

Precious is the Life Given for Mission



Reflections on the Centennial of the Death of
Saints Arnold Janssen
and
Joseph Freinademetz

SVD-SSpS-SSpSAP
Common Publication
January 15, 2010

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*The Logo for the centennial (front cover) was designed by
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Printed by GESP Italia, Città di Castello (PG)
January 2010

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FOREWORD

January 28, 2008, and January 15, 2009, marked the 100th anniversary of the death of St. Joseph Freinademetz and St. Arnold Janssen, respectively. We in the Arnoldus Family (Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration, and Society of the Divine Word) celebrated the year (January 2008 to January 2009) in honor of our two saints. During that time there were many reflections and presentations given in various provinces and/or through various media. At their joint meeting in January of 2009, the General Councils of the Missionary Sisters and Divine Word Missionaries, decided to gather the items together and publish them in some format for posterity.

This publication is a collection of some of the reflections, homilies, conferences and presentations written specifically during that year to deepen our appreciation of these two saints and our own spirituality. It is not a researched compendium but a booklet that can serve the members in further reflection on the life and spirituality of these two saints.

Guidelines used in choosing the selections were these:

- the selection's availability
- the selection was composed particularly for the year's celebration
- the selection speaks to members beyond a particular community or province
- the selection has a lasting quality that transcends the period of "centennial celebration."

Undoubtedly there are items existing in the Arnoldus Family Universe not included here. This may be due to their unavailability (they did not reach the collators), their geographic

limits (they spoke primarily to a specific audience), their authors are unknown, and/or their time limits (they referred frequently and specifically to the “centennial celebration”). Further, out of respect for the environment (use less paper) and to contain costs of publication, only a few black and white pictures are included in this publication.

The collators thank the two General Councils for their support of this venture. Gratitude also goes to those who took the time to send contributions, to those who assisted with translations, to those who edited or proof-read the items included here, and to those who graciously understood why some items are not included.

Perhaps this can be a prelude to a future, larger, and more comprehensive work on the spirituality of these two saints.

The collators:

Judith Vallimont, SSpS

Maria Elizabeth Ello, SSpS

Herbert Scholz, SVD



I.

**GENERAL
INFORMATION**



Palm Sunday
01 April 2007
S01 / 2007

To all Members of the SVD, SSpS and SSpSAP

In re: Centennial Year of Arnold and Joseph

Dear Sisters and Confreres,

Soon we will commemorate the 100th death anniversary of our two saints Joseph Freinademetz on January 29, 2008 and Arnold Janssen on January 15, 2009. The SVD 16th General Chapter recommended that the SVD Generalate and Provinces/Regions organize celebrations for these centennials. In line with this recommendation, the SVD General Council and the SSpS Congregational Leadership Team met on January 22, 2007 to discuss and plan the celebrations together.

In this meeting we agreed to celebrate these events in common as the Arnoldus Family. Our Adoration Sisters were subsequently invited, and they have agreed to join us in this family celebration. By celebrating these events in common, we wish to strengthen the desire and vision of St. Arnold that we sustain and complement each other in the same mission. All of us still remember and treasure the experience of joy at our mutual collaboration during the preparation and celebration of the canonization of Arnold and Joseph. We wish to continue and deepen this sense of family and partnership in mission.

As a result of our common discussion and planning, we are now pleased to announce the

CENTENNIAL YEAR of ARNOLD and JOSEPH
with the theme
“Precious is the Life Given for Mission”
29 January 2008-15 January 2009

The Year will begin with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the death of Saint Joseph Freinademetz on 29th January 2008 and close with the 100th anniversary of the death of Saint Arnold Janssen on 15th January 2009.

1. Main Objectives

The Centennial Year celebrations should aim at the following objectives:

- 1.1. To deepen our own knowledge of the two saints.
- 1.2. To grow together as one family.
- 1.3. To make the two saints more known in the local churches.
- 1.4. To reach out more to our lay partners.

2. General Principles

The following principles should characterize the celebrations:

- 2.1. The two events should be celebrated together; after all, the two saints have always been seen as very closely linked with each other.
- 2.2. The focus should be less on their personalities and more on the cause for which they lived and the values for which they stood. We would like especially to highlight their relevance for today.
- 2.3. The emphasis should be on celebrations on the provincial or local level rather than on a centralized celebration in Steyl, Oies or Rome. Indeed, we do not

foresee any such centralized celebration to which members of our religious family would be invited from the provinces/regions. The reason for this is that one of our main objectives is precisely to make the two saints and their relevance for today known to people in our countries and in our parishes, missions, institutions.

- 2.4. The celebrations should be kept simple, reflecting the lives of St. Arnold and St. Joseph.

3. Role of the Generalates

The role of our generalates will principally be to animate and encourage local celebrations and to provide some guidelines. A “Central Planning Commission” for the Centennial Year, composed of two SVD confreres and two SSpS sisters, has been formed at our generalates with the twofold task of planning the celebrations in Rome and acting as the point of reference for the provinces/regions. Through this “Central Planning Commission”, the generalates intend to provide the following:

- 3.1. In collaboration with the AJSC, guides for reflections every two months;
- 3.2. In collaboration with the Italian Province, a DVD version of the canonization and of the video “Der Chinese aus Tirol” in German, Italian, English and Spanish;
- 3.3. Other materials like articles, prayers, meditations, photos, bibliographies;
- 3.4. A special “Centennial” section in both the SVD and SSpS generalate websites. This section will contain the bi-monthly guides for reflections (3.1.), the other materials (3.3.), a list of different activities organized in the various provinces/regions, institutions, parishes. Details of this section of our websites will be communicated later by the Central Planning Commission. Special e-mail addresses have been

obtained for the Central Planning Commission, and they are: *centennial@verbodivino.it* and *centennial@worldssps.org*.

4. Further Suggestions

The SVD General Council has approached the German, Italian and China Provinces, as well as the AJSC, for some proposals for meaningful celebrations of the events. Considering these proposals, we now present some suggestions on how to commemorate these anniversaries on provincial and local levels:

4.1. Communications Media:

- Use the already existing SVD and SSpS publications to make known our saints and their relevance for today;
- Where possible, make use of diocesan or local magazines and newspapers to publish articles about our saints or our congregations;
- Calendars with sayings of St. Arnold and St. Joseph can be printed for the Centennial Year;
- Use radio and TV, according to the possibilities and practices in each country, to raise awareness of the saints coming liturgical feasts;
- Prepare DVD, CD or modules that present clearly the values that they lived for, in a language best understood by people today, especially the young ones;
- Employ artistic talents for songs, paintings, plays, etc.

4.2. Retreats and recollections:

at the provincial, community, individual levels, focusing on the two saints.

4.3. Prayers and liturgical celebrations:

either using existing liturgical texts or drawing up new ones.

4.4. Pilgrimages:

can be organized at diocesan/parish/institutional levels especially for our lay partners.

- In Europe: Programs for pilgrimages to Steyl, Goch or Oies will be prepared by the German and Italian provinces;
- In other continents: Presuming that in some countries there are already churches, small chapels or shrines built in honor of St. Arnold and St. Joseph, pilgrimages could be made to these.

Dear brothers and sisters, we invite you to fully use your initiative and creativity throughout the Centennial Year, keeping in mind the guidelines, particularly the main emphasis. As to those aspects of our family celebration where the Adoration Sisters cannot actively participate, we have been assured that by adoration and intercessory prayer before our Lord in the Eucharist they will contribute to the contemplative dimension of our celebration, as St. Arnold and St. Joseph would certainly wish. May these celebrations deepen our own knowledge of the two saints, help us grow together as one family and make the two saints more known in the different local churches.

United in the Word and the Spirit,

Sr. Agada Brand, SSpS

Sr. Agada Brand, SSpS
Congregational Leader

Sister Mary Cecilia

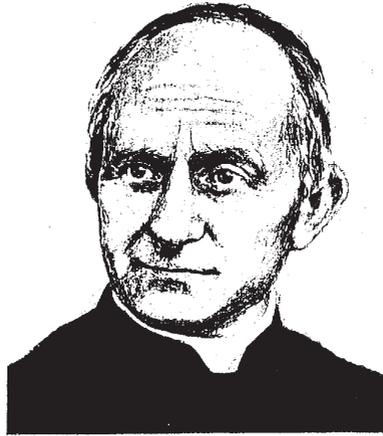
Sr. Mary Cecilia, SSpSAP
Superior General

Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD

Fr. Antonio M. Pernia, SVD
Superior General

Arnold Janssen

(1837–1909)



- Founder
- the Society of the Divine Word
 - the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit
 - the Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration

Significant Dates

November 5, 1837	Arnold Janssen born in Goch
1848-1855	Primary school in Goch and minor seminary Gaesdonck
July 11, 1855	School leaving examination, Muenster
1855-1859	Studies in mathematics, natural sciences, and philosophy in Muenster and Bonn
1859-1861	Theology studies in Bonn and Muenster
June 16, 1859	High school teaching qualification
August 15, 1861	Ordained priest in Muenster cathedral
1861-1873	Teacher at Bocholt public school

1866	Member of Apostleship of Prayer. Start of intensive promotion, traveling and publishing in German speaking areas of Europe
1873-1875	Chaplain to the Ursulines in Kempen
1874	Mission magazine <i>Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart</i>
December 3, 1874	Permission to found a mission house in Roermond diocese (Netherlands)
September 8, 1875	Inauguration of St. Michael's Mission House in Steyl
January 27, 1876	Inauguration of the Steyl Mission Press
1878	Periodical <i>Die heilige Stadt Gottes</i>
1878	Acceptance of the first lay [missionary] brother postulants
March 2, 1878	First missionaries sent to China: Joseph Freinademetz and John B. Anzer
1884-1886	First General Chapter and establishment of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) Arnold Janssen Superior General for life Successive acceptance of mission territories on all continents
December 8, 1889	Foundation of the Missionary Sisters
December 8, 1896	Foundation of the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
January 15, 1909	Death of Arnold Janssen in Steyl
October 19, 1975	Beatification of Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz by Pope Paul VI
October 5, 2003	Canonization of A. Janssen and J. Freinademetz by Pope John Paul II

[*Arnold Janssen: Serving the Universal Church*. Compiled by Stefan Ueblackner SVD. Published by the Society of the Divine Word, Rome, 2003]

Joseph Freinademetz SVD (1852–1908)



Pioneer of the Divine Word Missionaries in China

Significant Dates

April 4, 1852	Joseph Freinademetz born in Oies, Abtei, South Tyrol
1858-1862	Ladin primary school in Abtei
1862-1876	German primary school, high school and Philosophy/Theology in Brixen
July 25, 1875	Priestly ordination
1876-1878	Curate at St. Martin's in the Gader Valley
1878-79	Steyl
March 2, 1879	Mission-departure celebration, farewell to his home country
1879-1881	Saikung, Hong Kong
1882	Arrival in Puoli, South Shandong
1882-1884	Itinerant missionary
1884-1886	Mission administrator
August 15, 1886	Final vows

1886-1890	Itinerant missionary
1890-1891	Mission administrator
1892	Coordinator of the Diocesan Synod; visitation tour
1893-1894	Director of catechist courses
1895-1897	Director of the major seminary
1897-1898	Mission administrator
Nov. 1, 1897	Murder of Fathers Nies and Henle
Nov. 14, 1897	Occupation of Kiaochow Bay by German troops
1898	New mission stations in the east of South Shandong
1899-1900	Mission administrator (1900 Boxer Uprising)
1900	Appointment as Provincial
1903-1904	Mission administrator
1904-1907	Working with Bishop Henninghaus; Provincial center established in Taikia
1907-1908	Mission administrator
Jan. 28, 1908	Death of Joseph Freinademetz in Taikia, South Shandong
Oct. 19, 1975	Beatification of J. Freinademetz and A. Janssen by Paul VI
Oct. 5, 2003	Canonization of J. Freinademetz and A. Janssen by John Paul II

[*Joseph Freinademetz: Serving the People of China*. Compiled by Josef Hollweck, SVD. Published by Society of the Divine Word, Rome, 2003]

II.

**REFLECTIONS
ON ARNOLD JANSSEN AND
JOSEPH FREINADEMETZ**

Precious is the Life Given for Mission

Adeline Ayivor, SSpS

“Precious is the life given for Mission”, this was the theme of the Centennial Year. There are three important key words that strike me from this theme. These are precious: life and mission. When we describe something as precious, it means that this is very important and dear to us. From one of the SSpS Congregational letters, I came across the statement which goes, “precious is a word that describes water”. I agree 100% with this description. I find it very appropriate because water is precious to life. Water as we all know is life-giving. Think of some uses of water. Imagine, what happens to plants during the dry season. You find some plants almost dying, many trees with dry leaves and some without leaves at all. But as soon as the first rain falls, green leaves begin to sprout; weak plants regain some strength; animals in the forest are able to quench their thirst; gutters are washed clean; and the environment begins to look pleasant. Scarcity of water can bring about famine or even death. The abundance of water leads to greater yield of food crops for human consumption. You can think about all the goodness of water. There are exceptions where water can also destroy. Nonetheless, water is life-giving.

Similar to the word that describes water, we, missionaries of the Arnoldus Family are precious. And to remain precious at all times, in all places and to all people is our vocation. In other words, we are called to be life-giving. And we can be life-giving through strong prayer and good works just as Sts. Arnold and Joseph have done.

We are blessed to be among the chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people set apart. We are all gifted with life, a life that is precious, to enable us to share in the salvific mission of Christ, the Word made flesh.

There are so many people out there who are in need of our love, care and support. There are still thousands of people who are thirsty and hungry for the Word of God. Sometimes we are unable to reach out to those people and places, touched by violence, abuse of human rights, destruction of the environment, calamities and endless sufferings.

As missionaries of the Arnoldus family, we are always challenged to affirm hope in the midst of these harsh realities as well as the realities of our community life. All the same, we are called to serve despite the difficulties and obstacles.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, to be able to remain precious and to give all our best as missionaries, we need to follow the footsteps of our two Saints, Arnold and Joseph. They have set the pace for us to follow and if we divert our course, we will find ourselves in danger. Their number one secret was their constant union with the Triune God through prayer. Their intimacy with the Lord, the source of all strength and wisdom, helped them to remain in every situation and at all times.

All the missionary activities of St. Joseph Freinademetz, his zeal and his readiness for sacrifice as well as his decision to follow the missionary vocation, were rooted in and made fruitful by his union with God which was nourished by prayer.

From their life stories, we read that Sts. Arnold and Joseph were men of prayer; they prayed without growing weary. They spent long hours in devotion to the Sacred Heart as well as devotion to the Holy Spirit. St. Arnold said: "Through the indwelling Holy Spirit our prayers become powerful enough to pierce the clouds and works are made holy".

Therefore we are being encouraged and challenged as well to always seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our daily experiences.

Bishop Hemminghaus wrote about St. Freinademetz: “One felt that for him prayer was a vital necessity, the very joy of his life.” He also wrote: “In the evening when everyone had gone away, he would still devout a good amount of time to pray before the Blessed Sacrament and have spiritual reading.”

Let us evaluate ourselves. We have 24 hours in a day. How much time do we spend with the Lord each day? Most often we find ourselves spending much time on other things rather than with the Lord. Sometimes we allow our work, studies or other activities to drown us so much that we forget about our source of strength and inspiration. We are being challenged to allow prayer to permeate all our activities and experiences whether we are working or studying. We can only find courage and strength, wisdom and patience to handle the task entrusted to us if we remain in constant union with the Lord through our prayer. Jesus tells us this in John’s Gospel, “Live on in me, as I do in you. No more can a branch bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly. For apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15: 4-5). So we will lose our precious nature if we do not pray. We will be like salt that has lost its saltiness or be the branch that is cut off from the stem. There is a saying that you cannot give what you do not have; therefore, let us remain in Christ so that we can reflect Christ to all people.

As Sts. Arnold and Joseph were different in personality, they had different missionary experiences. But both followed the one way, that is following the will of God.

St. Arnold Janssen was convinced that God’s will is made known to us in the concrete circumstances of life so he admonished his

Priests, Brothers and the Sisters to find God's will in the events of their lives. He believed that God does not allow anything to happen to us, except for his own purposes.

Therefore, it is important for us to recognize God at work in our lives. That is why the Scripture says and I sing, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God..." We are being encouraged to accept sufferings as they come. St. Arnold once said, "The sufferings that God sends are grace from which ever greater benefits spring, they prepare us for greater joy." He also said, "God loves those who thank him even in suffering." St. Arnold always returns to the basic teaching of St. Paul in Phil 2:5, "The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had'." He was convinced that, striving to put on the mind of Christ will help us discover the will of God and to follow it.

You may ask "In what way can we put on the mind of Christ?" It is only by listening and meditating on the Word of God that we can know the mind of God, because God speaks to us through the Scriptures- the Divine Word.

According to Sr. Mary Catherine, an SSpSAP, "Fr. Arnold studied the Word in an effort to form his mind and heart according to the mind of Christ". That was the first step of searching for God's will. He also readily sought advice from many Bishops and others in authority. Yet on some occasions he warned against consulting too many people to avoid confusion.

Like Abraham, who faithfully followed the will of Yahweh by leaving his homeland and journeyed to the land he knew nothing about, (cf. Gen 12: 1-4), St. Joseph also followed the will of God by leaving his own homeland, Tyrol, for a land he knew not, the land of China. And there, later, he became more Chinese than Tyrolese. In his farewell sermon at St. Martin's Church on 11th July 1878, he said, he heard God's call exhorting him in these words, "Leave your home country and go together with the Good Shepherd, to seek out the sheep that has gone astray and to help your poor brothers in a far distant land", Joseph heard this still

voice of God and responded as in the words of the Galilee song, “Deep within my heart I feel voices calling me from within... So I leave my boat behind, leave them on familiar shore...”

Each one of us has been called to leave our homeland, our family and friends, our comfortable and familiar shores for unfamiliar places and people. With our own strength, we will never survive. The grace of God, through prayer, strengthens us to persevere each day as precious servants of God.

