. In these and other similar factors Arnold discerned the presence of God, the workings of the Spirit. It was also expressed in his conversation with Daniel Comboni, missionary bishop and Vicar Apostolic of Sudan. He asked the Bishop whether it was a good plan to found his own mission congregation for women. When the Bishop affirmed that, Arnold responded with a statement that expressed both his total surrender to God and his ability to recognize God's action and disposition in external circumstances:

“We do not want it if God does not want it. If it is God's will, however, he will make that clear and lead those persons to us who appear suitable to begin a foundation with. First, though, we will test them well, and then quietly wait for things to develop.”¹⁵⁹ He did not wish to begin with his own congregation for women until he had a clear sign from the Lord.¹⁶⁰ This sign from the Lord, the Holy Spirit, became visible alongside other signs, mainly in the founder's own inner development, his complete surrender and consecration to the Holy Spirit.

The First General Chapter of the Society of the Divine Word in 1885 already discussed the possibility of a women's congregation, for the missions and for perpetual adoration, and a foundation was accepted in principle. The first statutes state the essentials of the spirituality of the sisters' congregation, laying down the principle: “The sisters must give first place to the veneration of the Most Holy Trinity and especially of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶¹ It was determined that one department of the sisters

¹⁵⁹ Hermann auf der Heide, *Die Missionsgesellschaft von Steyl: ein Bild der ersten 25 Jahre ihre Bestehens*, Steyl, 1900, p. 539. (Jubilee Book)

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 538.

¹⁶¹ Alt, *op. cit.* p. 343.

would have missionary proclamation as their main task, while the other branch would be devoted especially to intercessory prayer and perpetual adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

The first Constitutions of the “Servants of the Holy Spirit” in 1891 stated: “Of the three Divine Persons we are to venerate and love especially the Holy Spirit without, however, neglecting the other Divine Persons.”¹⁶² The special aim of both branches was: “To love the Holy Spirit as the Father of love and the Dispenser of graces; to adore and glorify him, and to try to arouse love and devotion to him in others.”¹⁶³

Veneration of the Holy Spirit appears to take precedence over the missionary task, although in daily life it was the mission that was foremost. For Arnold the Holy Spirit, his love and veneration, was the inner dimension and fruit of all missionary activity. He placed his trust in the Spirit above all, more than in external activity.

The names of the two sisters' congregations are also closely connected to the founder's interior growth: “Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit” and “Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration”. Holy Spirit, mission and prayer belonged together in Arnold's view. We could also put it this way: he regarded Holy Spirit and prayer as the essential, inner dimension of mission, that makes all missionary activity fruitful.

In the first article of the Constitutions we read that the sisters glorify the Father and the Son **in the Holy Spirit** and spread the word of God on earth by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In this Arnold was following the teaching of St. Paul and the early Church according to which we do not pray **to** the Holy Spirit, but **in** the Holy Spirit: **in the Spirit** we cry out “Abba, Father!” (Rm 8:15) and “God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying: Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). The Holy Spirit in us brings us to glorify the Father and the Son; in other words, he glorifies the Father and the Son in us and through us.

¹⁶² Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit of 1891, Chapter I, Rule 3.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* Chapter II, Rule 2, #1.

The name of Arnold Janssen's two last foundations derives its deepest meaning from this and it reveals something of his own, inner development. The sisters are to serve the Holy Spirit in what is the Spirit's inherent and innermost nature: to glorify the Father and the Son. Glorification of the Father, the revelation of his name and his nature as the loving and compassionate Father of all people was the work of Jesus on earth (cf. Jn 17:4). The Spirit will glorify the Son, he will reveal to humankind in the depths of their hearts that Jesus is Lord, the image of the invisible God, to whom everything is handed over and who carries the universe in his hand.



Black Madonna, Kalkar School

Gift made to Arnold Janssen. From 1887 on the members of the Mission House sang their final evening hymn to Mary in front of this statue.

The sisters' life was to be dedicated to this work, proclamation of the Divine Word by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, who hovered over the chaos in the beginning and brought it to life by his creative love, is also the animator of the "new creation", the new world which all missionary work has as its goal. Further the Constitutions state that the sisters will fulfil their task in a way suited to them as women. The Holy Spirit, in whom the infinite love, feminine and motherly dimension of God is revealed, wishes to be revealed to humanity through the being and activity of the missionary sisters;

wishes to transform and recreate them in the image to which they are called from all eternity.