Like Solomon, St. Arnold and Joseph were models of prudence. They sought nothing but wisdom from God in dealing with people. They showed in their lives the spirit of love. This virtue prompted Joseph to say, “the language of love is the language that everyone understands”. We must remember that we are called as family to encourage one another and pray for one another. Sometimes we concentrate so much on people outside and forget about or neglect the needs and concerns of our own sisters as SSpS and confreres as SVDs. St. Joseph admonishes us once again as he told his confreres, “Let us love one another with a truly fraternal love. Let us be patient with one another, inspiring one another for the good”. St. Arnold also encourages us: “Everything is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit’s grace”.

Christ, the true vine, has promised to make all things new but it must begin with you and me starting today because he is the way.

[Joint SVD-SSpS Family Feast, Ghana, January 16, 2009]

Precious is the Life Given for Mission

Carol Welp, SSpS

One day a mother took her young son, Walter, into the heart of the city and there they were coming towards a big Catholic Church. She pointed it out to Walter saying “That’s our big Cathedral here in the city. alter looked up at the Church and said, “Mommy, why don’t they wash their windows.” he mother grinned and said, “Son, those are special windows, they aren’t dirty! They may look that way on the outside, but we will go inside where the sun shines through them and you will see how precious, how beautiful they are. So the Mother took her young son inside the Church and showed him the beautiful window of the saints: the sun shown through and they could see St. Peter, St Francis, St Margaret Mary and more.

The next day the young boy went to school and in his religion class the teacher talked about saints. The teacher asked the class, “Can any one tell me who are the saints?” Walter, who had has his lesson the day before from his mother, raised and waved his hand and said, “Saints may not be so pretty on the outside, but inside the sun shines through and they become very precious.” Yes a saint is some one whom the Son, the Light of the Word, and the Spirit of Grace shine through. He or she is very precious.

The preciousness of Arnold’s and Joseph’s lives is already publicly declared by the Church in their beatification and canonization. I think the theme for our Centennial year “Precious is the life given for Mission” is more about us, than about Arnold and Joseph. It is meant to help you and me to see ourselves and our Sisters and Confreres as precious in our lives given for mission. It is a call to know who we are and who we are not.

The Prologue to John's Gospel gives us a picture of who we are and how precious, blessed we are:

St. John tells us "the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love. And of this fullness we all have a share, love following upon love. God lavishes his love upon us; of Jesus' fullness we all receive, grace upon grace. The more we claim this love, this preciousness, open to it and make it the source from which we live, the more we will give our lives for mission. That's what St. Arnold did. In the depth of his being he pondered the Word, The Word who is Life, the Word who is Light! A light that shines through darkness and a Light no darkness can put out! And of this light, this word, this love we have all received. Arnold experienced this in his depths until his deepest self was rooted in God. This is what gave birth to his missionary enthusiasm. May this communion with God be experienced and lived in our hearts and the hearts of all human persons. May the Sacred heart of Jesus live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people.

Are we able to claim and receive the gift God is offering us and to let it fill our lives until we know our Preciousness, our blessedness and desire it for everyone else?

After Jesus' baptismal experience of His Blessedness, he was given 40 days to ponder what being Beloved entails. We can learn a lot from His experience about what preciousness is and is not.

- 1) Preciousness is not about having all my human desires and needs satisfied. Preciousness and sanctity coexist with hungers, longings, emptiness, restlessness. Preciousness is receiving the Word, the Gift of God, in our hungry lives and passing it on.
- 2) Preciousness is not entitlement nor having special privileges. It is not about testing God by insisting on special

protection or benefits. As one Scripture scholar put it: We don't need to throw ourselves down. We can take the stairs down like ordinary people and still be precious.

- 3) Preciousness is not about recognition, honor, power, the kingdoms of the earth. I can be a nobody and still be God's beloved daughter or son. Preciousness is to know before whom to genuflect, before whom to bow.

A wonderful image for St. Joseph Freinademetz is given to us by Bishop Gasser of Brixen in his letter of Joseph's release to Arnold: "Take my son, Joseph, and make a first class missionary of him. Yes, I am giving you in him the pearl of my diocese."

The word pearl has become a metaphor for something very rare, very fine, very valuable and precious. Doesn't that sound like our bother, St Joseph Freinademmetz? Yet even some of Joseph's confreres could see only the day-to-day struggles, the outside of the stained glass window, not the very rare, very valuable and precious person they had in Joseph. They wrote a letter to Arnold asking for his removal from China "because he only saw good in the Chinese. That being the case how could Joseph call them to conversion?" For these confreres Joseph's very fine, very rare and very valuable love for the Chinese was more an irritant, an annoyance. They couldn't see his life as precious for mission. They couldn't see the pearl of great price they had in their midst.

A friend of mine once said, "We in St. Arnold's family are real missionaries. We can live in war zones, in mosquito infested areas, among the very poor and marginalized, with those suffering HIV/Aids. Yes we are real missionaries, BUT at the same time we are not so good at loving and supporting one another, at affirming and encouraging our brothers and sisters in their mission and their preciousness." Why can't we accept and see the whole window, the dark and ordinary side as well as the side the sun shines through? We need to hold both the beauty and the not so beautiful and know this person is OK, is

precious. If God can say to my confrere, my sister “You are good and I love you”! Then he/she is good!!

Jesus knew Himself as the Blessed one of the Father and He could look out and see blessedness all around:

Blessed are the poor,
Blessed are the peace-makers,
Blessed are those suffering persecution

He also said “Look at the flowers in the field, look how beautiful they are. Look at the birds of the air. How gloriously they fly.” And look at you. Can you not see? Open your eyes - You are more than all of these. You are God’s beloved one. You are precious, open your eyes. You live in God and God lives in you! You and I are small, but we are one with our God and God’s mission. How small we are, how many our limitations, but how great is the mission our smallness partakes in. Let us open our eyes and see ourselves and our Sisters and Confreres as the Sun shines through us. Then like Saints Arnold and Joseph our missionary task is in the words of the St. Paul to proclaim this good news so “ that all will be able to grasp fully the breadth, the length, the height and depth of Christ’s love and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge so that all may attain to the fullness of God himself.”

Precious indeed are our lives given for Mission.

[Homily on January 15, 2009. USA]

A Tribute to Sts. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz

Gracy Antony, SSpS

In every celebration that I attended, both at the opening and closing of the death centennial year of Sts. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz, or any other program that was organized through the year, there was a tone of gratitude. Yes, that is the sentiment that was perhaps uppermost in the heart of every SVD, SSsP and SSsS. Gratitude to God, for the gift of the two Saints, and gratitude to the Saints, for who they were and are to us.

“Precious is the life given for Mission” (Worthwhile is the life of the one who gives his all, AJ, 1904). The time and culture we live in are somehow characterized by a certain distaste for the religiousmissionary vocation. The decreasing number of young people attracted to this way of life and the increasing departures from religious congregations allude to this tendency.

Perhaps the theme challenges us to look at ourselves, as missionaries. How precious do we consider our missionary vocation? To what depth has this truth of being a disciple of Jesus, being a missionary in the Arnoldus family, has captivated us or been uppermost in our consciousness? It is vital that those who remain committed, are convinced of the preciousness of our vocation, in order to become who we are called to be, to give our best to God in the people we serve, and thus to live our lives to the best. For, in giving lies the meaning of life. One of our most precious needs is to contribute to and enrich life. They live well, who live for others.

Life is the best and the most fundamental gift we have from God, and it is the most precious. Nothing else matters without it. The life given for mission becomes even more precious, as

the missionary sees every other life also as precious and valuable, graced with, dignity,. The missionary and is urged to move in the direction of defending, protecting, promoting, and caring for life especially where it is threatened. The human person in a very special way is the sacrament of God's presence. He is present in everything. God's preferred presence is his presence in the human being. Meditating on the throne of God as the human heart will help us see what a tremendous value mission work is. Imagine that we could gaze into the hearts of all those in the state of grace. We would see their hearts suffused and enveloped with light and at the center the Triune God. What an astonishing sight! This truth permeated Arnold to the depths of his being; it was the focus of his life around which everything else revolved. Arnold never tired of leading others to this living faith, encouraging them to love this divine presence. And so, he would say, "For the cause of mission no sacrifice is too great."

In a similar tone, Joseph Freinademetz, wrote to his family from Steyl in 1879: "Thank God... that the Lord has given us the grace of having a missionary in our family. In 1880, he wrote from China, "To be a missionary is an honor that I would not exchange with the golden crown of the emperor of Austria." In 1884, he wrote: I cannot thank the Lord enough for having made me a missionary in China." In 1887, "I do not consider being a missionary as a sacrifice that I offer to God, but as the greatest gift that God is giving me... When I think of the countless graces that I have received and continue to receive until now from God... I confess that I could cry. The most beautiful vocation in the world is being a missionary." It is important to note that he claimed these not when things were smooth, easy and comfortable, but in the midst of the struggles that he had to face in the initial years in China.

I believe we continue as SVD, SSpS, SSpSAP, because we deem our religious missionary life as precious. If not, it is not worth wasting our energies, our years of life. God's dream for each of us is to live life to the full. And these two saints who chose to

move ahead on a 'road less traveled' - taking risks of every kind, never sparing themselves, offering their lives to something greater than themselves - have opened up before us the road of fuller life. Journey on such a road of missionary commitment as seen in their lives inevitably calls for self dying, "because we are called to follow Jesus on the path of a small seed that has to die in order to grow and bear fruit."

Arnold Janssen: A Man of Deep Faith

In reality, there is no separation between faith and love, as there is no faith without active love, and no true love without faith. Both the Saints have lived a life of deep faith and great love. Without denying them either of the virtues, what is intended here is only to highlight one of the characteristic marks of their lives.

It was Arnold's Faith in the Triune God that led Arnold to be open and attentive to the world's needs, which in turn, led him to found the three congregations with their particular missionary thrust. The inner strength that enabled him to persevere in the face of tremendous difficulties and opposition was his deep rootedness in God, and his radical surrender to God's will. In the initial years, he had plenty of external privations and limitations to bear. These did not become a big burden to him and he put up with them bravely. What was harder was to bear the contempt of so many educated and influential personalities who viewed his work skeptically and judged it negatively and, therefore, did not offer him the necessary support. He was looked on as a man of eccentric ideas. Throughout his life he had also to struggle with his own personal limitations. Engaging in real issues often exposed his personal vulnerabilities. Yet, as a man of unshakable trust in the God who led him by hand, as it were, he went ahead with his convictions amid controversies and oppositions. Arnold's capital was his unshakable trust in God and the conviction that God had called him to the work of mission.

Joseph Freinademetz: A Man of Great Love

Freinademetz's natural gifts of 'attractive kindness, of pleasantness, of a friendly and charming personality formed the backdrop that made of him a missionary of love. The deepest driving force of his life was love. "Most of the time, his eyes shone with such attractive goodness, with such serenity that the Chinese easily trusted him and felt at home with him," Bishop Henninghaus recounted. Joseph said, "The pagans will only be converted by the grace of God and, let us add, by our love, for the language of love is the only foreign language which the pagans understand." Freinademetz had evidently learned to speak this 'foreign language' very well. "The apostolate is love, a work of love: the more a missionary is imbued with love', the more he is missionary. Mission must be a matter of the heart" he said another time. He had understood the message of for his Master, Jesus, that the essence of Christian and missionary life is love, and what is loved lives. This conviction was his source of strength through many an experience of being tested and tried, of being rejected and insulted. In his loving, he didn't spare himself at all. As someone said, he 'burnt the candle at both ends.' It was simply natural that at Joseph's death, one who knew him expressed his feelings with the words: "I feel as if I had lost my father and my mother."

The two men shine before us as saints, primarily because of the transformation they underwent through the grace of struggle and surrender to God, because of the many vulnerable moments they passed through, which turned out to be graced ones. Surrender in struggle gifts us with change and growth, gives life depth and vision, insight and understanding, compassion, and character. It not only transforms us, it makes us transforming we become able and worthy to walk with others, becoming more human. Struggle is the process that drives us to find God within us and in the darkness that surrounds us. "How happy are people who have surrendered completely to God! While others crawl like snails through many troubles and anxieties those who

have surrendered completely to God run like the deer That is no wonder because it is not they that run, but God draws them... “(AJ).

Let one of the ‘learnings’ from the saints’ lives be: welcoming into our hearts the hidden wisdom and the transforming power of struggle and pain, which we, so very often tend to avoid or try to escape. Our lives would then be very different. Setting ourselves on their path, would certainly be a better expression of our gratitude and tribute to our Saints than the wordy homilies, speeches and prayers we make in their honour. May we have the grace to live their lifechanging words. May their dream live on in our time and into the future!

[VANI - Newsletter of India South Province; Vol. 19 - No.1 January 2009]





III.

**REFLECTIONS
ON ARNOLD JANSSEN**

“The Love of God shines in our Hearts in Rainbow Colors.”

(A. Janssen)

Peter McHugh, SVD

Arnold Janssen: the wrong person, at the wrong time, in the wrong place! The wrong person, since Arnold did not have those personal qualities one would normally look for in the founder of a world-wide enterprise. A classmate commented, “Of all our class Arnold Janssen would have been one of the last you would consider suited for such a task.” The wrong time because the 1870s were very difficult for the Church in Germany with Church leaders imprisoned, parishes without priests, religious orders banned. Due to this Kulturkampf he even had to cross the border and found the mission house outside his own country.

The wrong person! Yet here we are a hundred years after his death and Arnold is more talked about and prayed to than ever before. The candles placed by pilgrims before his Tomb in Steyl have been burning continuously, day and night, since his canonization in 2003. The work he started is growing still, and now with various lay associate groups. We work in over 70 countries. More important than this numerical growth are the efforts being made to respond to the challenges of our day, even when this leads us along paths hardly imagined by Arnold. Clearly the right person and the Spirit was able to make good use of this “poor instrument of grace.”

The Spirit can likewise do great things through us if our dedication is as generous and wholehearted as Arnold’s who saw his life and missionary commitment as a response to God’s “inexpressible love.” “All three Persons showed their love for

us in a completely new and unheard of way. The Eternal Son by becoming human; the Holy Spirit by coming to dwell in human hearts; the heavenly Father by sending the Darlings of his Heart [the Son and Spirit] to reveal his love to us.” Sharing in this deepest desire of God for humanity was for Arnold what mission work was all about. His experience of God’s love gave him enthusiasm and strength, and to further this will of God he was ready to accept whatever sacrifice was necessary and to put up with the criticism of others.

Not surprising, then, that Paul’s expression, “The love of God is poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5), was one of the five texts most quoted by Arnold, for it is the basis of all mission work. Indeed, mission is really God’s love flowing into our loveless world to bring true life and joy. God’s love continued its flow through Arnold out to the world and this led him to appreciate ever more “the value of souls, the dignity of each person. Love of neighbor finds its highest expression in spreading the Gospel,” was the basis of his missionary enthusiasm, of his burning passion. “For such a cause no sacrifice is too great.”

And we? Sure, we say mission work is worthwhile and have dedicated our lives to it. Yet all too often the enthusiasm that burned in Jesus and in Arnold seems to be now in us just a smoldering fire, no longer a burning Christ-like passion. “May the Heart of Jesus live in the hearts of all!” remains hardly more than a pious prayer.

How to rekindle the fire? Hopefully celebrating the feasts and anniversaries of Saints Arnold and Joseph can help. Their example can inspire us to foster an attitude of dialogue that consciously tries to appreciate and defend the dignity of every person. In a retreat before a mission departure Arnold said: “Meditating on the throne of God [in the human heart] will help us see what a tremendous value mission work has. Imagine that we could gaze into the hearts of all those in a state of grace.

We would see their hearts suffused and enveloped with light and at the center the Triune God. What an astonishing sight!” This sense of astonishment and awe permeates Arnold’s talks. Astonishment that the Triune God would show such love for us poor humans in this way. Awe at the dignity and beauty which this infinite love bestows on every person, “to be a son or daughter of the Father, a sister or brother of the Son, a temple, a spouse of the Holy Spirit.” In his last Pentecost sermon Arnold put it like this: “The Holy Spirit is the God of love who comes in order to make humans lovable in God’s eyes and to reveal God’s love for them.”

It is especially when we show love and respect to others that the Spirit helps us to appreciate ourselves as lovable. Here is the key to holiness, a lifelong process. “Love alone widens the human heart.” Arnold made conscious efforts to show his love and respect, though not always successfully according to some who lived with him. He was no flawless saint, but he did try earnestly to be open to the transforming love of the Holy Spirit. In 1901 Arnold asked the community: “If you wish to do me a special favor, then help me to pray for something of the fullness of divine love for my cold heart. And what I have in mind here in the first place is not love for God but love for all of you. How grateful I would be if you would pray for me to have such a love.” Fr. Gier, one of his early critics, said that for those who knew him in the early days the older Arnold was like a different person. And yet as late as 1906 the Bishop of Roermond had to investigate the validity of serious complaints from some of the Brothers and even some of the Sisters in Steyl.

Like Arnold we too have to struggle against our weaknesses, all too aware of our frailty. But it is a struggle filled with hope, knowing that it is God’s love that changes us rather than our own efforts. A hope directed not to some vague future but to the present. The indwelling Spirit of Love makes each person lovable already now.

This is the basis of those fundamental challenges set by our General Chapters:

- to approach the other in dialogue with an attitude of “solidarity, respect and love” (SVD 2006);
- “to be a compassionate presence of Jesus in his prophetic mission” (SSpS 2002);
- to contemplate the mystery of the Blessed Trinity dwelling in us, “whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of our brothers and sisters” (SSpSAP 2003).

“Just as sunlight,” wrote Arnold, “when it shines through falling rain is refracted in the seven beautiful colors of the rainbow, so shines the love of the Holy Spirit in a seven-fold way in the hearts of the saints and gives them that special beauty which delights the eye of a spiritual person.”

May the indwelling Holy Spirit lead us to take delight in the rainbow-colored beauty of each person we live with and of those we serve, and indeed above all of ourselves.

[Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center, Steyl, *Bimonthly Reflections*, No. 1]

The Eucharist in the Life of Arnold Janssen

Franziska Carolina Rehbein, SSpS

St. Arnold had a great love for the Eucharist, a legacy from his parents. 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 the following Masses. Even on weekdays she was able to arrange her work in such a way that she was always able to attend a Mass. She was convinced that without the blessing of the Eucharist she would not be able to finish her work. Her example, as well as that of his deeply religious father, made a strong impression on the young Arnold.

When Arnold was eleven, he received his First Holy Communion. He considered it a great grace, for which he prepared himself well, as was the custom at the time, by learning the whole catechism by heart. Nothing is said about Arnold's spiritual experience on the day of his first communion. He said very little about his religious feelings and inner experiences. 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. They bear witness to his deep feeling about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, which we also see in his later life.

In the first letter Arnold wrote, "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, ... the Mighty One who rules the earth according to his will... Prepare your heart already... Pour out your heart before him; recommend to him your joys and sorrows... You will never regret it as I now regret having done so little to prepare.”

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. Oh brother, let me congratulate you a thousand times! You are now the sanctuary of the Lord, his inheritance and his love.”

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. With all his spiritual might, Arnold wanted to respond to that incomprehensible love and to avoid everything that could separate him from it.

A few years later we encounter the same love and reverence in Arnold’s letter to his mother, shortly before his ordination:

“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.”

This love and reverence filled Arnold’s heart also in his later years: “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 body of Jesus works! 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.” (Conference, 1894).

A poem from his later years (1896) gives us an insight into the mystery of Arnold’s love for the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

After Holy Communion

O quiet happiness, O blissful fortune! Now he is all mine,
The King, wonderful and great,
before whom the heavens bow.
Oh tell me, where is a throne so honored
That God the Father’s Son wishes to repose there?
Where is a castle in whose hall the King of creation dines?
Where was ever a joyful feast that could praise him as
guest and friend?

O inexpressible, highest bliss! – I can find no words;
His loving glance fell on me, he came through my door.
He entered my dwelling that is empty of all ornament,
And gave me of the wine of his love,
as if I were of equal dignity.
Did ever a prince descend so far from his throne
That he called the poorest of beggars
to nestle against his heart?

O highest Son of the King,
before whom the world bows down,
My heart, now the throne of your love,
 marvels in reverence and is silent;
It becomes silent before the fire of your love,
in holy rapture,
That you my Lord and my God deign to bless it thus.

There is no doubt that Arnold’s Eucharistic devotion was influenced by the theology and religiosity of his time. According to the theology of Matthias Scheeben, which influenced Arnold

deeply, the Eucharist was a source of grace. Arnold often emphasized that the Father and the Holy Spirit are present in the Eucharist together with the Divine Word, though not in the same way. Centering his spiritual life on the central mystery of the Christian faith, the Trinity, gave it an inner unity, depth and vitality. Highlighting the Trinitarian dimension of the Eucharist is characteristic of our Founder's spirituality and shows why it remained so important for him. It was for him not something apart but was deeply rooted in the central mysteries of the Christian faith: the Trinity, the Incarnation, salvation.

In every Eucharist we celebrate the whole mystery of salvation and we exclaim: "We proclaim your death, O Lord; we glorify your resurrection, until you come in glory." In the celebration of the Eucharist we take part in the Today of the Christian salvific mystery: the Incarnation, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Glorification of Christ and are drawn into that event. St. Arnold looked on the Eucharist as the memorial celebration of the sacrifice of the cross on Calvary, in which Jesus offered himself to the Father as the divine Lamb. He encouraged his confreres to take part in this total giving through their vows in religious life . "In Holy Mass, therefore, we should offer ourselves with the Savior and renew our vows and the total giving of ourselves which they entail, ready to face any suffering." Thoroughly imbued with his faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist our Founder treasured and loved in a special way adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In different ways he expressed his deep personal love for the mystery of the permanent presence of the Lord in his church: in conferences, in the prayers he composed to Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament, and especially in his frequent visits, often staying for a longer time before the Blessed Sacrament. Especially in his younger years he often spent long hours during the night in the chapel.

From the time of founding the Sisters' Congregation Arnold Janssen had had in mind one congregation with two branches,

the Mission Sisters and the Adoration Sisters. He called the latter “missionaries on their knees,” since their special task was to pray for the missions. Hermann Fischer emphasizes how for Arnold all work for God’s kingdom was in the first place definitely a matter of prayer. What Arnold said in his sermon at the opening of the branch of the Adoration Sisters was typical of his deep appreciation for prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament: “The cloistered Sisters should sit like Mary at the feet of the Lord, glorify him day and night through the Divine Office, and as soon as their number allows, maintain perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, praying in this way for the richness of graces for the Church and the Congregation.”

[Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center, Steyl, *Bimonthly Reflections*, No. 3]



Arnold Janssen and the Parable of the Kingdom

Leo Kleden, SVD

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed...

Mt 13:31

The simplicity of this beginning should not discourage us. The mightiest tree starts as a single seed and the strongest of giants was once a weak, whimpering baby.

Arnold Janssen on the inauguration day of
the Mission House in Steyl, September 8, 1875

Jesus told the story of God's Kingdom only in parables. What is remarkable about the parables of Jesus is that they are all simple stories about everyday experience: a sower going out to sow seeds in the field, a fisherman throwing a net into the sea to catch fish, a woman searching for the lost coin, a shepherd looking for the lost sheep, a merciful father waiting for his prodigal son to return home, and so on. Very simple and ordinary things!

The ending of these parables, however, surprises us with something extraordinary: a tiny seed becomes a big tree, the seed in good soil brings a hundredfold harvest, there is greater joy in one lost sheep found again than in the ninety-nine remaining in the flock, and the merciful father makes a big feast for the prodigal son who has returned home.

The Reign of God is ...*like that!* The ability to experience the Reign of God is a kind of sensitivity to see something extraordinary in ordinary things. Jesus, therefore, says: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" (Lk 10:23). It is a certain ability to see the forest in the tiny sprouting seed, or to see the secret of the sky and the ocean in a drop of morning dew.

If Jesus told the story of God's Kingdom in parables, the early Christians told the story of Jesus – his life, death, and resurrection – as the best parable of God's presence. He is the smallest seed that fell into the ground, died, grew, and yielded a harvest in abundance; he is the bread of life broken and multiplied for the hungry, the living water that flows for the thirsty, the light that shines in the darkness. Later when Jesus sent his disciples to continue his mission, he sent them empty-handed, because he wanted them to follow the path of a small seed that has to die in order to bring new life. Under the guidance of the Spirit the disciples understood this secret of the Kingdom, as did Benedict in the cave of Subiaco, Francis of Assisi who left his parents' house naked, Arnold Janssen in an old, crumbling house of Steyl, and Mother Theresa serving the poor and destitute on the streets of Calcutta.

Now we can say that the life and the mission of Arnold Janssen have become a new parable of God's Reign. We recall his famous saying on inauguration day, when many people were disappointed by such a poor beginning of the German-Dutch Mission House: "The simplicity of this beginning should not discourage us. The mightiest tree starts as a single seed and the strongest of giants was once a weak, whimpering baby. We know that with our present resources we cannot accomplish our task, but we hope the good 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... So I appeal to all those assembled here: What can we do? First, pray. Beg the Lord of the harvest. Secondly, sacrifice." First things first: We have to pray because ultimately the Kingdom is the work of God himself and we are just small instruments in his hands. But we have to sacrifice because we are called to follow Jesus through the path of a small seed that has to die in order to grow and bear fruit. In this context we also recall how Arnold started his missionary project empty-handed and how he put his total trust in the Lord of the harvest and

relied on his brothers and sisters who shared and supported his vision.

By dedicating his first mission society to the Divine Word, Arnold Janssen wanted to remind us that “In the beginning was the Word...The Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:1.14). The first attitude of a missionary, therefore, should be a contemplative attitude of letting the Word become flesh and live among us. We recall a particular example of our missionary saint. Joseph Freinademetz once asked Arnold Janssen how he could best prepare for his mission in China. Arnold advised him to learn by heart the Gospel, because in that distant foreign land he might be forbidden to carry the Bible and would have to proclaim the Good News from his heart. Joseph followed the advice, but what he did was much more than just memorizing texts. He let the Word become flesh in his life so that his person would be transformed by the Word and become good news for the people of South Shantung. When Arnold further sent our brothers and sisters as missionaries to different parts of the world, he actually continued implementing the parable of a sower who went out to sow seeds in the field. Arnold realized that there would be many obstacles on the edge of the path; there would be resistance by the rocky ground and thorny soil, but in the end the Word would find rich soil and produce a harvest in abundance. Arnold, therefore, urged his missionaries to do their best in the work of evangelization because “to proclaim the Good News is the first and greatest act of love of neighbor.”

From the very beginning our congregations (SVD, SSpS, SSpSAP) were designed as international societies. They were intended to receive members from different peoples and cultures; and our missionaries were to be sent to all nations, especially to the places where the Good News had not yet been proclaimed or not yet been proclaimed enough. In this way our societies were designed as signs that “people from east and west, from north and south, will come and sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God” (Lk 13:29).

If nowadays we reformulate our mission under the catchword “prophetic dialogue” or “life-giving relationships,” we are simply reaffirming and deepening the missionary insight we have inherited from our Founder. Through the work of our missionaries, especially through their commitment to faith-seekers and to the poor and marginalized, we re-actualize the parables of the Good Shepherd or of the Merciful Father. In reaching out to people of other cultures and other religions we emphatically announce the all-inclusiveness of God’s Kingdom.

Listening to the parables of Jesus, reading again the life story of Arnold Janssen, and reflecting on our contemporary mission, we realize that the Lord has indeed done great things through his simple servant from Goch: The extraordinary in an ordinary person!

Thus we joyfully continue our mission today. Even though our membership in Western Europe is on the decline and our financial resources decrease, our young missionaries from Asia, Africa, the Americas or different parts of Europe will find a new moment of grace in following the Lord along the small path of a seed, because “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. “Worthwhile indeed is the life of one who gives his all,” said Arnold.

[Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center, Steyl, *Bimonthly Reflections*, No. 4]

Arnold Janssen and the Will of God

Sr. Mary Catherine, SSpSAP

The familiar saying from Dante's *Divine Comedy* "In your will is our peace" would be a good motto for Fr. Arnold's life. When he was appointed to work as director for the Apostleship of Prayer he began to understand that as we honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we must begin also to unite ourselves to the intentions of that Divine Heart. He often quoted St. Paul, "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). And he held up the spiritual ideal that "the best form of devotion to the Heart of Jesus is to make our wishes conform to those of the Heart of Christ... As Jesus, we should live our lives not for our own honor and glory, but according to God's will and for his glory."

Acting on his conviction that all decisions were to be channeled through fervent prayer seeking the will of God, he showed that he did not keep his spiritual ideal only in the realm of thought and reason. Fr. Arnold took the Word of God in Scripture seriously and when he read St. Paul's words: "This is the will of God your sanctification" (1Thes 4:3), he considered this a mandate for himself and his missionary society. He told his followers that sanctification is God's work but it requires our cooperation. He was deeply convinced that an essential feature of surrender to God is the desire to have his will concerning us fulfilled in every regard... Then God will enlighten us and bring us to sanctity and enable us to do all things in him who strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

Fr. Arnold was convinced that God's will is made known to us in the concrete circumstances of life. He reflected prayerfully on the Incarnation and believed that as God sent his Son into the world as man to teach us who God is and how to follow God's will, so God continues to let his will be known through human agents and the happenings he allows in our lives. Always

attentive to the Word of God that is living and active in Sacred Scripture, Fr. Arnold admonished his priests, brothers and sisters to find God's will in the events of their lives. God, he felt, does not allow anything to happen to us, except for his own purposes. It is important for us to recognize God at work in our lives. Fr. Arnold always returned to the basic teaching of St. Paul that had so captured him when he began his work for the Apostleship of Prayer: "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:6). He was convinced that striving to put on the mind of Christ would lead one to become aware of God's will and to follow it, because Jesus came only to do the will of the Father.

Fr. Arnold studied the Word of God in an effort to form his mind and heart according to the mind of Christ. This was the first step in seeking God's will. He searched all sides of any decision that was to be made. He also readily sought advice from many bishops and others in authority, since he considered that they would be speaking God's will to him concerning the foundation of the mission seminary. Yet on some occasions he warned against consulting too many people. In a letter to the Deacon Hermann Wegener he counseled: "Regarding the advice you will seek, I advise you not to consult too many people. That will only confuse you. There is no certain way of knowing the will of God in this life; according to the teaching of the Church, we cannot even be sure of sanctifying grace. Each person has to make the main decision about his vocation himself. If God gives him the grace to embrace a more perfect state, and provided he obtains the agreement of his confessor and has reflected on this with God in prayer, then he can proceed. God enables those who seek him to find the right way to heaven and uses obedience so that the person can achieve the greatest grace." We find in these words an insight into how Fr. Arnold sought the will of God in his own life: fervent prayer and seeking advice from a confessor or spiritual adviser.

In the early days of the mission house, Fr. Arnold's strong belief that what he was doing was God's will caused him to continue

even when the first collaborators, Fr. Bill and Seminarian Reichert, left him and there was a possibility that the Seminarian Anzer would also leave him. He reflected at the end of 1875: "...even if the Lord in his inscrutable plan discards the first builders, in order perhaps to replace them with others who are better and more suitable, may the Lord do what he wills. May his will always be done. May he choose the instruments and discard them as he pleases."

He prayed in that first year: "May God give us the grace to zealously seek his will and make ourselves more and more worthy of his heavenly blessings through the attainment of a simple and loving heart."

As he was seeking permissions from various bishops regarding the founding of the mission house he met with many obstacles. Fr. Arnold expressed his struggle: "I have experienced periods of severe struggle and it seemed to me I would have to endure a crucifixion if I were to succeed. On top of that I experienced physical affliction and some adversity. But it seemed to me that to give up would be contrary to God's will. So I hung on, continued working, and I have no doubt that God wants the project and that he is the true *agens* [mover] who deigns to use our poor hands for this purpose."

For Fr. Arnold the will of God and religious obedience were as one. He once wrote: "Look upon the will of your superiors as the holy will of God and try to comply in all simplicity and sincerity." He would have been deeply gratified by the statement of the instruction on authority and obedience from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life (May 2008): "To seek the will of God means to seek a friendly and benevolent will that desires our fulfillment... Obedience is not humiliation but the truth on which the fullness of human persons is built and realized. Hence, the believer so ardently desires to fulfill the will of the Father as to make of it his or her supreme aspiration." In 1904/05 when six priests were appointed to the

missions, Fr. Arnold asked them: "Please recognize the will of God in this call directed to you in religious obedience, humbly submit to it and accept it joyfully as a challenge."

When selecting the Sisters to be sent to the missions, he instructed Sr. Josepha: "This matter may not be settled in haste nor unduly rushed; rather you must pray much and ask others to pray, and then reflect a great deal once you have obtained all the necessary information and asked those for their opinion who can give the most exact particulars in every respect... At the same time pray repeatedly to the Holy Spirit and call on the patron saints. The importance of a good choice is obvious. You have to follow the light from above in all simplicity but also with great care and endeavor to find God's will as it manifests itself through the situation." Again we see his recipe as it were for seeking God's will.

Fervent prayer to know the will of God, he believed, would resolve any difficulties in the way of fulfilling it, as he wrote to Fr. Joseph Freinademetz in China regarding the acceptance of a local diocesan priest into the Society: "If he so urgently wishes to become a member of our Society, he should begin to pray fervently for it, so that if it is indeed God's will, the difficulties lying in the way will be resolved."

Regarding the foundation in Brazil the Founder wrote: "If it is God's will that we remain there, he will ordain things in such a way that his divine will is revealed." When he wanted to establish a mission in Chile he wrote: "Since at the moment we cannot meet the requirements, it is not God's will for us. So we cannot object if the two persons concerned... approach another congregation." In regard to a college in Santiago: "If I take the view that I should not begin new projects on my own initiative but wait to see which way Divine Providence is pointing, I believe I act legitimately... Since Santiago is the capital of Chile and a college would make a great demand on the Society, this principle applies all the more and I must ask God to consider my weakness. If he wants us in Santiago he should tell us by

clearly indicating his divine will... If we want to build a college and a church we will need far more money than we have. So I am waiting for some additional signs of God's will."

Always before establishing a new foundation, the Founder prayed and waited for the will of God to be more clearly revealed. In certain situations, as with the founding of the mission house in Techny, it became clear through various events that it was God's will to proceed and he prayed that the new foundation would correspond to God's holy will. In regard to a foundation in Palestine, he followed the reservations of his councilors and asked the Bishop to look for another congregation. He wrote: "We cannot take on the matter just yet; first the will of God must be more clearly revealed."

In June of 1901 Fr. Arnold received a letter of fifty-five pages from Fr. Gier listing his failings and imperfections. This caused the Founder much suffering but he accepted it in great humility. In his address to the community at a feast day celebration on July 19, once again he mentioned his central thought of God's will: "I greatly need prayers. The Society is growing fast. It is God's will that each member dedicate himself to his work... I ask the eternal love of the Holy Spirit to grant me his love more and more... May [the Lord God] establish between us in all respects the relationship that should bind us according to his divine will." In his farewell conference at St. Gabriel's in June 1908, the Founder concluded his recommendations for the future of the mission house with these words: "May God's will be done. This most holy will must always be adored."

We can see from the various quotations that the "will of God" was all pervasive in Fr. Arnold's life. Not only did he strive with all his ability to learn that will and follow it, but he repeatedly asked this of his priests, brothers and sisters. May his prayers for us continue to help all the members of his three foundations to do the same.

[Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center, Steyl, *Bimonthly Reflections*, No. 6]

Arnold Janssen: A Man of Dialogue

Michael Somers, SVD

At times one can get the impression that ‘prophetic dialogue’ is a totally new concept and a new ‘cool’ word to describe our mission today. Yet when we look more closely at the life and work of Arnold Janssen we find that he was a model of prophetic dialogue in different ways. The last general chapter SVD shows that “prophetic dialogue entails a recovery of what is characteristically an SVD way of doing mission” (*In Dialogue with the Word*, no. 6, 2006, p. 8), beginning with Arnold Janssen himself.

It was his faith in the Triune God that led Arnold to be open and attentive to the world’s needs, which in turn influenced and shaped him and gave our congregations their characteristic missionary thrust. From the very beginning, Fr. Arnold understood mission as God’s ongoing dialogue with humanity.

Though he was timid, reserved and rather clumsy in interpersonal relationships, he nevertheless found ways and means to express that which echoed deep within. It is this power to discern and ‘connect’, more than anything else, that authenticates Arnold’s spirituality. This is only possible when one learns to relate or dialogue meaningfully: with self, others, creation, and God. Let’s have a look at some of these instances of dialogue by our Founder.