This shows the deepest cause of Arnold's enthusiasm for mission: glorification of the Trinity. All mission work is ultimately glorification of the Father and the Son who wish all people to share in their life through the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit.

In the sisters' Constitutions, Arnold's special love for the Holy Spirit is expressed in ever new forms and invitations: "He is the source of all graces, and with his grace he gives himself as the greatest gift. Oh, may we fully recognize his ineffable, holy love and love him in return wholeheartedly and with unswerving fidelity as his child and spouse."¹⁶⁴ This intimate expression of love and surrender is certainly unusual for a book such as the Constitutions, but here we again encounter the spousal mysticism already seen in Arnold's poems; here he wished to recommend it especially to the sisters. Thus he continued:

"The names Holy Spirit, Love and Gift, which reveal his glory to us, are proper to the Third Person of the Divinity. The sisters should aim to be his faithful servants in reality, not in name only. Furthermore, as his consecrated daughters they should love him with true filial love and zealously strive with the devotedness of a spouse to spread the knowledge of him and his love and grace among all people."¹⁶⁵

Here Arnold called the sisters not only Servants of the Holy Spirit but also "his consecrated daughters" who strive with "spousal love" to spread knowledge of him. This recalls the unusual title that Arnold loved to use for the Blessed Mother: 'Immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit'. What these expressions have in common is unlimited openness to the activity and inspirations of the Holy Spirit, unconditional love and radical surrender of the person to the God of Love. It is not difficult to recognize Arnold's fundamental disposition here, his perfect transparency and availability for the action of the Holy Spirit to whom he had surrendered totally.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Chapter I, Rule 6.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Rule 6, statute 1.

It is also expressed in another article of the Constitutions in which the sisters are encouraged to imitate the passionate love of the Seraphim. At the same time this love is to be practical and to be visible in attitudes and deeds:

“Holy love of God does not consist in pious feelings but in motives and deeds. It awaits the call of the Beloved and endeavours to answer it promptly. Let us, dear sisters, attend in this way to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and our love will be like that of the seraphim.”¹⁶⁶

It testifies to Arnold’s deep faith that, although he determined collaboration in the proclamation of the faith as the specific purpose of the Congregation, he named the special aim of both the missionary and cloistered sisters as special love and glorification of the Holy Spirit. Arnold regarded true mission as the activity of the Holy Spirit. Over and above that the sisters were to contribute through their life as instruments of this Spirit that not only the gifts of the Spirit were loved but also the Giver of these graces himself, that he would be adored and glorified.

Eucharistic adoration was a deep wish of Arnold from the beginning of his foundation. Perpetual adoration, however, was only possible with his third foundation, the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, who were originally part of the one single Congregation with the Missionary Sisters. The founder called them “missionaries on their knees” and expressed therein his deep faith in the power of intercessory prayer, to which he had given much attention throughout his life.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Rule 13, statute 2, #7.

11 In God’s Presence

More than seventy-five years ago, on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Society of the Divine Word, Fr. Anthony Hilger, SVD, Arnold Janssen’s private secretary from 1905-1907, stated in a talk on the founder: “In the Church’s saint-studded heavens he will shine among the brightest stars,” and he added by way of explanation: “Surely true holiness is essentially a conscious, enduring, intimate union with God combined with virtue in heroic degree. If so, then I could not say what saint possessed a sanctity superior to his.”¹⁶⁷

His uninterrupted inner attention to the presence of God and awareness of his inspiration, his constant union with God whom he experienced as omnipresent, are without doubt outstanding traits of Arnold’s prayer life. He was truly “contemplatively-missionary”, “contemplatively-active”. The awareness of being constantly surrounded by the loving presence of God allowed him to see every matter and every event in the light of that presence.

In his young years he spent many hours of the day and especially of the night in prayer, often in a genuine struggle with God, to gain interior clarity concerning his foundation, in difficulties, setbacks, crosses and disappointments, in order to pray “for the intentions of the Sacred Heart”. In his mature years his spiritual attitude was expressed above all in his “constant walking in the presence of God”. His enormous amount of work as founder and superior general meant he could no longer afford the frequent special hours of prayer that were formerly so precious to him. Instead his whole life and work became prayer. His secretary testified: “He was habitually in an attitude of prayer. This statement is no mere cliché, but a deep, lasting, ineradicable impression, gained during my long association with him.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Anthony Hilger, “A Private Secretary’s Impressions of our Founder” in McHugh, *Analecta* 63/III, *op. cit.* p. 52.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 53.

As he was dictating letters, his thoughts would sometimes stop flowing. Then his lips moved in silent prayer for help to find the right words. He often asked his secretary to kneel with him and pray the ‘Veni Sancte Spiritus’ so as to find the right tone in his writing. After that things usually went on smoothly, whereas beforehand he had struggled for words.

On the 100th anniversary of Arnold Janssen’s birth, Anthony Hilger stated: “The whole greatness of our Father Arnold was that he thought and lived entirely in God. ... I never doubted that he always lived in the awareness of the presence of God and wanted only to act in accordance with God’s will. ... Even though he would outwardly be interested in the most profane things, he was still noticeably conscious of living in the presence of God. From this derived his constant prayerful attitude which found expression in the introduction of the Quarter Hour Prayer which was probably his best memorial.”¹⁶⁹

The “supernatural truths”, or rather, the truths of faith, were as real and tangible for Arnold as everyday matters and the situations of daily life. He was completely taken up and overwhelmed by the thought that God paid as much attention to him and all his affairs, concerns and worries as if he were the only one. He was filled and gripped by the knowledge that he was constantly in God’s gaze. Consequently his heart was capable of no other response than loving, trusting surrender, ready to turn at every moment to the God who was waiting for him.

That is why confidence in the power of prayer was one of the founder’s strong points, one that stayed with him all his life. He was convinced that no earthly might, no matter how great, could withstand the power of prayer. He knew that through faith he could move mountains of obstacles. He took it for granted that God would not desert him when he ventured into great things for God’s sake. He was convinced that, when we labour for God, we are collaborating with God, and this collaboration can never end in failure. God never failed his trust.

¹⁶⁹ Anthony Hilger, “The 100th Birthday of Arnold Janssen” in McHugh, *Analecta* 63/III, *op. cit.* p. 68.

Similar confidence filled him with regard to himself and his own salvation; he simply knew he was enfolded in God’s love and guidance. He did not fear death in the least but thought always and only of what lay beyond the portals of death. “When we are at last in heaven,” were the words with which he often began a conversation. Frequently his eyes shone as he spoke of the happiness of heaven. In this connection his secretary said:

“He was immersed head and shoulders in temporal misery and laboured in it, yet his thoughts were so continually at home in the supernatural. With an iron energy and relentless self-denial he refashioned his rough nature into a well-balanced, amiable man of God. Setting aside all human respect, he sought only God’s will and good pleasure. In bad days as well as good he remained the same, for he kissed God’s hand with the same fervour, whether it gave or took away. A man like this could feel confident of his eternal salvation and in childlike simplicity enjoy in advance, as a fore-gone conclusion, the heavenly joy which he confidently awaited.”¹⁷⁰



Cross in the Mission House Oratory

Above all the founder of Steyl was firmly rooted and built on love, as Paul wished for the church of Ephesus (cf. Eph 3:17). That love broadened and widened his heart in all directions. It honed his view for what God wanted and he sought to promote that by every available means. With the great love for the Trinity that completely possessed him, he saw God’s imprint everywhere throughout creation.

Everything turned into a revelation and communication of divine love. He encountered God’s wisdom, omnipotence and beauty in all things. Nothing was indifferent, rather everything led him to God and

¹⁷⁰ Hilger, “A Private Secretary’s Impressions...”, *loc. cit.* p. 62.

spoke to him of God. He was a friend of flowers, meadows and woods, and he loved to sit down in meadows during his hours of recreation. He loved springs and rivers, mountains and stars, and he marvelled at their passage through the universe. On the other hand he could also become enthusiastic about precise railway timetables and he followed with great dedication the sections of the journeys his sons and daughters had to travel.