With self: Fr. Arnold was in touch with himself, aware of his rough character and difficult personality. The sting in his personality put at risk relationships and friendships. When his secretary mentioned to him some critical remarks and comments made about him, he asked Fr. Gier to write down the comments

he heard. Little did he think that Fr. Gier would take him so seriously and a few weeks later he handed Fr. Arnold 54 small pages of negative criticisms. Fr. Arnold made special efforts to improve. He prayed each day after Mass for “the grace to understand how a wise father or the heart of a mother ought to be towards my subjects” (J. Reuter, *Proclaiming the Word in the Power of the Spirit*, p. 71-72).

Arnold elicited admiration, but he also evoked antagonism. He disturbed many; and frequently this happened through apparently contradictory behaviour, rather than through preached word or inspirational action. To many of us, Arnold remains an enigma, a maverick and often a nuisance. Dialogue and engaging with the real issues involves exposing vulnerability, beginning with Arnold’s own vulnerability. Poorly equipped for the task ahead, Fr. Arnold touched painfully the reality of who he was: His great desire to share God’s love with all people contradicted his obvious talents. His vision was blurred by many negative reactions and the impossibility of such an enormous task, made more difficult by being at the wrong time in history due to the Kulturkampf. In his inner struggles he touched deeply his humanity in his weaknesses and limitations, yet he set out into deeper waters. Arnold allowed himself to be vulnerable, rid himself of all defences and opened himself to the possibility of ridicule and failure, of being dismantled of personal pride, being hurt, rejected and misunderstood. He surrendered himself in dialogue with the Word.

With others: Fr. Arnold read the signs of the times in a provocatively challenging and disturbing way. He had the inner freedom to listen deeply and the outer initiative to respond in new and fresh ways. From this perspective, Fr Arnold teaches us that dialogue is a way of being present in history; dialogue is not being passive; rather it is being courageous, restless, taking initiative. Arnold had this daring spirit even to the point of discarding all that which does not produce life in abundance. In

those early days his involvement in the Apostleship of Prayer led to his awareness of the wider world. In the language of the Apostleship of Prayer his intentions became one with God's intentions or "the intentions of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus." While the German Church became caught up in itself and in its own crisis due to the Kulturkampf, for Arnold this was the Spirit prompting it to look beyond itself to the needs of the wider world and thus a new mission was sensed, which led to the opening of the first German/Dutch mission house. "We live in a time when much is collapsing and new things must be established in their place." (Arnold Janssen to Archbishop Melchers of Cologne, 1875)

Arnold was a man of dialogue, dialogue with the world and dialogue with God. "People can serve God and still dedicate themselves to concern for worldly matters." There was no contradiction for Arnold, both were held in creative tension and this led him to be open to the Spirit and to risk relationships. He showed his enthusiasm for mission, cultures, and languages in the way he handled requests from new mission countries. His secretary recalled how he would spread encyclopaedias and maps over the floor in order to learn all he could about the country and culture from where the request came. In his vulnerability, Arnold could choose freely: to be open to others, no matter who that other was, to stand firm in his convictions amid controversy, to risk his voice or action even though there was the possibility of being misunderstood, rejected, or laughed at even among his own, to share his faith and vision even though he might be questioned or criticized, to risk failure, thus discovering his giftedness and potential.

With creation: Fr. Arnold helps us to recognize that what gives real meaning to life are things we often dismiss as being of little value. For example: the sacredness of our created world. We must remember that the first WORD spoken by God was creation in its beauty and diversity (Prologue of John). This is our passion for life.

As a teacher of natural science he discovered God in all things and beings and all things in God: “In spring we see how the plants, beautifully formed, sprout from the dark, dirty soil and soon stand before us in all their colourful beauty and with sparkling, affectionate eyes gaze at us like messengers from God. Where do they come from? The finger of God, the Holy Spirit, is at work here.” Awareness of God’s presence and openness to the Spirit is the key to his spirituality, for at the core of Fr. Arnold’s spirituality lay the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. This was the basis of his union with God, his love for people, and his missionary enthusiasm. It involved every aspect of his life and became a deeply personal relationship to God as Father, Son and Spirit; “we in God and God in us.” Everything spoke to him of God, and God spoke to him in everything. Thus his life was one of constant discernment and dialogue. The thousands of letters that he wrote speak for themselves; he remained close to all his sisters and brothers in the missions and supported them constantly. “Obviously the ‘spirit of the Founder’ is profoundly Trinitarian. It is rooted in the Founder’s great devotion to the Holy Trinity. For, the dialogue of life and love within the Trinity is the giving of one’s all to the other” (‘A Word from Fr. General,’ *Arnoldus Nota*, Jan/Feb 2007).

With God: Through his devotion to the Holy Trinity Arnold sought to safeguard and foster the spiritual and more holistic values that underpin life in its fundamental meaning. Dialogue is to be as inclusive as possible and challenge all movements that veer towards exclusivity. Arnold’s vision of God and the divine plan for creation led him to perceive in depth through dialogue. He strove through discernment to see the whole picture as God sees it, and the contradictions which others find irreconcilable he held in creative tension. It is the unity of all reality, the whole which is greater than the sum of the parts, that engages the person of dialogue.

When weary of life, Arnold sat down by the well of life and in moments of intimacy and prayer God became his rock, his

meaning, his courage, his all in all. “Meditative prayer is not a time of sterile, cold reflection; rather it should be a heartfelt, loving dialogue with God.” He discovered that only in unshakable trust and total surrender into the hands of God could his impossible dream become a reality. In those vulnerable, yet graced moments, Arnold faithfully used the potential that God had invested in him, never counting the cost. His weaknesses became his strengths and today we are gifted by the ordinariness of this man. Most importantly, to be vulnerable is to know the paradoxical power in surrendering ourselves to God. It is to allow the power of God’s Spirit to take over and to move through us. It is to know that by ourselves we can do nothing, but with a surrendering heart we can do all things in the one who wishes to grace us every moment of our lives, so we can become a blessing for others as Arnold has become for each one of us.

[Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center, Steyl, *Bimonthly Reflections*, No. 7]



“*Et tui erant*” - Reflection on the 100th Death Anniversary of St. Arnold Janssen

Antonio M. Pernia, SVD

The ringing of the bells that morning was longer than usual. And everyone in Steyl knew that the Superior General, Arnold Janssen, had died. It was the early morning of Friday, 15 January 1909. At the first hour of that day, at 1:00 AM, the founder of the Steyl religious missionary congregations passed away peacefully and without any struggle.

Although the final illness had set in already in early November, Arnold Janssen was confined to bed only during the last ten days. From 05 January, the founder could no longer get up from bed. His right side was completely paralyzed and the paralysis had now spread to the left side. On 10 January it seemed that the death agony had begun. The last rites were administered, and the Prayers for the Dying were said. Despite his condition, the founder joined in the responses. The hymn to the Holy Spirit, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, was heard repeatedly from the founder. And in the midst of his prayers, a small Latin phrase escaped from his lips – “*Et tui erant*”.

At first the phrase seemed irrelevant and meaningless. But he kept saying it – until one of those around him remembered: “*Et tui erant*” – And they were yours! It was a phrase from the final prayer of Jesus before he went forth to his death (Jn 17:6ff). “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. *They were yours*, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because *they are yours*”.

On the night before he died, Jesus prayed for his disciples. In a strikingly similar way, a few days before he died, Father Arnold prayed for his spiritual sons and daughters. And his prayer revealed a profoundly modern missiological insight – *Missio Dei*. Mission is God’s first and foremost. The missionary congregations which he painstakingly founded, the missionary vocations which he carefully nurtured, the mission work around the world which he efficiently organized – this great work, his missionary vision, his lifelong mission – all this was God’s. Everything that he lived and died for, everything that he worked hard and sacrificed for, everything was God’s. *ET TUI ERANT!* There was nothing he could claim as his own. It was all *Missio Dei*. The founder may never have used the terms themselves, but his lifestyle and spirituality showed that he understood the call to mission as a call to collaborate with God’s mission.

It is therefore understandable that the search for God’s will was a central concern of the founder throughout his life. For if mission is fundamentally collaboration with God’s mission, then it is essential that one is constantly attuned with God’s will. Thus, he sought all his life to learn to discover God’s will and follow it. And he demanded the same of his priests, brothers and sisters. Before making any major decision, he discerned hard and waited for God’s will to be revealed more clearly. In discerning God’s will, the founder generally combined both prayer and study, or contemplation and dialogue.

First, prayer and contemplation. While Father Arnold was no “mystic” in the classical sense of the term, those who knew him closely testify to his “mystical disposition” or “prayerful frame of mind”. Thus, while Fr. Arnold was not gifted with extraordinary mystical manifestations such as visions, ecstasies and revelations, he appeared to walk in the presence of God and gave the impression that he was constantly conversing with God. Biographers of Fr. Arnold inevitably refer to his “communion with God” and love for prayer as prominent characteristics of his personality. It was from this that he drew

the energy and strength for the many tasks that he had to do. And it was through this that he contemplated God's heart and discerned God's will about a particular question.

Second, dialogue and study. For Father Arnold, discovering God's will was not only a question of prayer and contemplation. It also required serious study and research. No important decision was ever made without first demanding detailed information regarding a concrete situation, consulting with members of the general council, dialoguing with confreres or groups of confreres, asking advice from experts and persons in authority. Indeed what emerges from the founder's style of reaching a decision is the image of a person of dialogue. The many consultations he undertook, the innumerable letters he wrote, the various reports from the missions he required – all these bespeak of a man striving to discover God's will by being open to hear the other, to learn from concrete situations, and to dialogue with confreres.

Thus, in his lifetime, Arnold Janssen sought only to do God's will – in such a way that whatever he achieved was not his but God's. At his death, that Friday morning of 15 January 1909, he handed over to God his life's work and labor. *Because they are yours! Et tui erant!*

It is beautiful to remember that the founder prayed for his followers just before he died. But it is also important to note that in his prayer he considered his followers as belonging not to himself but to God. *Et tui erant.* Because they are yours. In other words, what was important for Father Arnold was not that the members of the congregations he founded be his followers but that they belong to God and be truly "persons of God". That is to say, that by being followers of the founder, members of the congregations he founded would become like him – a man of God, someone who placed at the center of his life the holy will of God, which is the salvation of all peoples. This is the real meaning of our vocation as followers of Arnold Janssen –

becoming persons of God, as companions of the Divine Word and servants of the Holy Spirit. Because this experience of being of God or of belonging to God is the very source of mission. For such experience is the experience of being chosen by God or of being loved by God – an experience which impels us to share the Gospel with others. Thus mission no longer seems like an obligation or a duty, but an expression of our experience of belonging to God or of being of God. It is in this light that St. Joseph Freinademetz could say: “I do not consider being a missionary as a sacrifice which I offer to God but as the greatest grace that God gives me”.

Contemplating Fr. Arnold’s life and work, we his followers can only whisper in prayer: “*Et tuus erat!*” For he was yours. Totally yours. The inscription on his tomb reads: “*Dulcissimus in Christo. Arnoldus Janssen. Pater, Dux, Fundator noster. In pace.*”

[*Arnoldus Nota*, January 2009]

Reflection on Arnold Janssen

Mary John Kudiyiruppil, SSpS

Here our reflection focuses on the importance of Arnold Janssen in the animating and pioneering roles of Mission Congregations today.

I. Fr. Arnold: The Missioner, The Sender

If the idea of “being sent out” is intrinsic to the understanding of mission, then Fr. Arnold was not a ‘missionary’ but a ‘missioner’. He did not take a single physical step in the direction of foreign mission. He was rather the ‘sender’, the ‘missioner’, the ‘layer of foundations’. This has special significance for Communities like ours where we are founding, receiving, sending, opening, closing, transferring, visiting and inspiring.

I would like to highlight three important qualities of Arnold in this regard. They are:

1. Arnold: The Sensible and Enterprising Founder.

Sensible: Fr. Arnold is often seen and at times accused of having many devotions. But facts indicate that he exercised moderation in manifest religiosity. He never felt himself called to religious monastic life; his interest was in mission. He wrote to his Brother William upon the latter’s decision to join the Capuchin Brothers, “In as much as I do not have it... I envy those who are called to serve God in monastic life”. Despite his great esteem for the sacraments and the promotion of Church attendance, Arnold Janssen followed the principle: “We can no longer save the world with sermons and liturgy alone”.

As a young man he decided to study mathematics and natural sciences. To him the two disciplines held no conflict. When

purchasing land or building, he analyzed the soil, assessed the water quality, studied the strategic importance of the location and calculated its future prospects including finance. His highly trained powers of judgment avoided making hasty decisions.

At the death of Fr. Frienedemetz in 1908 of typhoid fever, Fr. Arnold felt a hard blow; his faith said: “We now have a powerful intercessor.” But his practical mind instructed that the hospital be disinfected so that the situation does not create more “intercessors”. He was sensible to a fault.

Enterprising: Closely related to and flowing from his sensible nature is his industrious personality. For the Founder, mission became the one single driving force of his life which made him capable of continually transcending himself and placing all his talents and resources at the service of the reign of God. Arnold put all he was worth and all his resources at the service of mission. And to me this is the single greatest exhortation of Arnold to us today – to do all we can at the service of God’s people. Have you ever imagined what Arnold would have achieved if he had handy a computer or internet that we are fortunate to have today? In his own time Arnold was quite well-known in the ecclesial, social and political sphere of Western Europe because of his connections and contacts. He had a veritable hunger for information-keeping abreast with history, geography and anthropology. Today’s mission situations are complex requiring of us the ability to understand and analyze realities like Arnold did.

2. Arnold: The Searching, Enduring Founder

In spite of all his positive endowments, Arnold was a man who groped in the dark worrying about the future of the foundations from where no positive news was coming. When success was slow and the going got tough, he bore the brunt of criticisms and humiliations at times overt and public. He was underestimated by others and to some extent continues to be so even today. He had an amazing capacity to sit with the

unpleasant, to ask pardon if necessary and to clarify issues. Arnold felt deeply the distance and isolation usually meted out to persons in authority by 'respectful' subjects.

After having done all we can, there still remains much undone. Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Mystic, in one of his discourses, narrates a conversation between a flower and a fruit in which the flower asks the fruit: "O fruit where are you?" The fruit, still in its primordial form, answers: "I am hidden within you O flower". The flower asks, "O fruit when will I see you?" The fruit replies: "If you are waiting to see me, I haven't a chance". The flower must die confident that the fruit will emerge.

The departure of the members through death or at will, the scandals that engulf Church and mission today and the painfully slow progress in some missions can at times overwhelm the congregation especially those at the helm. It is here that Arnold stands out as model of a new definition of success.

3. Arnold: The Optimistic and Supportive Founder

Fr. Arnold managed to think optimistically about the missions even when things on the ground were deplorable. The reason for his optimism was the religious interpretation he gave to all that happened. He detected progress year after year. He spoke of the South American mission: "It is quite different from thirty years ago, and in thirty years time it will be even better". Optimism shows itself in our capacity to work in small groups and celebrate small victories.

Fr. Arnold gave constant support to his missionaries abroad. He wrote letters choosing words carefully and prayerfully, 'sleeping over it' to use his own words. He sent telegrams and seized every opportunity to connect with his members. Protecting the reputation of others, was for him, one way of showing support. He paid meticulous attention to details in founding the Sisters' Congregation and in sending them abroad. He was insistent that the Sisters should have a convent to call their own.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, until a few years ago it would have been enough to know the language and have some professional training for overseas mission. Today mission animation does not consist so much in strategies by which we encourage our members to go to mission as it consists in supporting and accompanying them. This is especially true of situations where our members, on a daily basis are faced with the grim realities of suffering and death all around them like, for example, those working with persons with HIV and AIDS. Appreciating and listening to their experiences and stories when on home leave or upon retransfer can help reduce the sense of isolation and hopelessness. Arnold Janssen stands singular in the continued accompaniment and support that he gave to his men and women in the missions. He writes to Fr. Neuenhofen in Ecuador: "Of course I am concerned for the salvation of all people; but my concern for you is greater."

II. What is the Value of a Centennial Anniversary Celebration?

I like to enumerate three.

1. Valuing the Present

A traveler sees a man lazing under a tree on the other side of the river. He shouts over to him: "How can I get across to the other side?" The man looks up and replies: "You ARE on the other side!" A centennial anniversary celebration can at times have a similar effect on the members: gazing at the other side and longing to get across there.

Merely looking back at the good old past in nostalgia does not help for two reasons. One: there is no such thing as 'good old days'; it's a myth. Two: the present time is good enough and is in many ways the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to learn to tap the resources that are there rather than to lament the bygone past may be one invitation of the Centennial.

2. Renewal

The Centennial Anniversary Celebration is an experience of renewal for the members of the Congregations. By 'renewal' is meant a recapturing of the two impulses of mission: the attraction and the sending. In his Inaugural Address to the Episcopal Conference in Aparecida, Brazil 2007, Pope Benedict XVI described the attraction impulse of mission as "discipleship" and the sending impulse as "missionary action". He says: "Discipleship and Mission are but two sides of the same coin. When the disciple is in love with Christ, he or she can not but announce to the world that Christ alone saves us. The disciple knows that without Christ there is neither light nor hope, neither love nor future".

The renewal I'm talking of is not confined to a renewal centre or to the recital of certain prayers, articles of faith or pious practices although all these will help.

3. Dialogue and Communion

Back to the story of the riverside: looking at it from another angle, Who are the people on the 'Other Side' for us today? We may call them dialogue partners, congregational or geographical priorities or target groups. They are people of other faiths, other cultures and people living in constant exposure to violence and deprivation. The General Chapters of the Celebrating Congregations have aptly summarized their responses to those on the 'other side' in two words: Dialogue and Communion.

Dialogue is more than holding a prayer service together in which scriptures of different faiths are read or hymns sung. It's taking time to sit together, giving all parties concerned a chance to talk and a chance to listen. In the deeply divided world of Christians and Muslims, now made worse by segregation, discrimination and outright war, our mission must increasingly take a relating, dialoguing role. All dialogue must eventually lead to communion where unity and interconnectedness are felt in a

real way. In their 13th General Chapter the SSpS deepened the theme of Communion as that quality which reflects the life and dynamism of the Trinity in our communities. Living the Prophetic Dialogue for the Society of the Divine Word and living the Chapter Directions as Intercultural, Learning and Authentic witnesses for the SSpS are Congregational indicators where the Spirit is blowing us into action today.

100 years and more is a long time. Down the years we have given new interpretations to our spirituality and charism. Our communities are international in character but different from the Founder's understanding of internationality. Our thrust is still mission but that thrust throws us into situations which the Founder may never have imagined. Many things have changed in manner and focus, but what has not changed is the realization that all mission is God's mission. God's will was primary in the lives of our two Saints. Therefore, together with Sts. Arnold and Joseph and our members and collaborators around the world, let us hold on to the conviction: "The will of God will only take us where the grace of God will protect us".

[Centennial Closing Eucharist, SSpS Generalate-Rome, January 15, 2009]

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Arnold Janssen (1837-1909)

Josef Alt, SVD

Introduction

Arnold Janssen founded St. Wendel in 1898. He was enthusiastic about this foundation. Already in February 1899 in a letter to China he stated: “This foundation promises to be a veritable pearl. It is particularly wonderful that there is much wooded area and meadows, that St. Wendelin lived here and that one is quiet and undisturbed. “He also shared his joy with the confreres in Argentina in 1901: “The location of the new house in St. Wendel is magnificent. It is situated on a mountain ridge surrounded by two valleys and two mountains; below the house is a beautiful, huge forest of pine trees; in May the birds begin singing at three in the morning or even earlier.”

This man shall be the object of our reflections. We shall do so in six sections.

I. The Historical Context of Arnold Janssen’s Life and Work

The prevailing conditions of the time in which Arnold Janssen began his journey through life and developed his life work were anything but favorable. On 20 November 1837, the year Arnold Janssen was born, Clemens August Droste zu Vischering, archbishop of Cologne, was arrested. This event “made him and his main objective, the independence of the church from the state, known far beyond the borders of his diocese and initiated a movement without which the church history of Germany in the 19th century cannot be understood.” Arnold Janssen was just three weeks old then.

At the height of the “Kulturkampf” (conflict between church and state) in 1874/75 Arnold Janssen made the decision to found a mission house for German Catholics. Eight bishoprics were vacant and a thousand parishes without a pastor. There were numerous summons and arrests as well as confiscation of property. Seminaries were closed, monasteries disbanded. AJ very clearly saw the difficulties in Germany, but interpreted them in a way different from most of his contemporaries. For him the situation which apparently offered no prospects was a call and a challenge to look and act beyond the imposed limits and restrictions towards the universal church.

The mentality of those decades was shaped by an unbroken faith in progress and natural science. The industrial-social revolution threatened to suppress attention to religious concerns; colonialism threatened to turn the mission command of the Church into a political and cultural mission.

In 1884 Germany began to join the club of the colonial powers. In close causal connection with the commitment taken on in the German colony of Togo and the acceptance of German protection for the missionaries in China in 1892, Arnold Janssen was able to establish the first mission house in Germany, in Silesia. Other mission congregations of foreign origin, too, were able to establish houses in Germany

The Catholic Church found it ever more difficult, particularly starting from the second half of the 19th century, to present itself in a convincing and attractive way. Its condemnatory judgments often appeared one-sided and unbalanced. It made the attempt to secure and to retain, by all means, the secular power of the Pope, i.e. the Papal States. The First Vatican Council could not be brought to a conclusion because of the outbreak of the French-German war in 1870. The dogmas of the infallibility and the jurisdictional primacy of the Pope did not find unanimous welcome in the Church of Germany, but led instead to the establishment of the Old Catholic Church.

The internal situation of the Church since roughly 1900 was characterized by the attempt to contain modern developments in theology. An imaginary concept of an enemy was constructed which corresponded very little to the actual reality. What was more burdensome for Arnold Janssen was the influence which Berlin (i.e. the German government) tried to exercise over the missionary activity, partly with help from Vatican authorities. He condemned the meddling of Berlin and Rome's ceding to pressure in the appointment of a new bishop (after the death of Anzer) for the Vicariate of South-Shantung and feared serious negative consequences for the future. Under pressure from Berlin and with the agreement of Rome he had to withdraw top-rank missionary personnel from Togo because they had criticized the "uncivilized" behavior of German colonial officials.

II. The Time of Preparation

Arnold Janssen was the second child born into a family which was very much like so many others in his native region: many children, not particularly blessed with the goods of the earth, but nevertheless content, industrious, having few demands, and staunchly devoted to the Catholic faith. Altogether the Janssen couple had ten children, of whom eight survived infancy. Their modest means automatically trained them in thriftiness and intelligent circumspection in using those means. In his studies Arnold obtained good marks only in mathematics and in the scientific subjects. His results in languages, on the other hand, were rather modest.

After the passing the matriculation examination in 1855 he enrolled in the universities of Münster and Bonn. At first he studied mathematics and scientific subjects, in which he obtained excellent results. This permitted his diligence and intelligent handling of problems to be tested and deepened. His report cards above all praised his "evident capacity to form clear and precise concepts," "his consistent earnest striving and keen sense for understanding the laws of language," and finally his untiring diligence and his persistence and perseverance. He acquired the

national teacher's certification for the subjects to be taught in secondary school (Gymnasium).

The study of theology was concluded with priestly ordination on 15 August 1861 in Münster. His bishop assigned him to school work to teach natural science at a school in Bocholt. Arnold Janssen was respected as a strict but fair teacher. He used his organizational ability to put on scientific exhibits. He also passed on his knowledge to the larger public through articles and lectures.

Arnold Janssen later regarded his activity as teacher and educator as providential preparation for the new and much more comprehensive tasks he was to take on. He recalled his thoughts at that time: "Why a teacher? Why not work elsewhere, where you can do more good? My bishop, however, said to me: It is in divine providence. And I did not brood but did what was incumbent on me; and later when establishing the mission house it became clear to me that I had been in the right place for preparation."

During those 12 years of teaching Arnold Janssen matured in his personal spiritual life. The total renunciation of tobacco, the strong limitation in the consumption of alcohol, fasting and the deprivation of sleep represent the outer aspect of his spiritual development. The more important dimension, however, was the interior one, namely to be freed of oneself and the world, to be able to be caught up in prayer and meditation and the ability to lead others to deeper faith and prayer. The latter he did above all, since 1869, as director of the Apostleship of Prayer, first in his home diocese, then in the entire German-speaking Catholic area. For this he sacrificed his annual holidays.

The concern for and identification with the intentions and desires of Jesus opened Arnold Janssen to the entirety of faith, to the mission of the Church and to his own life task. He became "catholic" - universal - first in thinking and praying, then in planning and acting. In 1873 he left school ministry and from

then on dedicated all his efforts to the mission among pagans. He published an easily understandable mission magazine to provide information, but also, in addition, to ask for prayers and active support of missionary activity.

III. The Foundation and the Beginnings of the Steyl Missionary Enterprise

Influenced by the Prefect Apostolic and, later, Vicar Apostolic of Hong Kong, Mgr. Giovanni Timoleone Raimondi, Arnold Janssen in the summer of 1874 came to the decision to personally start a mission house for German-speaking Catholics, although most of his acquaintances judged him the least suitable for such a task. With the approval and the blessing of all bishops of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Holland — although not on their behalf — as well as with the generous assistance of the German Franciscans, he was able to open the mission seminary in Steyl, a small place in Holland close to the German border, in a former inn, on September 8, 1875. The sermon Arnold Janssen preached gives us a glimpse of his inner feelings: “May the good God then do with us what he wants. If our seminary succeeds we will thank the grace of God, and if nothing comes of it, we will humbly strike our breast and admit that we were not worthy of the grace.”

The first decade turned out to be very difficult. Within half a year after the opening of Steyl he felt constrained to part with two collaborators. The idea of mission was clear, but the manner of realizing it and of training the future missionaries led to a break. Arnold Janssen emphasized his own commitment to education and teaching: “From the beginning it has been my aim 1. to work hard for the instruction of the candidates and 2. also as much as possible to exercise an influence on the spirit of the candidates by means of conferences and spiritual reading and spiritual guidance in order to form and edify them.”

The number of students grew from year to year. Since most of the candidates came from poorer families they were unable to

pay the required fees for board and lodging. The apostolate of the press helped to provide the lacking funds. At the same time the magazines inspired new candidates to come to Steyl in order to become missionaries. The distribution of the magazines depended on the unpaid volunteer work of thousands of lay people in the parishes who, guided by the brothers from Steyl, considered this their contribution to the missions. With the help of the magazines and the printing press it was possible to establish a solid financial basis for the enterprise. The department of the Brothers, which comprised skilled men in the various crafts and in agriculture, became important precisely in countries like Togo and New Guinea. The existence of the Brothers' department could be considered assured when, in 1882, the first brothers pronounced their vows and were sent to the mission.

Continuing in a rhythm of every seven years there followed the foundation of the missionary sisters in 1889 and of the adoration sisters in 1896. Being clearly convinced of the pastoral and missionary necessity of the involvement of women, he took on the task of founding a congregation of women with a missionary orientation. Starting in 1895 these "Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit" were sent abroad, at first to Argentina for work among the German-speaking immigrants, but soon to all the other areas where priests and brothers from Steyl were active followed.

What was probably decisive for the success of his publicity work and the silencing of negative judgments about him was the fact that already on March 2, 1879 Arnold Janssen was able to send the first two missionaries to China. One of them was Joseph Freinademetz. The tree planted began to bear fruit already at an early stage and thus showed its vitality.

IV. Expansion and Leadership

Arnold Janssen was now in a position to shape the structures of the young community, in a juridical and spiritual sense. Just as half a year before the foundation of Steyl he already cast his eyes on Rome as headquarters in order to counteract the dangers

of an exaggerated nationalism, he also simultaneously had another goal in mind: “I believe we cannot do without the foundation of a religious congregation.”

This foundation was laid in the tenth year of the existence of Steyl, at the first general chapter in 1885. To lead the congregation the current head, Arnold Janssen, was elected superior general for life. A rule was designed, still needing further improvements but nevertheless approved by the bishop of Roermond. It stated that the society consisted of priests and brothers, that their common goal was the spreading of the word of God especially among the pagan nations and that all had to be ready to go wherever the superior would send them for life. Following Christ they were to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience. In their relations with each other love of neighbor was to be the supreme norm. This basic thrust remained unchanged even during the next two general chapters held under Arnold Janssen.

The enterprise grew by leaps and bounds. After six years of tough negotiations with civil authorities, Arnold Janssen was able to open a central house for philosophy and theology in the outskirts of Vienna in autumn 1889. A year earlier, in autumn 1888, a small group began specialized studies in Rome to prepare themselves for teaching those subjects. Starting in autumn 1892 in eastern Germany, in the heart of the province of Silesia, a minor seminary grew rapidly and provided access to the Slavic populations. This was followed in 1898 by St. Wendel (in the west of Germany) and in 1904 by St. Rupert, near Bischofshofen (in Austria).

New areas of work in foreign countries were sought and taken over. Thus, in 1889 pastoral work among immigrants was started in Argentina, followed by Ecuador, Brazil and Chile. Those were Catholic countries but where the faith had grown weak and was in danger of disappearing. Something similar applied to Catholics in the USA. Arnold Janssen defended these new commitments: “Here we have to do with baptized Christians who for that reason have a certain preference as compared to others, although the pagans have the first claim to our help on

the basis of what is stated in our Constitutions.” The same considerations applied to the engagement in the Philippines. Missionary work in the strict sense in non-Christian countries was in no way neglected. Apart from China, one needs to mention Togo, New Guinea, and Japan.

When the 25th anniversary of the Society was celebrated in 1900 Arnold Janssen could justly be proud: The Society was active on all five continents and was preparing to take on new areas of work. On May 1, 1900 it numbered 208 priests, 99 theology students, 549 brothers, 731 candidates in the secondary schools (minor seminaries) and the lyceum (college level) and 190 sisters. In recognition of these facts the Society of the Divine Word in 1901 received definitive approval.

Arnold Janssen trained collaborators on all levels and formed them in his spirit. He assigned responsibilities to others and thus got to know, almost automatically, the capacities, perseverance, speed, and cooperativeness of the individuals. This system began already among the lower classes. There were seniors in charge of household chores, for opening and closing the windows in the dormitories, for ringing the bells, for the refectories, for the library. In studies not only intelligence and quick understanding showed themselves but also diligence, and above, all, humility and modesty. The higher the level the greater the responsibility given, and thus the character of each one showed itself more clearly.

V. His Principles of Action

The first thing Arnold Janssen looked for when faced with an important decision was to obtain sufficient information for himself and his councilors. That meant reading books, articles or statements of experts. He was truly “hungry” for information. He wished to arouse such hunger also in others and therefore spoke of his many questions as “thought-provoking”.

He chose the places for starting a house or an activity with very great care. Just two examples. His reaction to an offer he received from the Roman Congregation in 1891 was put in the following terms: "14 days ago I received an inquiry from the Propaganda whether I would be willing to accept a mission in South Africa and that I should as soon as possible indicate the more specific area. This meant, of course, that I had at once to study travelogues, books, missionary reports with greatest intensity in order not to act imprudently. I at once ordered various books, the most important travelogues etc. and studied them as best I could. Everything not absolutely necessary had to wait. In various conferences I tried to explain clearly what I had learnt. How many things needed to be taken into consideration: health, location, climate, characteristics of the populations, rainy seasons, dry seasons, the possibility of having it ceded to us, plans for the future etc."

One can likewise very well illustrate this basic attitude in his procedure when looking for a suitable place to possibly open a new mission house. In the July 1895 issue of his magazines Arnold Janssen had addressed "a request to our friends" to supply him with information about suitable opportunities for the foundation of a new house within or outside Germany. Steyl no longer had sufficient space to accept the many applicants. The following points would have to be taken into consideration in the choice of a property: 1. An old monastery would be preferable to a big private house. 2. Even more welcome would be a big property with only such buildings as could be used as shops or for agricultural purposes; he would be thinking of an area, compact if at all possible, of three hectares on which the needed buildings, garden and play/sports grounds could be constructed. 3. The distance to the next railroad station as well as to the next church should be indicated, and in this regard a greater distance would be preferable to too close a proximity. 4. Finally, in view of the health of the future students it would be important to be able to take suitable walks in the surroundings nearby and the water and the climate would have to be healthy.

Arnold Janssen left many things to his councilors and other superiors except for one thing: the care for the priests, in particular for the new priests. Practically all throughout the early history of the Society he personally preached the retreat prior to ordination and afterwards introduced them to priestly life and ministry by giving them many conferences. He had developed his own system for assigning their work. The new priests had to submit a lengthy curriculum vitae in which they also had to indicate their academic grades and any scientific inclinations. Next, they had to state their wishes regarding their future work, giving reasons and explanations. What was demanded in all this was a sincere and open presentation of wishes and proposals, including what each one would refuse or dislike. Arnold Janssen himself collated the requests for manpower from the various areas of activity, as well as matters that rather belonged to the private and family life of the new priest. He noted whether the parents were still alive, how many brothers and sisters he had, each with age and job. When somebody came from a farm he knew its size, at times even the number of horses and cows. Subsequently he talked at least twice to each one to arrive at a concrete decision in order to do justice to the wishes, talents and condition of health of the candidate, the needs and requirements of the place of work and the evaluations of the formators and councilors.

One of his major concerns was to create and maintain the inner unity and harmony of the Society. His ample correspondence served this aim. Although Arnold Janssen admitted to himself and to others his inadequacy as a letter writer, he was nevertheless conscious that he had something to say - not just as a person in authority but also in reference to the matter itself and on the basis of his experience. The principle which he recommended to others and also used himself was: "Don't speak, write, or preach often and much - but rather give something solid, well thought out, well reflected on! Let that be your motto!"

He placed his correspondence in the wider context of the task to be done. What was at stake was "that the Society should try

more and more to become a useful instrument in the hand of God [...] But we should accomplish the task indicated as true sons of the Society of the Divine Word.. That is why it is necessary for us to adhere to it quite closely.” Consequently, whoever would endanger the inner cohesion of the Society, irrespective of whether superior or subject, e.g. by disobedience or unjustified criticism, by behavior showing lack of charity and by giving bad example, should have no place in it, unless he showed evident signs of trying to improve.

If one looks for concrete principles which something used as the basis for his action and his decisions, one will find them in the following seven questions:

1. Is the activity useful or even necessary for the reign of God?
2. Is there no one else around to do the work or to accept the task?
3. Is there a request or an offer coming from ecclesiastical authorities?
4. Are the necessary personnel and sufficient material resources available?
5. Has enough research, reflection and especially sufficient prayer been done in order to arrive at the right decision?
6. Is any setback or failure to be interpreted as a sign of rejection by the Lord of history or as a challenge for renewed reflection, more intense prayer and a greater readiness for sacrifice?
7. Is the sole fundamental aim of all we do the glory of God and the salvation of people?

VI. The Mystery of the Person

After this presentation of the life and work of Arnold Janssen we must ask: What were the sources of his energy? Where did

he get the courage to begin and carry on to the end “the adventure of faith”? What forces drew him out of the predetermined track to embark on the arduous road to Steyl, which he started with the words: “I have to go. Onward!” What was it that opened his eyes to see and judge the events of his time in a way that differed from that of his contemporaries?

What must be considered the basic force is the manner and form of his faith. What is specific to Arnold Janssen is the intensity with which he made the central realities of faith the content of his own life, untiringly modeled them for his followers and recommended them as guidelines for their lives, namely the Holy Triune God who should live in the hearts of all people. In its deepest sense missionary activity had to serve this goal. To proclaim the Triune God as source and goal of every earthly community, this was what gave him a strong dynamism. Arnold Janssen derived the name he gave to his foundation in Steyl from the Word of God seen as the expression of the dialogue taking place in God himself and with humanity, as the Prologue of the Gospel of John presents it. It was and is imperative to look most carefully and most zealously for the traces of the manifold manifestation of this Word of God in Holy Scripture, the history of humanity, the religions and cultures, as well as in contemporary history. This was already demanded by the first Statutes of 1876. It was therefore only natural that in the course of time Arnold Janssen would enter ever more deeply into the mystery of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit is the spirit of distinction or separation at the beginning of creation; he is the spirit of discernment when it comes to knowing whom we should follow; and he is the spirit of decision when it comes to choosing whom we want to follow. From this perspective it is easy to understand why Arnold Janssen promoted retreats; for in them the power of the Spirit who will renew the face of the earth is likely to manifest itself more forcefully and with greater frequency. The engagement in favor of the unity of Christians, too, finds its depth dimension in this.