Arnold's wonder over God and his deeds also appears in the report of his secretary: "One day as we sat entranced by the view of the imposing mountains around St. Rupert's in the alps of Salzburg, he remarked, 'We poor human beings have to punish ourselves into exhaustion to climb only one of these giants. God's hand, however, casts innumerable stars and planets into the universe with the greatest of ease and positions them in their orbits – but he sets more value on a single human soul than he does on all the lifeless creation; he created the universe for us.'"¹⁷¹

Here we see that Arnold had truly become a mystic, inebriated with the mystery of God. At the sight of the turbulent, churning waters of the mountain rivers he exclaimed: "How clear and penetrating is this expression of divine power and might of which the powers of nature are just a pale shadow. How innumerable many features of the uncreated divine being are revealed in the many-sided riches of creation."¹⁷² He encountered the loving countenance of God in all things.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Hilger, "100th Birthday of AJ", *loc. cit.* p. 74.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Conclusion / Looking Ahead

When we look at Arnold Janssen's prayer life in its entirety, we cannot fail to notice a characteristic feature: the composition of numerous oral prayers. Right from his schooldays at Gaesdonck he wrote prayers: for his family, then later as a young priest for the members of the Apostleship of Prayer, for the readers of his magazine, and for the members of the three Congregations he founded. It is tempting to ask whether his prayer life exhausted itself in oral prayers and remained mainly in that sphere.

Evaluating the content of Arnold Janssen's prayers, Albert Rohner¹⁷³ has variously highlighted the founder's solid theological knowledge expressed in his prayers. The mystery of the Blessed Trinity, especially, is treated with thoroughness and depth. Yet Arnold did not bring speculation or abstract theology into his prayers; his spirituality was fundamentally nourished by the Scriptures: In the trinitarian dimension he relied for the major part on the gospel of John. The christocentric element is based on John and Paul, and life in the Spirit again on the new testament theologians named. Even the titles of his foundations testify to his deep roots in holy Scripture.

Arnold's purpose in composing his prayers was both catechetical and missionary. He particularly expressed the mystery of the Trinity as a mystery of salvation in prayer form. He was concerned that this infinite, loving act of God would be recognized and shared (cf. Jn 17:3). Above all his prayers were missionary and apostolic. He wanted to share with others what he experienced himself and what moved him to the depths of his heart.

Arnold was gripped by the mystery of the Trinity, especially by the way in which it is revealed and communicated in incomprehensible love as a mystery of salvation in human history. That is the centre of his life,

¹⁷³ Rohner (ed.), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens (Analecta SVD 56)*; idem in *Analecta SVD 63/II*.

and his prayer, thoughts and actions revolved around that. In the course of the various phases of his life, it was revealed to him inwardly with increasingly new and greater depth, and he wished to share it with others in the measure with which it was given to him. That is the reason for his numerous oral prayers. He felt urged to show people this richness of divine love and goodness and to bring them to share in the mystery to a deeper degree.

It is certainly striking that he studied trinitarian theology in particular. He wanted to communicate to others the great mystery that gripped and filled him and from where he drew life, although he was well aware that the absolute mystery could not be adequately expressed in human concepts and words. On the one hand, therefore, his prayers show the clarity of his mind and his theological concepts, on the other we can sense the struggle and effort to clothe the incomprehensible and ineffable in human words.

In Arnold's prayers we sense his wonder at and adoration of the absolute mystery that had taken hold of him inwardly and increasingly revealed itself to him. Thus, for example, he became like a child before the God who became a child, and his expressions of love and admiration found no end. At the procession to the crib on Christmas Eve he carried the Infant, and in the dark of night, when he thought he was alone in the great church, he lay prostrate on the floor in adoration and surrender.

Mystics often try to put their encounters with God in the language of poetry and symbols. At the same time they are always aware that no human realities can adequately express what they have experienced. Oral prayers were Arnold's means of letting others share in his own experience of the ineffable mystery. He was not concerned with himself, however, and did not speak directly of his own inner experience. We have to look deeper to discover his inner secret hidden behind the external formulations. In everything he remained the sober mathematician and the reserved, reticent man of the Lower Rhineland, wary of showing his inner experience. His intentions were always missionary and apostolic.