Arnold Janssen felt himself borne and led by the Church. The Church was his spiritual home. Just as he asked for prayers for himself to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he desired that particularly when he presented important petitions to Rome the members of his foundations, especially the Adoration Sisters, would storm heaven with prayers in order to implore the right and speedy decision. He considered prayer for the advisers of the Pope and of the bishops - and at times a frank word spoken in all humility - as more helpful and meaningful than criticism and griping about their ordinances. As regards love for and obedience to the Church there was no one in his Society who could have surpassed him or taught him anything. In this way he maintained his inner balance and kissed the hand of God, precisely in those moments when he did not understand its directions and dispositions.

After having listened to what has been said we can perhaps better understand what the Church states in one of the prefaces for holy pastors:

You inspire us by his holy life,
Instruct us by his preaching
And give us your protection in answer to his prayers

[Talk given at St. Wendel's and in Munich, in January 2009]



IV.

**REFLECTIONS
ON JOSEPH FREINADEMETZ**

Reflections on St. Joseph Freinademetz SVD

Pietro Irsara, SVD

My years are fast declining and moving toward the end with giant steps. This makes one feel deeply sorry for not having put the long series of grace-filled years of one's life to better use in the vineyard of the Lord; one would at least like to wake up in the eleventh hour and work with full strength as long as the time lasts. Your pious prayers help me.

Joseph Freinademetz
to Theodor Buddenbrock, Feb. 1907

Introduction

On January 28, 1908, Fr. Joseph Freinademetz died of typhoid fever in Taikia, the Central House of the Divine Word Missionaries in South Shantung. He was worn out and had no strength left in him to battle the contagious disease. Some two days before his death, Fr. Theodor Bucker, in the name of all missionaries, asked him for his blessing and said: "We promise you to continue working in your spirit." With a faint smile on his face Joseph answered: "You wish to continue working in my spirit? I was far from doing everything well".

Freinademetz tried to love and serve God and people with his whole heart and his whole soul. He understood his life as worship of God. The brief period of service in his native land, and his many years in China had only one aim: the glory of God. His humble statement at the end of his life "I was far from doing everything well" certainly expresses his honest opinion of himself. Today we may rightly state: Fr. Freinademetz did not make things easy for himself, but he did them well; he was a good missionary.

The brief reflections which follow are meant to help us in our spiritual reflections on the life of St. Joseph Freinademetz. May they help us to reflect on our own life and work as members of the Arnoldus family and on our relation with God and with our mission.

The quotes used in these reflections are mostly taken from:

- Augustinus Henninghaus, *P. Jos. Freinademetz S.V.D., Sein Leben und Wirken, Zugleich Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mission in Süd-Shantung*, Yenchowfu 1920, p. 633. [**Abbreviation: Henninghaus**]
- Fritz Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out, Blessed Joseph Freinademetz SVD, Missionary in China 1879-1908*, Rome 1984. [**Abbreviation: Bornemann**]
- Fritz Bornemann (ed.), *Josef Freinademetz, Berichte aus der China-Mission*, Rome 1973 (Anacleta SVD 27) [**Abbreviation: Berichte**]
- Fritz Bornemann (ed.), *Erinnerungen an P. Josef Freinademetz*, Mödling und St. Augustin 1974.
- P. Pietro Irsara SVD (ed.), *Lettere di un santo, Giuseppe Freinademetz, L'amore per il prossimo, la famiglia e la Badia* [A collection of letters in the original Italian. **Abbreviation: Lettere**]

1. Saying Good-bye¹

In Summer 1878 it was time for Jose Freinademetz to say good bye: good bye to the familiar surroundings, to parents, relatives and friends, to the flow of life he had grown used to; good bye also to the kind of life for which he had prepared himself for so long: the security and warmth of the parish house, the work as

1 *Bornemann*, p. 34; letter to Franz Thaler, Steyl, 18.2.1887, in *Lettere* p. 15f.

assistant parish priest which he had come to like very much. To say good bye means to go away; it means to leave behind what had been important until now, that which had filled the life of Joseph Freinademetz and given meaning to it. Why does he do this? What moves him? Does he know what he is doing? What he is getting into?

On Sunday, August 11, 1878, he said good bye to the parish of St. Martin in Thurn, where he served as assistant parish priest and elementary school teacher: "The divine good shepherd in his unfathomable goodness has invited me to go out together with him into the desert in order to help him in his search for the lost sheep. What else should I do but kiss his hand full of joy and gratitude and say with the Scriptures: 'Behold I come!' and with Abraham leave my father's house, native land and you, my dear ones, and go to the land which the Lord will show me." A week later, in his home parish St. Leonhard, he added: "For me, too, it is difficult - I cannot deny this - to leave my dear parents and so many benefactors and friends. But after all, man is not meant for this world. He has been created for something greater: not to enjoy life, but to work wherever the Lord calls him."

Joseph Freinademetz did not piously look for self sacrifice; he did not follow the itch for adventure or romantic wanderlust. Joseph Freinademetz felt called; he followed an invitation and set out on a journey like Abraham long ago. To leave, to say good-bye, was difficult for him. But he did not hesitate because he was sure that he was on the way to the land that God would show him, as the Bible says of Abraham. He set out to do the will of God and was thus led to himself, to fulfillment in life.

His inner sentiments are laid bare in a letter which he wrote to Franz Thaler, his friend and benefactor in Sottrù, a small village next to Oies, on February 18, 1879, a few days before the departure ceremony in Steyl:

“... Dear friend, at times I find it hard to live far away from those whom I have loved so much, to leave my native place, which has given me so many friends and joys, and to look for another home where one has to start from the very beginning like a child beginning life anew, where one has to learn new and very difficult languages and get to know people who have completely different interests and customs ... It is hard to begin such a life after I have been so happy among you Ladins. And I say it to you in all honesty: I would never do this for anything in this world, not even for millions of worlds. But I am very happy and content that I can do this for the good Lord up there, even if I would encounter death a thousand times. And I know his grace will never abandon me. My only desire is to be able to convert many, very many of our poor brothers. Only for this do I leave my dear father, my dear mother, my brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, among whom you occupy one of the very first places, and my beloved St. Martin.”

For reflection:

Joseph Freinademetz left his native land, but he did not go in search of another one. He remained “stateless”, and even later in the midst of his Chinese whom he loved so much he felt being a stranger. The reason why he “set out on the journey” was his faith, the faith that gave him assurance that he would find his home in God, that he would be sheltered “in the shadow of his wings” as the Psalmist says. 1 Pet 2:13 states: “Beloved, you are strangers and in exile.” “After all, man is not meant for this world..., the young Freinademetz told his home parish.

In my life, to which things did I say good bye? From which have I moved away, perhaps in pain? Where do I feel at home and sheltered? Am I on the way, like Abraham and Freinademetz, to the “land” which God wants to show me? Do I inquire about this land, to I look for it? “By the infinite mercy of God, who chooses the weak as his instruments, I hope to share in a grace of which I am not worthy for eternity,” Freinademetz said when bidding good bye to St. Martin.

2. Living with Disappointments²

With the Te Deum on his lips and his heart beating for joy, the young missionary Joseph Freinademetz stepped on Chinese soil. But what he experienced and had to face at first were bitter disappointments. He had truly arrived “in a foreign land”. Back home he was highly esteemed and honored as a priest and well accepted as a person. But here people curiously stared at his European look and behavior. Nobody asked for him; no one seemed to be interested in knowing why he was there. The loneliness began to affect his mind. Everything contrasted harshly with what he had expected. “What I saw, heard and experienced day after day, was often diametrically opposed to the convictions I held hitherto”, he wrote looking back on those days.

But what was totally incomprehensible to him and what he felt most bitterly was the seeming religious indifference. Nobody seemed to hunger for the bread of truth and grace as he had expected. He found nothing familiar. Being a man of his time and with his European background there was no room in him for understanding the foreign culture and way of life: “One can hardly make ten steps without coming across a lot of devilishly grimacing faces and the most diverse forms of devilry. The air one breathes here is thoroughly pagan; no inspiration coming from the outside; the encouraging word, the inspiring good example is absent. No sound of a church bell, no religious feast, no solemn procession speaks to the heart; in most cases the chapel has the same decoration on Good Friday as on Easter Sunday. Externally there is no difference between Christmas and Ash Wednesday; always and everywhere the same milling mass moving to and fro without beginning or end...”

2 *Bornemann*, p. 47; *Berichte*, pp. 37, 39f., 41; *Verbum* (SVD Internal Publication), Vol. 4, 1962, p. 410; letter to his godchild Franz Thaler, China, 28.05.1902, in *Lettere*, p. 86f.; letter to Elisabetta Thaler, Yenfu, 23.01.1907, in *Lettere*, p. 93; letter to Elisabetta Thaler, 26.12.1907, in *Lettere*, p. 96.

He himself described those first two years as his “mission novitiate”. They were a tough school for him since the truly existential questions were raised: For what had he left home? Was China indeed the country which – remember Abraham – God wanted to show him?

He must have spent much time brooding, meditating, struggling with himself and praying before he wrote these almost mystical lines: “The quiet solitude and general loneliness speak to the heart of the missionary in a unique manner, and since the more we are alone, the closer God is to us, the missionary does not know whether in such a situation he should cry because of inner hurt or shout for great joy, and so he does both.”

The difficulties at the beginning of his missionary life, however, were not the only ones. Again and again disappointments crossed his path: “In spring 1890, he had an experience which he called the saddest of his missionary life. 200 catechumens (candidates for baptism) fell away; and this because, of all things, their catechist, whom Fr. Freinademetz himself had baptized and employed, seduced them to apostasy and instigated them against Fr. Freinademetz. This was a bitter disappointment, but he knew how to control himself. Pretty soon the catechist made himself impossible and the majority of the catechumens returned.”

Towards the end of his life, when physical hardships had become less, persecutions had come to an end, and loneliness was no longer a problem because of the affectionate loyalty of Christians and the arrival of many confreres. The mission was flourishing, so to say. Freinademetz had to fear that the blossoms would wither all too quickly, because with the increasing influx of Europeans, their irreligious behavior also made itself felt. He complains about this, writing to his godchild on May 28, 1902: “For the rest, at present we live in peace here in China, and once again many become Christians. The main scourge for us and the poor Chinese are the many Europeans, without faith and totally corrupt, who begin to flood China. Yes, they are Christians

but they are worse than the pagans. They have no other thought than to make money and enjoy all worldly pleasures; poor people!”

He defended his Chinese: “The Chinese are not hostile to religion, and if Europe were Christian today as it could and should be, I am convinced the whole of China would convert to Christianity. ... the wind coming from Europe is very chilly and evil; one must, therefore, fear that the poor Chinese will remain pagans and even become worse than the pagans.” Just one month before his death he writes with bitterness: “The bad example of those who come to China ... causes them (the Chinese) to be indifferent to, or even enemies of, Christianity.”

For reflection:

Disappointments and crises are part of our life. They discourage us, block the flow of life and cause certain things to come to a still stand. But that is precisely where their great importance lies. They force us to pause, to reflect and thus turn them into opportunities; they challenge us to consider other ways, to dare making a new start.

God dares to send us crises which cannot simply be brushed off by prayer or pious exercises. Even for the believer crises are challenges which force us to reflect, call forth hitherto hidden capacities in us and thus promote the development of our personality.

Faith does not gloss over problems and difficulties but gives us the strength and courage to see things in their full reality. It is a question of faith whether I accept that God acts differently from what I expect and wish. God often arranges things in such a way that through disappointments, through crises and sufferings, I arrive at a relation with him which would not have been possible for me without them.

Am I capable of seeing that the obstacles on my way can open me to the presence of God which surrounds me everywhere?

Can I understand that crises coming from God are always a manifestation of love and can make my life mature and enrich it?

3. Attractive Kindness³

“His gentle and kind nature radiated a charm which won the hearts of all who came into contact with him”. This is how Bishop Henninghaus characterizes Joseph Freinademetz, and he continues: “Most of the time his eyes shone with such attractive goodness, with such kind serenity that the Chinese easily trusted him and felt at home with him”.

Even if the language and expressions of the early 20th century may sound exaggerated today, there seems to be little doubt that Freinademetz indeed possessed an “untiring goodness and kindness”, was endowed with inexhaustible patience, and radiated a “noble self-forgetful love”.

This kindness did not leave him, according to Henninghaus, “even when reprimanding and imposing punishments”, although he made “no small demands” on confreres and Christians. If on rare occasions he became stern and angry, his words would shake people to the core, Henninghaus quotes Chinese Christians as saying. Evidently he never let himself be carried away to use corporal punishment. “The hand of the priest is meant for blessing and not for beating”, was one of his guiding principles.

The longer Freinademetz lived and labored among the Chinese the greater the understanding he showed for them and their ways, the more the natural disposition of his personality came to the fore. Bishop Henninghaus attributes “this pleasant and serene friendliness” to his natural disposition but also points to a deeper reason: “His happy natural disposition had been refined

3 *Henninghaus*, pp. 69, 77f., 81, 82, 83; *Erinnerungen*, p. 99.

into the pure gold of supernatural, noble unselfishness in the school of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and in that school he had acquired that self-control which does not allow itself to be influenced by one's moods and the weather."

This does not mean, the Bishop emphasizes, that there were no "days of sorrow" and he believes that Freinademetz often enough experienced times when he could say with the Psalmist: "My drink I mix with tears" (Ps. 102, 10).

He did not make others pay for disappointments, failures and irritations. The bishop finds the basis for this in "the core of his character", his unselfishness. "To refuse nothing to others, to demand nothing for one self," was another of his guiding principles, or, as Fr. Johannes Blick SVD quotes him as saying: "The pagans will only be converted by the grace of God and, let us add that, by our love," for "the language of love is the only foreign language which the pagans understand". Freinademetz had evidently learned to speak this "foreign language" very well.

For reflection:

A fellow student of Freinademetz in Brixen, Fr. Mair, CSsR, described him as follows: "I find no better description of him than this: (he is) the incarnation of the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, a personality which radiates the supernatural virtue of serenity. It was the spirit of love, silent joy, inner peace, gentleness, modesty which manifested itself externally".

What impression does such an attitude in life make on me?
Would I strive for such virtues?

From daily experience we know how difficult an understanding and patient love of neighbor can be. Can the example of this saint spur us on and help us to train ourselves in this love and goodness which manifests itself in unselfish service? How do I behave toward someone who keeps aloof from me and doesn't show me any love?

4. Prayer: The Atmosphere of His Life⁴

Freinademetz worked a lot, and prayed a lot! Very often he remained before the tabernacle till late into the night. There is hardly any letter of his that does not contain the request to remember him, the Chinese entrusted to his care and the whole Mission in prayer, just as he emphasizes and affirms again and again that he never forgets the recipients (of the letters) and frequently recommends them to the Heart of Jesus and the Mother of God.

From Steyl, that is even before leaving his native place never to return, he writes: “You, too, should pray and thank God every day at least by saying an Our Father and a Hail Mary, because he was so gracious to call a missionary from our family.” His vocation had truly been the fruit of his fervent prayer. “Since I have often consulted with the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in prayer and this thought forcefully enters my mind precisely at the time of prayer, I believe I can truly find in this a hint...,” he wrote in his application to Arnold Janssen.

Before leaving for Steyl, in his farewell sermon in St. Martin, he calls on the faithful: “Pray! Prayer is the key to paradise. Prayer is the staff on our pilgrim way, the source of life giving water, the food which strengthens our soul.” The thought that one day they would meet again in paradise helps him find consolation in view of the definitive separation from parents and home. But the presupposition for this is prayer. While traveling to China, in a letter to his parents from Singapore, he wrote: “Pray for me, and I shall pray for you, that this day may be for all of us a day of joy. Pray also that I may receive the grace to spend my life working hard in the vineyard of the Lord for the salvation of souls.”

4 Letter to Franz Thaler, in *Lettere*, p. 62; letter to his parents and brothers and sisters, Steyl 29.10.1878, in *Lettere*, p. 15; Bornemann, pp. 31, 34, 140; letter from Singapore, 14. April 1879, in *Lettere*, p. 21; *Berichte*, p. 61; *Henninghaus*, p. 83f.

In a long report sent to Steyl he describes how much this work in the vineyard of the Lord was joined to prayer: “I was alone in the midst of a totally pagan people ... *Deo gratias!* ... And now, what shall I do here, what shall I aim at? ... Dear God, do you build, otherwise I shall build in vain; do you fight, do you watch, otherwise I shall fight and watch in vain. The harvest would seem to be plenty, but ... Nevertheless, God wants it! Hence, get going, get to work!”

For Fr. Anton Volpert who had his training as a missionary under Fr. Freinademetz, he was “a man of prayer. When traveling he sat in the cart praying or reading. At home in the course of the day and frequently until late into the night he was often seen in church, lost in prayer.”

In the opinion of Bishop Henninghaus, too, Fr. Freinademetz was “a man of prayer. Prayer was the atmosphere and the joy of his life. The first place in his prayer life belonged to the two sacred duties of a priest: daily holy mass and the recitation of the bre-viary. Even on exhausting mission trips he never omitted these two sacred exercises ... Even when pressured by work he tried to pray the breviary at the proper time. ... One could see him kneeling before the altar, for a long time and repeatedly in the course of the day, absorbed in silent prayer. It is no exaggeration to say that he dedicated all of his time that was not occupied by other duties to prayer. He had a very special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To love and honor the Sacred Heart was for him, as a Tyro-lese, a precious heritage. He, too, felt bound by the oath by which his ancestors had consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart; this corresponded altogether to the inclinations of his own heart. It was, therefore, always his concern to also instill this love and devotion in the hearts of others.”

For reflection:

Joseph Freinademetz was convinced of the power of prayer. This made him unafraid. “Even if the whole world collapses, God

does not let prayer go unheeded. One thing alone is always necessary: to pray much. A life without prayer is the surest way to hell. Never forget to pray for us and all missionaries”.

- Am I convinced of the power of prayer?
- Could anyone say of me: “He is a man/woman of prayer?”