It is our task to overcome the hurdles of words and forms and penetrate to the inner source from which these words sprang. There is no doubt that the living water of the Holy Spirit was flowing in Arnold and he never tired of drawing from that wellspring, even when the vessels with which he drew it were poor and unattractive. His words are vessels that are unable to hold the Essence. Listening and absorbing, however, is the way people will be led to drink from the springs that also flow in us, and then to pass on this stream to quench the thirst of many others.

Appendix

A – Prayers Composed by Arnold Janssen

1 *Evening Prayer for his Family in Goch*

The prayer opens with:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, God of hosts,
Earth is full of his glory!
Glory to the Father! Glory to the Son!
Glory to the Holy Spirit! Amen.

This homage to the Trinity is repeated three more times in the course of the devotions. It is followed first by prayers of praise, thanksgiving, and offering, each of which is answered by one or more ejaculatory prayers. A few examples:

Let us praise and adore God in all his works.
Let us pay homage to God for our creation.
Let us praise him for our redemption.
Let us glorify him for making us holy.
Let us thank him for our heavenly destiny.
Let us thank him for our heavenly Mother Mary.
Let us thank the Most Blessed Trinity for the graces and privileges bestowed upon Mary and all the saints on the day of her assumption into heaven.

Among the intercessions we find the following:

Through the merits of the Precious Blood of Christ we implore that we:

Always fulfil the will of God.
Always remain united with God.
Think only of God.
Love God alone.
Do everything for God.
Seek only God's honour.
Sanctify myself only for God.
Recognize my own nothingness.
Recognize God's will ever better.

After prayers for relatives and superiors, there are many other intercessions including the following:

For the poor and needy.
For the sick and neglected.
For all Christians who are troubled and in distress.
For those who will die this night.
For those who are in danger of mortal sin.
For the just, that they may persevere in grace until the end.
For the holy Church that our Saviour purchased with his blood.
For all who have become separated from the Church of Jesus through their own fault.
For the pagans who have not yet heard of the kindness and love of our Saviour.
For the Holy Souls in purgatory.
For a genuine fear of offending God.
For the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
For virtue and progress in virtue.
That we may esteem eternal life above all else.
That we may direct our thoughts and desires to God's holy good pleasure.
That we may flee from self-satisfaction.
That we may prepare our will ever more for complete surrender to God.
That you yourself will be pleased to prepare us and make us capable to fulfil your most holy will.

2 *The Quarter Hour Prayer as it Developed*

1st Version

Lord God, because of the truth of your words, I believe in you! –
Increase my faith!
Because of your fidelity to your promises, I hope in you! –
Strengthen my hope!
Because of the greatness of your goodness, I love you! –
Inflame my cold love!¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Form found in Arnold Janssen's evening prayer of 1851 or 1852. See Rohner (ed), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens, op. cit.* pp. 44-49.

2nd Version

Lord God, because of the truth of your words,
I believe in you, O my God!
Because of your fidelity to your promises,
I hope in you, O my God!
Because of the greatness of your goodness,
I love you, O my God!
Because of my deplorable sinfulness,
I detest myself, O my God!
Because of the burning love of my Saviour in the most
Blessed Sacrament,
I long for you, O my dearest Jesus!
Oh, then give me the living water of your grace. Amen.¹⁷⁵
L. And send us from the Father the Holy Spirit!
A. Grant that we may clearly recognize his guidance
and constantly follow it.¹⁷⁶

3rd Version

L. Lord God, because of the truth of your words,
A. I believe in you, O my God.
L. Because of your fidelity to your promises,
A. I hope in you, O my God.
L. Because of the greatness of your goodness,
A. I love you, O my God.
L. Because of my deplorable sinfulness,
A. I detest myself, O my God.
L. Because of the burning love of my saviour in the most
Blessed Sacrament,
A. I long for you, O my dearest Jesus.

¹⁷⁵ As in the enrolment booklet for the Apostleship of Prayer, 1866, p. 10, entitled "The Most Salutary Acts of Virtue". Introduced in the Mission House in 1875 as Quarter Hour Prayer.

¹⁷⁶ Added as a conclusion in 1884 at the suggestion of Ferdinand Medits. *Verbum Supplementum* 4.

L. Oh then give me
A. The living water of your grace.
L. And send us from the Father
A. The Holy Spirit.
L. Grant that we may clearly recognize his holy guidance,
A. And constantly follow it. Amen.¹⁷⁷

4th Version

L. I believe in you, O my God,
A. Because you are the Eternal Truth.
L. I hope in you, O my God,
A. Because you are infinitely merciful, faithful, and almighty.
L. With my whole heart I love you, O my God, and am sorry
for having offended you,
A. Because you are ineffably good and lovable.
L. Out of love for me you are present in the Blessed Sacrament,
A. Therefore I long for you, O my dearest Jesus.
L. Send me from the Father the Holy Spirit with his seven gifts,
A. That I may glorify God in all things. Amen.¹⁷⁸

5th Version

L. God, eternal truth,
A. We believe in you.
L. God, our strength and our salvation,
A. We hope in you.
L. God, infinite goodness,
A. We love you with our whole heart.
L. You have sent the Word as Saviour of the world,
A. Let us all be one in Him.
L. Send us the Spirit of your Son,
A. That we may glorify your name. Amen.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Vademecum* 1899, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ Formulated by the fourth SVD General Chapter, 1909. Cf. English SSpS *Vademecum*, 1948, pp. 79-80.

¹⁷⁹ Formulated by the SVD General Chapter, 1967.

3 *Prayers of Petition*

1 – May the holy Triune God, the Omnipotence of the Father, the Wisdom of the Son, and the Love of the Holy Spirit, be known, loved and praised by all men.

Glory be. As it was.

2 – Bless, O Lord, the holy Church as your kingdom here and in heaven. Make the Church Militant victorious over the enemies of salvation; look with mercy and compassion upon the Church Suffering, and exalt the Church Triumphant to ever increasing honour and glory. Amen.

May the love of God reign and triumph in heaven and on earth. Amen.

3 – Let us pray for all ranks of holy Church. God Holy Spirit, strengthen and sanctify ever more the bishops, priests, and religious of your Church. Bless all Christians, parents and children, spiritual and temporal authorities and their subjects. Strengthen their faith and love of God and neighbour. May all sinners, heretics and unbelievers be converted. Be the consolation of the poor and the refuge of the dying. Through correct use of the holy sacraments may the kingdom of God on earth grow and flourish. Amen.

O Holy Spirit, animate us by the power of your divine grace. Amen.

4 – Bestow, O God, the graces of the Holy Spirit, especially on the priests of our Society¹⁸⁰ who are working in the missions, as well as on the lay brothers, sisters and students, teachers, their catechumens and new Christians, parents, children and youth, believers and unbelievers. Through the power of the Holy Spirit may their work be blessed, idolatry shattered, faith and morals strengthened and the kingdom of God spread upon earth. Amen.

Come O Holy Spirit. Come O Holy Spirit. Come O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your holy love. You who have united the people of all tongues in the one faith. Amen.

¹⁸⁰ This was changed for the Sisters' Congregations to: "... on our Sisters and the members of the Society ..."

5 – Grant, O Lord, your divine assistance to our entire Society¹⁸¹ and all its members, priests, brothers and students, postulants, novices and professed members, candidates for the priesthood and the Society, especially those who are sorely tried and tempted.

Sweet Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us!

All our holy patrons, pray for us!

6 – Look graciously down upon our relatives, friends and benefactors, living or deceased, especially our parents, brothers, and sisters. Bless those entrusted to our care, our superiors and all for whom we ought to pray, especially if we have harmed anyone in any way.

My Jesus mercy! Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation!

7 – Lastly, we humbly pray for ourselves, that we fulfil our duties, avoid sin, correct our faults, advance in virtue, fulfil the holy will of God and attain the degree of sanctity and come to that heavenly place to which in your divine goodness you have destined us. God, come to my assistance. Lord, make haste to help me. Glory be. As it was.¹⁸²

4 *Prayers to the Holy Spirit Composed by Arnold Janssen*

1 – O sublime Spirit, proceeding from the love of the Father and the Son and sent by them to the world in love, you love us not because we are lovable but because of your own lovableness! You do not give anything other than yourself, rather, in sanctifying grace you give us yourself as the greatest of gifts. You come to bend the obdurate, to warm the chill, to purify the stains of sin and to transform the children of sin and misery into children of light and love!