Freinademetz knew: God does not need our prayer, but we need prayer for our life. Also, he never forgot that our prayer should not only be centered on our own concerns and problems but above all on those of others. Praying in this way we become the voice of the church in the whole world - just like Joseph Freinademetz in China.

- Does my prayer embrace the concerns and problems of others?
- Do I ask God’s help for our confreres, for our missionaries? Do I beg for his blessings on our mission?

5. Enthusiastic and Untiring⁵

During the first decades of the Shantung mission, Fr. Freinademetz personally either founded or further developed almost all of the Christian communities. He paid these communities frequent visits. For a long time he did not have any place he could call his home. Wherever a Christian was living, that was ‘home’ for him. To reach the more remote communities he had to travel hundreds of kilometers. He always carried with him the most necessary things: mass kit, bedding, clothing, etc. A horse or mule served as pack animal, more rarely a cart. A Chinese accompanied him.

As an itinerant missionary he was also a preacher. All throughout his life, “wherever he happened to find an opportunity - whether on the road or in country inns - he used to preach to the people

5 *Henninghaus*, p. 186.

who gathered around him or engage in religious conversation with them. Even when exhausted from a long trip, he didn't have the heart to send people away without having had a friendly religious conversation with them." Towards the end of his life, in the fall of 1907, he still made a long roundtrip through the districts of Lini and Tsingtao. This trip was so exhausting for him that he had to stop twice to take a longer period of rest.

He dedicated his foremost attention directly to the spiritual life of the communities. He took the preparation of catechumens for baptism and first Holy Communion most seriously. Whenever possible, he gave them courses and talks. In his catecheses and sermons he put the emphasis on religious truths and instruction in prayer.

In spite of his big workload, Fr. Freinademetz found time to send the Bishop written reports about his experiences, translated texts and wrote booklets, among other things, a brief outline of Christian Doctrine, a devotional meditation on the Mass, rules for leaders of Christian communities, and for the seminarians two treatises in Latin on the Sacrifice of the Mass and on the Breviary.

Finally, Fr. Freinademetz was superior in a variety of functions: rector in Puolichwang, director of the school in Tsining, head teacher of the women catechists, Pro-vicar (assistant vicar), six times administrator of the entire mission, provincial superior. At times he even became treasurer, which he liked least; but also such a task he tried to carry out conscientiously.

In the retreat conferences of 1902, Fr. Freinademetz repeatedly emphasized the sentence of St. Paul from Second Corinthians: "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your sakes" (2 Cor 12,15). Joseph Freinademetz made these words his own. He was always ready to give all, even his life.

For reflection:

I try to become aware of myself, of my capacities and talents, my hopes and successes, the goals I have achieved. To what extent do I pay attention to the manifold needs of people?

Jesus wants that we find true life, life in joy and abundance. Am I aware that he is counting on my help in order to bring this about?

6. A Testimony of Gratitude⁶

Thomas Cardinal Tien, SVD, the first Chinese Cardinal, was a student of Fr. Joseph Freinademetz. In May 1963 he visited Oies. In the parish church of St. Leonhard/Abtei where Joseph Freinademetz had been baptized, celebrated his First Mass, and taken leave of his homeland, Cardinal Tien addressed the parish community in German. Here are some of his words:

“...My dear people! It is a great joy for me to be here in your community, and I genuinely feel the need to bring you and your people my own and my people’s gratitude for the holy missionary that you sent to us. Fr. Freinademetz, the servant of God, was the kind of missionary that the Lord God certainly intended. We could not have wished for a better one. That he was a true missionary can be seen in the great suffering he endured just to gain a foothold in my country in order to be able to proclaim the Gospel. My native land has been the homeland of the great Confucius, and precisely because of this the more educated among my people were utterly opposed to any foreign missionary. They did everything possible to prevent foreign missionaries from gaining a foothold in China. From this we can gather that your servant of God, Fr. Freinademetz, must have had to follow the Lord in a veritable ‘Via Crucis’ during his first years in my homeland. But just as our Savior carried his cross,

6 A. Baldissera, *Siur Ujöp Freinademetz*, Balsan/Bozen 1975.

so Joseph Freinademetz heroically bore his; he gladly accepted every ignominy done to him and every difficulty placed in his way, for salvation's sake and in order to save souls. And the grace of God won out in the end!

“...For a long time already - indeed for years - I have longed to come to this homeland and home village of your holy missionary and now that I have the joy of being here with you, my happiness is complete. My hopes and my longings really have been fulfilled. I simply had to come here to tell you about him. I had the happiness of living with him for almost eight years. He first took me in when I was only a boy in primary school, and later accepted me into the seminary. There I was often allowed to serve his Holy Mass; I had the opportunity again and again to listen to his teaching, something for which I can never thank him enough. He was the quintessential missionary, not only because he had to bear such a heavy cross and suffering, but also because there in my homeland he became all things to all men and women. Whoever came to him with a happy heart, with that person he rejoiced. Whoever came to him in suffering, found in him consolation and help. We simply called him “our mother”. He helped us in whatever way he could, and he is still helping us today. It is not only here in your homeland that men and women turn to him for help and protection. You are not the only ones who experience a boost when you pray to him. My people too – our faithful Chinese – still pray to him, and whoever prays to him never remains unheard.

“My dear people! This is the reason why I am experiencing such great joy at being here in his home village, at being able to be present, to pray, and to offer the Holy Sacrifice in this same church in which he grew up and in which he became the missionary that he was in my homeland.”

For reflection:

Cardinal Tien said: “The picture of this priest kneeling before the tabernacle has become an indelible image in my memory.”

- Do I foster personal prayer before the tabernacle?

Cardinal Tien said: “Fr. Freinademetz was simply there for others. We knew that we could come to him at any hour of day or night. We were never a burden to him, never. He was always friendly, he was a saint.”

- Charitable goodness belongs to the very essence of mission. What is my attitude toward those who do not think as I do; who belong to other cultures, or who are poor and marginalized?

7. Sickness and Recovery⁷

In February of 1898, Fr. Freinademetz, as representative of the bishop, visited the German colonial troops who had occupied the bay of Kiaochow in November of the previous year. The soldiers were deeply impressed. Captain Dannhauer described the missionary in a Berlin newspaper: “The numerous sufferings and deprivations that he has undergone during the course of nineteen, unbroken years exercising his difficult missionary task in China’s hinterlands can be clearly seen on his noble and classically craggy Tyrolean face and physique. But although his neck is bowed, his face and cheeks thin, pale and emaciated, his eyes sunk deep in their sockets, precisely from these eyes, which normally are so filled with friendliness and gentleness, there are flashes of enthusiasm and boundless energy whenever he touches upon his mission during the course of his report.”

At that point in time Fr. Freinademetz’ health was no longer what it used to be. Years of hard work, worries, dangers and

⁷ *Bornemann*, p. 258; *Henninghaus*, pp. 394 and 82f.

hardships had broken it. In the end his voice gave out. He, who preached so gladly and so fervently, suddenly felt that he was no longer able to speak out loud. A serious illness was affecting his larynx and lungs, he was coughing up blood.

When Bishop Anzer returned from Europe in mid 1898 he ordered his pro-vicar to go to Shang-hai and have himself examined by the doctors there. The findings showed that his lungs had been affected. The doctor prescribed absolute rest, repose and good food. The bishop sent him to Nagasaki in Japan. It was extremely difficult for Freinademetz to leave “his” mission. The clientele of the health resort Unzen, furnished according to European standards, did not correspond to what he was accustomed to. After only a few weeks he was back in China. Although he felt better his illness was not completely healed. For the time being he was forbidden to preach. He placed his life in the hands of the Lord and thanked the Bishop for having “so generously allowed him to take this vacation trip.”

Freinademetz did not spare himself and, to some extent, burnt the candle at both ends. Was he right in doing so? On the other hand, as provincial, he paid great attention to the physical and spiritual well-being of his confreres. He expanded the central house in Taikia and asked the missionaries to use its facilities and opportunities in order to recuperate physically and mentally, make their annual retreat, and spend time together in ongoing pastoral formation and education. He saw to it that the confreres felt at home in the central house.

In spite of his asceticism and unassuming character Fr. Freinademetz obviously enjoyed companionship and jokes. “Fr. Freinademetz belonged neither to the ‘sons of thunder’ nor to the ‘sour faces’, Henninghaus writes and adds: Wherever he was, a lighthearted mood prevailed most of the time; even as superior he was not one of those whose presence covers the surroundings like a damp cold fog making everyone feel depressed and paralyzed.”

For reflection:

Our service in the vineyard of the Lord demands that we look after our health, that we take the time for recollection and reflection so that our spiritual life doesn't get shortchanged. When body and soul are in harmony, we will be happy and at peace.

- Am I thankful for my health? Do I recognize it as a great gift of God?
- Do I look after my health? Do I go to a doctor promptly when I recognize signs of illness or physical problems?
- Do I try to discern the will of God in my old age or in illness and put up with my sufferings while maintaining my good cheer and a sense of submissiveness?

8. Nearing the End⁸

At the beginning of January 1882, the then Vicar Apostolic of Shantung, Msgr. Cosi, had named J. B. Anzer as his Pro-Vicar for South Shantung. Several days later, Anzer traveled to Puoli, where the only Christian community of the new mission territory entrusted to the SVD was to be found.

When the mission in South Shantung celebrated its twenty five years of existence on January 28, 1907, nobody could ever have foreseen that on precisely that same day, one year later, the light of the great missionary would be extinguished - Anzer had already died in 1903.

The mission's jubilee was planned as a very simple celebration to thank God for the protection and blessings of the past twenty five years. At the time of the jubilee, Fr. Freinademetz was staying in Yen-chow-fu. For him the day was not only an occasion to look back but also to look toward the future. On this day he

8 *Henninghaus*, p. 619.

baptized 150 new Christians. He had thoroughly prepared them for the sacrament during an instruction period which had lasted several weeks.

As Bishop Henninghaus writes in his biography, at this time Fr. Freinademetz was already visibly weakened. Sicknesses, troubles and sufferings had “left their imprint on him. His hair was streaked with grey and his friendly features showed deep creases. His voice had lost its earlier bright, metallic tone. Despite all this he stuck fast to his usual ascetical and pious daily habits. His strictness with himself did not let up in the least. His mild, hearty friendliness was always the same, and his ‘first love’, the holy fire of eagerness for souls, burned as brightly as ever in his mature heart as when he was young. This gave him the freshness of youth, boundless energy and an obvious joy in carrying out every task that had been loaded on his shoulders for the good of the mission”.

Half a year after the jubilee celebrations, at the beginning of June 1907, Henninghaus left for his first trip to Europe as bishop. This meant that Fr. Freinademetz had to once again shoulder the burden of leadership in the China mission. It was the sixth time that he served as Administrator of the China mission.

In the middle of August he set out on a visitation of the east which was to keep him away from the central station for more than three months. An accident and stresses and strains caused him much trouble, kidneys and heart acted up, water collected in his badly swollen legs and feet and forced him to interrupt his travels for some days of rest. In December he returned to Yenchowfu. He wanted to prepare himself for the Regional Synod of Bishops in which, in the absence of the Bishop, he was scheduled to take part. But that never happened. In Yen-chow-fu typhoid fever was raging; it had already claimed many victims. Joseph himself contracted the fatal disease while spending himself in the care of those who had been stricken by the disease. His weakened body was unable to put up a defense.

For reflection:

Every human person would like to live long and reach ripe old age. But how are we preparing for our own old age?

Freinademetz asked his superior general several times to relieve him of his office as provincial.

To what extent do we manage to turn over responsibility to younger ones?

Despite sickness, hardships and suffering one could sense in Joseph Freinademetz a certain “youthful freshness, energy and joy in taking on any task that needed to be done.”

How can I learn to be of service to others, even when bodily ailments and limitations begin to make themselves felt?

9. The Deadly Epidemic⁹

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century typhoid fever was one of the most dreaded diseases in China. It also claimed victims among men and women missionaries. At the end of 1907 the disease had broken out anew in Yenchowfu where the Mission maintained a big orphanage and girls' home. Fr. Freinademetz arrived in Yenchowfu at the beginning of the December, returning from a visitation trip. He was physically weakened. A confrere noted that he was hardly able to keep himself in the saddle during the trip. Yenchowfu was the bishop's seat. Since Bishop Henninghaus was in Europe from June of that year Freinademetz had to take care of the official business as the representative of the bishop. He had barely arrived when the care for the sick became his main preoccupation. In the words of his first biographer: “Like a good father he was in the midst of his suffering children, trying to console, help and especially prepare the gravely ill for a good death. Every morning he went

⁹ *Henninghaus*, p. 628f; *Bornemann*, p. 477, 481.

from room to room to give Holy Communion to each one.” The death of the first Superior of the SSps Sisters was an especially heavy blow for him. “The good Lord has taken her from us and we must accept this heavy blow with resignation to God’s will and bear it with courage,” he wrote to his Superior General Arnold Janssen. Admittedly, again and again his courage began to fail him. He felt overburdened, was downcast, almost depressed: “One difficulty after the other! Please, return soon... I am often at a loss and at times without joy,” he wrote his bishop.

Being in constant contact with the sick he himself got infected. When he traveled to Tsining on January 17 in order to preside over the exams in the catechists’ school, he complained of a headache but still wrote an extensive letter - his last one - to his bishop and friend: “Like a cart our Mission moves on as usual in the midst of all sorts of crosses and sorrows. ...”

He concludes the letter with a request for a blessing which sounds like a last wish: “May your Excellency please bless your flock again and again and pray for it; may the dear Lord accompany all your steps, make your strenuous labor fruitful for yourself and the South Shantung Mission and soon bring you back safely into our midst.”

The letter covers “three and one half pages in quarto” and “is written in his typical clear and flowing handwriting. Not a word in the letter gives a hint that he felt gravely ill or even near the end of his life. Except for the brief personal remark just mentioned he, being faithful and committed to his duties, only reports the happenings and concerns of the Mission.” This is how the bishop evaluates the last letter of his representative.

Already on the next day, on January 18, Fr. Freinademetz had to cut short the exams; he felt the typhoid fever in his body. On Sunday, January 19, he still celebrated mass; it was his last mass. In the afternoon he was brought to Taikia, where he had his seat as provincial superior. “This is the last journey,” he said when boarding the carriage.

For reflection:

Fr. Freinademetz evidently felt that his days were numbered, that his life filled with troubles and struggles was coming to an end. This did not prevent him from reporting the difficulties and problems of the Mission to his bishop and sending him his best wishes; he did not say a word about his own health. “That Christ may take shape in us; that is and shall remain my prayer,” he had written his bishop at the beginning of the new year on January 1, 1907. The source of his strength was his faith and trust in God’s love and help. “If we love our vocation we are not traveling the wrong road,” he had told the sisters during their retreat.

Trials and doubts as to whether one is traveling “on the right road,” will arise in everybody’s life, including my own ... How did I experience that the Lord was at my side and gave me strength and patience to persevere?

Where do I find courage and strength, wisdom and patience, to handle the tasks entrusted to me with trust and a sense of responsibility?

10. “The Next Move is Upward!”¹⁰

“There, now I have gotten to the end; the next move is upward!” With these words, as Br. Ulrich Heyen recalls, Fr. Freinademetz, clearly marked by typhoid fever, got down from the carriage that had taken him from Tsining to the provincial house in Taikia. This was on Sunday evening, January 19, 1908.

During the night he ran a high fever which slightly decreased on Monday morning, but he had no illusions and gave his final orders— as provincial he was religious superior and in the absence of the bishop also administrator of the whole Mission. In a document that was to be opened only after his death he named

10 *Bornemann*, pp. 481-483; *Henninghaus*, pp. 630-633.

his successor “until other arrangements are made by higher authorities.” “For the rest I die with full confidence in the mercy of the Divine Heart and the intercession of His and my Mother Mary together with that of my patron saint and patron of the dying, St. Joseph,” were the final words of the communication. He signed it “Taikia, 20.1.1908, from my sickbed, Jos. Freinademetz.”

With deep devotion he received the anointing of the sick or the “sacraments of the dying,” as they were then called.

At his request the images of St. Joseph, the Heart of Jesus and the Guardian Angel were hung above his bed from which he was no longer able to get up. In life he had put his trust in them, now at the hour of death he wished to have their image before his eyes. His trembling hands clasped the rosary with the cross, as had always been his custom.

The thoughts of the book “Preparation For A Happy Death,” which he asked to be read to him, helped him to overcome the final fear of dying; thus he could say in the end: “If one has done one’s duty and all that was within one’s power, the good God will surely be merciful...”

He did his duty till his very last day. With a trembling hand he wrote to Fr. Röser on January 21: “Am writing you from my bed, probably sick with typhoid; last night I had a 39° fever; by now I have perspired some; however, I must be prepared for my last hour! Fiat voluntas Dei Summi Omnipotentis (May the will of God Most High and Almighty be done)!” It is moving that even in this situation he was still concerned about others, and especially of “his” Chinese: “The infirmary of the virgins (these were the young orphan girls who lived in the orphanage in Yenchowfu until they got married) needs a stove,” he instructed Fr. Röser and adds: “When one is sick oneself, one knows well enough what would do one good, and we owe the same to the Chinese. For we came to serve.” Even on his death bed in his final illness he remains true to his basic attitude and mission. At

the end of the letter he remarks: "I pity you that you must always be in the midst of the many people sick with typhoid. May the good Lord keep you and protect you from getting infected. Memento mei, quaeso, (remember me, I beg you) especially if the good God should call me."

His confreres, especially Br. Ulrich Heyen, who had been with him in many a danger, cared for him with loving attention and did for him what they could do, that which he had done for them throughout life: Many prayers were said for him, including by Christians from the vicinity.

Every day Fr. Petrus Noyen celebrated Holy Mass in one of the adjacent rooms and gave him Holy Communion. All the time one of the priests or brothers was nearby. One after the other the missionaries came from the outlying stations in the surroundings to spend a few moments with him. In the name of all Fr. Theodor Bücken spoke words of thanks and farewell and asked for his blessing for the priests and the Mission. He assured him: "We promise you to continue working in your spirit." Though near death he did not want to take this lying down: "You wish to continue working in my spirit? I was far from doing everything well".

For reflection:

Joseph Freinademetz lived his personal vocation until his last moment with every fiber of his being. The deepest driving force of his life was love. Serving people he made God's love visible and tangible and thus brought many closer to God, cheered them up and filled them with joy. When the moment came for him to let go of what he had loved so much and what he had built up, he could do so with the confidence that he had not lived in vain.