May we fervently adore you with the Father and the Son, as their greatest treasure and immeasurable love. We adore you in the gentle heart of

¹⁸¹ Changed for the Missionary Sisters to: "... our entire Congregation, to the Servants of the Holy Ghost of Perpetual Adoration and to the Society of the Divine Word. Bless all the members..."

¹⁸² Rohner (ed.), *Die Gebete Arnold Janssens*, p. 40-43 (cf. English SSpS *Vademecum*, pp. 73-76). Towards the end of his life the founder devoted his special concern once again to the "Prayer of Petition".

our divine Master. We pray that from this sacred Fount we may abundantly receive the grace we thirst for. Amen.¹⁸³

2 – God Holy Spirit come into our heart and soul. Illumine us and strengthen us with your grace that we may clearly discern and faithfully follow your inspirations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.¹⁸⁴

3 – God Holy Spirit, in your divine Wisdom you prepare every path from on high. You come when we need you and by the power of your grace you bend the obdurate, warm the chill and purify the stains of sin: pour out over us the spirit of love and prayer and unite us all in you, that through you we may be reunited with the Father and the Son. Amen.¹⁸⁵

5 Various Short Prayers composed by Arnold Janssen

May the holy triune God live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people.

May the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief vanish before the Light of the Word and the Spirit of Grace.

Prayer for Christian Unity recommended by Arnold Janssen
From the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

Lord Jesus Christ, before your passion you prayed to your heavenly Father that all who believe in you might be one, as you are one with the Father. Look with favour on the prayer that, following your divine example, we offer for the restoration of unity among all who confess your holy Name. Grant, O Lord, that with one voice and one heart we may glorify and praise your exalted and glorious Name, as well as the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and for all eternity. Amen.

¹⁸³ *Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart* 1874, p. 45.

¹⁸⁴ First appeared in Latin in the Constitutions of 1885/133. Cf. McHugh, *Spirituality*, p. 140.

¹⁸⁵ Rohner (ed.), *op. cit.* p. 94.

B – Poems composed by Arnold Janssen

A Christmas Wish

1895

With the angels I would want to sing,
Far and wide in the depth of night.
And to bear the message of the child
That is waiting for us in the stable.
I want to waken those who slumber,
Who have never seen the light of sun,
Invite those whose heart is burdened,
Who never knew the joy of Christmas.
To all, to all I want to make known
Where they will find their Saviour.

Like the star I want to shine out,
Brilliant rays to the furthest straights.
To proclaim God's love
In the night-clad valleys.
Would that into all hearts descend
The light of faith and fire of love,
Guiding the steps of all nations
To where their King reposes,
So that, united at the feet of Jesus,
They greet their Saviour in the Child.

With the mother's purest love
I would like to kneel beside the Child,
With Joseph's faithful dedication
Care for Jesus day by day.
I would gladly offer as a crib
A heart filled with love, and there
Protect him from the wind and frost,
On a bed of straw, warm and soft.
Tenderly, I want to offer him
All my being, doing, walking, thinking,
Guide my steps, O Child, I plead.

SONGS OF FAREWELL TO THIS EARTHLY LIFE

St. Rupert's, 1st July 1908

***My first Song on my Way to Death
In honour of the Heavenly Father***

The end of my days is drawing near
And now death is awaiting me.
Be then, O Lord, my good Father
And give me your bread of joy.

Forgive my failings here on earth,
And plunge them into Jesus' blood.
May the Spirit of Love assist me
And you, O Father, dear and good.

Firmly have I believed your words
And taught others to know you.
I thank you for this grace;
Enfold me in your love.

I placed my hope in you on this earth,
Trusted through every need and pain,
So let me now become your portion,
Let me be with you, good Father.

You helped me always to love you,
Often to speak of your love,
Now lead all to your love,
Complete all that I have always hoped.

My works were only paltry;
But you were strong in the weak,
Completed what I was not able to do;
You were the strength of my soul.

So call me now to see you,
And the Son whom you sent,
Together with the Love of your hearts,
The God of Love in the joyous land. Amen.

My second Song on my Way to Death

St. Rupert's, 2 July 1908

In Honour of the Most Holy Son of God

O you whom I have served on earth,
O dear, sweet Son of God,
What will become of me, poor man,
For see, evening is already approaching.

If I contemplate your great works,
And all you have done for us,
O how little then it seems
That I have done for my part.

And yet, O Son of God most high,
How greatly you have loved me.
By your death you gave me life,
You died for one who grieved you.

Through you heaven was opened,
Salvation bought for us with your blood.
You who became our Brother
Obtained the highest grace for us.

Clothed in our poor flesh,
You lived piously among us,
You, most high Son of the most high God,
Seated in majesty at his right hand.

And since you chose your servant
You looked down upon me,
Called me through your Spirit
And protected me through his Bride.

In your holy priesthood
I could share completely:
Like you to teach and to save,
To offer you on the altar.

And as you sent out your servants
To teach about heaven's door,
That fortune was also mine,
How can I repay you, O Lord, for that?

Yes, great was your goodness and love
To me, such an unworthy servant.
Now I come to you, Highest Good,
A branch from a sinful race.

With the arms of your love
Enfold me, sweet Jesus.
I have struggled and fought for you,
Placed my life's path in your hands.

My third Song on my Way to Death

St. Rupert's, 14 July 1908

In honour of the great Father of Love, the Holy Spirit

In the evening of my life
I come to you, God Holy Spirit,
To give fervent honour and thanks
To you whom my soul praises.

God of beautiful love, never
Can I praise and thank you enough.
You gave me all I have on earth,
Even body and soul I owe to you.

You gave me intellect to recognize you,
And powers to love you, too.
How I thank you that you made it possible
To direct all of them to you.

You made me a child of the Church,
Gave me pious parents and teachers.
Thus I was guided on the path of goodness,
All of this I owe to you.

You gave me the ability to learn,
Drew me to yourself through grace,
Called me to the priesthood
And prepared the path for me.

Thus, Lord, I became your son,
You gave me strength and grace for yourself,
Anointed me with your oil,
Filled me with your Spirit.

Than I worked as a priest,
Strove for your holy kingdom,
Encouraged people to practise prayer
And encouraged myself as well.

Thus, Lord, you inspired me
To work for souls in need;
To train good priests for them,
To save them, as God commanded.

But it was not I who achieved this,
You yourself accomplished that work,
You gave the grace for it, and helpers,
Alone I would have done everything wrong.

Therefore, Spirit of Eternal Love,
Love and thanks be to you.
Forgive me that I loved so poorly,
Accomplished so little for you.

But now, when my life here ends,
Grant, O my dearest Consoler,
That I may be united with you
And enter into your repose.

And when my eyes have closed,
Let others stand in my place
And let my sons, my daughters
Implore you in my spirit,

That united and with all their might
They praise you always and ever,
And continue to promote your honour,
Since I worked so weakly for that.

And yet, O Father of Love,
My heart is full of thankful joy
That I have helped some people
To do what you inspired in me.

Yes, that I spoke and encouraged
People to see your great love
So that they would love you more,
You, God's sweet breath of love.

You are the great finger of God,
The love of the Father and the Son.
You have glorified them on earth,
You Star of Love of the eternal throne.

You have glorified their love,
Revealed it, high and commanding,
And inflamed by their love
Forgot yourself all too much.

Yet now that, perhaps, the day is ending,
The evening of the times very near,
Arouse from the midst of your own,
Those who insist on your greater honour.

For it can no longer remain this way
For you, exalted Lord of Love.
The Son and the Father want it
For you, the apple of their eye.

Grant, then, O mild and gentle Spirit,
That my children will think that way,
That they may love you in return
And be zealous for your honour,

That they may love you sincerely,
Since you have given us so much,
In addition loved us so greatly,
You God, who guide all things.

Therefore I consecrate them to your love,
Oh take them under your protection
That they may serve you, chaste and pure,
Not following sinful human paths.

For that is your exalted will,
You who love purity so greatly;
For you are holy, thrice holy,
And you wish the honour of the pure.

The father of your children exalts you,
Your children exalt you, too.
Accept them in your goodness and love,
You, God's sweet breath of love.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Arnold Janssen, "Poems of Father Arnold, 1874-1899" (1908) collected by Br. Eugenius Wachter and Br. Bonifatius Gassmann, Steyl, 1949.

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