How do I prepare for death?

The burial gown, they say, has no pockets! I must therefore let go, leave behind, even those things which all throughout life

were precious and dear to me. Am I aware of those things – and those persons?

Am I aware that in the end it does not matter what and how much I have achieved but solely whether I have given others love and have thus lived my life as the image of God?

11. “Thank the Physician!”¹¹

The strength of Joseph Freinademetz was spent, his body worn out; he could no longer fight the typhus. His final agony lasted nine days, from the 19th to the 28th of January. The pain became unbearable, but neither Chinese medicine nor the skill of an American doctor was able to help him. Br. Ulrich broke out in tears when Joseph woke up in agony after long hours of unconsciousness and mumbled to him: “Thank the physician!” During the last days he frequently lost consciousness; in the intervals he could be heard saying short ejaculatory prayers. His last night turned out to be a night of excruciating suffering, caused by additional bladder problems. An intervention brought temporary relief, until complete exhaustion set in. There was no real agony. Accompanied by the prayer of his confreres Joseph Freinademetz died on Tuesday, January 28, 1908 at about 6:00 p.m. His was, in the truest sense of the word, a return to the Father.

Although his death was not really unexpected, his closest collaborators were deeply affected. “The worst blow that could strike our Mission struck it today,” Fr. Georg Stenz wrote the Superior General in Steyl and reported: “Just now at 18:00 hours our kind pro-vicar died here of typhus... In his illness he gave us a heroic example of patience. He did not want to die yet, but he also resigned himself fully to the holy will of God. ... It is only now that people of South-Shantung will become aware of what he meant for us!”

11 *Bornemann*, pp. 483-485.

They were conscious that in Fr. Freinademetz they had lost more than an ordinary person: “A heavy blow not only for the Mission, but also for the whole Society,” Fr. Johannes Düster wrote and added: “Right away people prayed for the deceased but also already to him.”

That was probably also what Sr. Blandina, Holy Spirit Missionary Sister, had in mind when she wrote: “Already now one would wish to honor our highly esteemed Fr. Superior Freinademetz as a saint. Our poor orphans have only one consolation left, that we have an exceptionally good intercessor; the future will show this!”

The mourning was particularly deep among the simple Chinese: “Many will moan over the loss of Fu Shenfu!” was the opinion of a catechist, knowing full well that the deceased had sacrificed himself for “his” Chinese. What moved the Christians was not just what he had done for them, but above all how he had dealt with them. “I feel as if I had lost my father and my mother!” was how someone expressed it.

Superior General Fr. Arnold Janssen tried to console his confreres: “The Lord God has taken from us this second founder of the Mission, this good soul, whose merits for South-Shantung are great and immortal. We may thus hope that his heavenly crown was ready and that the Lord called him in order to give his faithful servant the well earned rest and a beautiful place in His glorious kingdom. The more zealously, unselfishly and sacrificially he worked the more will he now rejoice, but also be active for us as intercessor at the heavenly throne.”

For reflection:

Fr. Freinademetz did not long for death. Initially he was rather fearful; but then he let himself be sustained by the thoughts of a book, became calm and composed and was thus able to say goodbye, in peace with himself and with God, and to let go in the awareness that he had “fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith” (2 Tim 4,7).

For many Christians it was clear: “If he is not in heaven, then no one can ever hope to go to heaven!”

In his native place a prayer card was printed which said: “Died in China with a reputation of holiness ...”

Which impression does the death of this holy man make on me? What can I learn from it for my life – for my death? What do I do against the fear of death? Am I serious enough in asking myself whether I do God’s will, or whether I do that which he is probably expecting of me?

What does “holy” mean to me? – The word has something to do with “whole,” wholeness, health. For me what is a “saintly” life? Can I imagine to live – and to die – in a “saintly” way, i.e. according to the salvation which God offers me?

12. “Truly a Saint”¹²

Joseph Freinademetz was known and respected in Christian circles in Chinas. The expressions of sympathy and appreciation when the news of his death broke are a clear evidence of this.

Msgr. Jarlin CM, Apostolic Vicariate of North-Chihli, Peking:

“We loved and revered your dear deceased. I recall the kind and strong impression he made on me when I saw him in Peking several years ago. His memory has always remained in my heart. It seemed to me as if I had seen a Saint Francis de Sales, so unassuming and kind he appeared to me. Surely the Lord has already received him into paradise. Nevertheless I recommended him to the prayers of all my priests and Christians.”

12 *Henninghaus*, pp. 637-639, 641; Jakob Reuter (trl. J. Vogelgesang), *Blessed Joseph Freinademetz SVD, South Tyrol’s Outstanding Missionary to the Far East*, Rome 1975, p. 76f.

Msgr. Ciceri CM from Chinkiang:

“The news of the loss suffered by your Vicariate on account of the death of Rev. Fr. Freinademetz pained me. I regarded him highly since I knew him personally and I esteemed his virtues very much. He was a truly a saint.”

Fr. Henri Boucher SJ, Rector of the Jesuits in Zikawei:

“In the person of Rev. Fr. Freinademetz you have lost an outstanding member of your Society, a priest after the heart of God, a truly apostolic man.”

Fr. Thomas Ceska, Vincentian from Chihli:

“As for me, the sad news of the passing of your saintly Superior and Pro-Vicar Fr. Joseph Freinademetz has filled me with deep sorrow, particularly since the dear deceased was my compatriot and his virtues were known far beyond the boundaries of your Apostolic Vicariate. Your beloved Mission now has an intercessor close to the throne of God.”

Thomas Tien SVD, the first Chinese Cardinal, who had been a student of St. Joseph Freinademetz recalled how highly Fr. Freinademetz was regarded by his Chinese countrymen: “All Christians considered Freinademetz a living saint. ‘He is like Kungtse’ (Confucius), the Chinese said: ‘in him everything is good, everything is perfect in him, always friendly, unassuming and humble’. He spoke Chinese well. All those who came in contact with him were deeply impressed by him. An old catechist, who hardly saw anything good in the foreign missionaries and on principle always disagreed with the others, was of one mind with them in this: ‘Fu Shenfu is a saint. He is different from all the others.’ In my time as a seminarian in Yenchowfu I often met Fr. Freinademetz. It was our custom that every Sunday after high mass we would go to him in order to speak with him.

In the church he knelt in the sanctuary, visible to us all. To see him pray was an impressive experience. The image of this priest on his knees has been indelibly etched in my memory... He lived only for others and sacrificed himself for others to the last with utter unselfishness and self-forgetfulness. His piety was attractive and unfeigned.”

Bishop Augustinus Henninghaus, his companion for many years:

“Throughout his many years as a missionary he never received public recognition; he never received any tribute from the Chinese, no decoration and no status button, no honors with which the Chinese government was rather liberal at that time... Fr. Freinademetz who had shown kindness to so many, to whom thousands felt indebted in gratitude and esteem never received any such tribute... This is nothing short of striking to one who knows the circumstances here and lets one conclude how well Fr. Freinademetz knew how, quite unobtrusively, to steer clear of external tributes. He desired no earthly recognition and reward for himself; he did not want to step out of the ranks of the milites gregarii (the ordinary soldiers), but only to fulfill his duty with modesty and fidelity.”

Bishop Henninghaus continues:

“Dangers, sufferings, worries, toil, difficult hours were not lacking in his life. But even then he always remained the same, because his whole being and striving was rooted in God and directed to God alone. In God he found his foothold and his strength, in him the center and goal of his whole interior and exterior life.”

For reflection:

Taking into consideration all I have so far read and heard about Joseph Freinademetz, how would I describe him for myself?

Does my knowledge of him challenge me? Does it affect me?

Freinademetz was considered a “living saint”, meaning in him, in his manner of living, people were able to glimpse and perceive God’s salvation. Can something like that also be perceived in my life?

Do his personality, his commitment, his piety and - last but not least – his dying exercise an influence on me?

Can I adopt something from his life in my own life?

13. “In the Odor of Sanctity”

P. Freinademetz died “in the odor of sanctity”, a phrase used for centuries to describe heroic holiness. Many of his contemporaries considered him a saintly man, a “just man”, as the Bible calls such persons. The Chinese Christians revered him as a ‘father figure’ during his life time. But many of his confreres likewise held him in high esteem. Fr. Georg Froewis, for instance, calls him a “model missionary” in his diary. On November 4/5, 1907 he writes about him: “the holiness of the man shines forth in everything”

In the eyes of many Chinese Christians Fr. Freinademetz could have immediately been canonized, or “raised to the honors of the altar” as the traditional phrase goes. They were absolutely convinced that after his death they had him as an intercessor with the eternal Father. Thus immediately after his death, as Fr. Johannes Düster reports, people “not only prayed *for* him, but also immediately began to pray *to* him”. In the funeral sermon which he delivered, Fr. Theodor Bucker called him an “heroic apostle” and a “holy religious”.

The memorial ‘holy card’ printed in his native Tyrol at the time of his death said that he had died in the “odor of sanctity”. This was most likely based on the obituaries which had been written. But it certainly also reflected what was known from his own letters as well as from reports of others about him, about his life full of privations and self-sacrifice. People’s admiration for his

deep piety, his ascetical life-style, and his generous spirit of sacrifice was now transformed into veneration for a countryman whom they *knew* to be with God.

In his native South Tyrol, under the regime of Italian fascism, everything German and “Ladin” was suppressed and people were confronted with the heart-wrenching choice of staying on and publicly identifying themselves as Italians or of emigrating to Germany. During this time of difficult decisions many turned to him for refuge as one of their own who had left home in obedience to God’s call, but who had never denied or hidden his origins and was, in fact, proud of being from his beloved ‘Tyrol’. There was scarcely a home in South Tyrol in which the Servant of God, was not called upon for help during that difficult time. At present there is an image or a statue of the Saint in practically every church and chapel in South Tyrol.

The house in which he was born in the small hamlet of Oies in the upper Garda Valley (Alta Badia) has become a favorite place of prayer. Pilgrims and casual visitors, tourists and local people, stop over for a while, for a time of inner and exterior rest, and recollection. In silence they formulate their petitions, desires and aspirations. In the visitors’ book one comes across, above all, petitions for blessings on the family, for health, for help in suffering and sorrow. But there are also requests for success in upcoming exams and in finding employment. For every petition, there are frequent expressions of gratitude.

For many people Oies has become “holy ground” where they find what they really need. According to Saint Joseph Freinademetz: “Just as the tree needs the earth in order to find sap and nourishment so the soul needs prayer!”

For 30 years now, every second Sunday in September a big group of pilgrims, some thousand persons, organized by the Catholic Family Association of the diocese of Innsbruck has been coming to Oies. Processions arrive from many parishes of South Tyrol but also from the neighboring provinces of Belluno and Trento.

For some years now young people have been making the eleven hour trek from Oies to Brixen – the very same journey made by Joseph Freinademetz at the age of ten when he left home for the first time to go “to study.”

The correspondence of the Secretariat shows just how many people turn with confidence to Joseph Freinademetz as their intercessor. Nor should we overlook the numerous images and statues of him, done professionally or in popular style, which are to be found in every corner of his native region,

Chapels and churches in his honor have been built not only in his native Tyrol but also in other countries and continents, showing how Joseph Freinademetz, local patron saint of the people of South Tyrol, has also found many devotees in other parts of the world. No doubt this is due in part to the fact that he belonged to the Society of the Divine Word, which has meanwhile grown into a worldwide missionary religious congregation.

For reflection:

The veneration of a saint like St. Joseph Freinademetz is an expression of the confident conviction that in the life and work of this person God makes visible something of his own saving action. And this means that we may trust and hope that with God’s help our life, too, can find fulfillment.

Furthermore, veneration leads to imitation: “If anyone loves me he will keep my word “, the gospel of John says (14,23).

To which extent is the veneration of St. Joseph Freinademetz an encouragement for me and an incentive to live a life that “pleases God”?

[From the Ancestral Home and Shrine
of St. J. Freinademetz, Oies, Badia, Italy]

Homily on Joseph Freinademetz

Antonio M. Pernia, SVD

A hundred years ago, on Tuesday, 28 January 1908, about six o'clock in the evening, after almost 30 years of uninterrupted missionary service, Joseph Freinademetz expired in the SVD central house in Taikia, South Shandong, China. The word "expire" is a good word to describe the death of Joseph Freinademetz, because Joseph came to China to give his life for his dear Chinese. He gave all, in such a way that, in the end, nothing remained. He literally "expired" or "extinguished himself" – like a candle which gives light in the dark until the very end. And, in the end it simply expires. But more than the end of a life, the death of Joseph Freinademetz was rather the fulfillment of a dream. In 1886, seven years after his arrival in China, he wrote to his family in Val Badia: "I love China and the Chinese, and I would die a thousand deaths for them". Six years later, in 1892, he wrote again: "As for myself, I really love my dear Chinese and I have no other desire than to live and die among them".

So, that evening of 28 January 1908, the missionary life of Joseph Freinademetz was not really ended, but rather fulfilled.

"To die a thousand deaths" is, indeed, an appropriate description of the missionary life of Joseph Freinademetz in China. From the time he reached China in 1879, Joseph did not spare himself in preaching the gospel to his dear Chinese, even in the most far-flung villages. He had to suffer much, but never once retreated from any suffering or sacrifice: long trips, resistance to his preaching, hostility of non-believers, persecutions, attacks by bandits, death threats. In 1884 he wrote to his parents, saying: "Many were the times when I was in danger of death, when the pagans conspired to kill me, but the Lord has always protected me until now". And again in 1888, he wrote: "Those villages are

very dangerous; at certain times of the year, it is almost impossible to go there because travelers are attacked by bandits, robbed and even killed”. And then a year afterwards, in 1889, he narrated the now well-known incident when he once tried to save a poor Chinese who was being punished by a Mandarin for having consented to be baptized. For this, Joseph was struck and hit, tied up and thrown to the ground, dragged to the road and left half-dead. Thus, even before his death that evening of 28 January 1908, Joseph had already died a thousand deaths for the gospel and for his dear Chinese.

More than the physical sufferings, there was the inner transformation which he sought to achieve from the time he reached China. Arriving in Hong Kong from Europe, Joseph did not lose time. He immediately dedicated himself to the study of the Chinese language and the attempt to transform himself exteriorly so as to have the appearance of a Chinese. Indeed, Joseph easily became a Chinese exteriorly. His name became “Fu Shenfu”. His reddish blond hair was shorn except for a crop at the back to which a black pigtail was fastened. The black cassock from Europe gave way to a blue Chinese robe. Cloth shoes replaced the leather ones. But his view of things remained European, Tyrolean. After two years in Hong Kong, he wrote: “China is well and truly the kingdom of the devil. You can hardly go ten steps without coming up against all kinds of hellish images and every manner of devilry!” And again he wrote: “The Chinese character has little that appeals to us Europeans. ... The Creator did not endow the Chinese with the same qualities as the Europeans. ... The Chinese are incapable of higher motives.”

Chinese clothing did not turn Joseph Freinademetz into a new man. He recognized that and realized what had to be done. He said: “The main work still remains: transformation of the inner person; to study the Chinese way of thought, Chinese customs and usages, Chinese character and disposition. All that cannot be achieved in a day, not even in one year, and also not without some painful surgery.” With these words, Joseph formulated

his life plan without actually realizing it. He began to free himself from his narrow thinking and became a graced missionary. Thus, twelve years later, he could declare: "I am now more Chinese than Tyrolese, and I would like to remain a Chinese also in heaven". Thus, Joseph repeatedly said: "The greatest task of the missionary is the transformation of the inner self".

This inner transformation obviously entailed an inner death; that is, the death of the old person (the Tyrolese) so that the new person (the Chinese) could be born. And so the missionary spirituality of Joseph could be described as a spirituality of the cross. It was because of this that the painting made for his canonization in Rome four years ago shows him clasping the cross with his hands close to his breast. In 1888 he wrote to his parents: "As for us missionaries, there is no lack of crosses. I could write you an entire book recounting all the calumnies that the pagans throw at us. ... But with God's grace we are now accustomed to carry the cross; the cross is the daily bread of the missionary". And to the catechists receiving instruction from him in Tsining he said (1893/94): "There is one path all have to take if they wish to become saints. I mean meditation on the bitter suffering of our Lord Jesus."

Joseph, therefore, understood that missionary work had to follow the path of Christ's passion. He wrote: "The entire Passion repeats itself in the life and history of the Church. ... The Church here has to traverse a week of the Passion, sweat blood in the Garden of Olives, die on the Cross, she has constantly to struggle and fight, to work and suffer, to endure and to bleed. Bloody and bloodless martyrdom is her constant characteristic." Thus, Joseph understood that mission is a sharing of the cross of Jesus, a giving of oneself to the people, a pouring out of one's life for the gospel of Christ. And not as a sacrifice, but as a privilege, an honor, a gift from God. Shortly after having been admitted by Arnold Janssen to the mission house in Steyl, Joseph wrote to his parents(1878): "Thank God. ... that the Lord has given us the grace of having a missionary in our family. I repeat what I already

said earlier: I do not consider this as a sacrifice that I offer to God, but as the greatest gift that God is giving me”. Andin 1880, he wrote from China: “To be a missionary is an honor that I would not exchange with the golden crown of the Emperor of Austria”. And again in 1884, he wrote: “I cannot thank the Lord enough for having made me a missionary in China”. In 1887 he said: “When I think of the countless graces that I have received and continue to receive until now from God. ... I confess that I could cry. The most beautiful vocation in the world is being a missionary”.

And so, in that evening of 28 January 1908, when Joseph Freinademetz expired, his missionary life was not extinguished or ended; rather it was brought to fulfillment. Without doubt, it can be said of Joseph Freinademetz: “Precious is the Life given for Mission”. His death that evening of 28 January 1908 was but the last act of a life completely given for mission.

Indeed, precious is the life given for mission. At the entrance of the room, or small house, where Saint Joseph died at only 56 years old in Taikia, South Shandong, China, one can still find two marble plaques announcing his death, one in Latin and the other in Chinese. The announcement says: “Here, in this small room, the servant of God, Fr. Joseph Freinademetz, tireless preacher of the Gospel, outstanding in words and deeds, after having received the last sacraments, gave his soul back to God – 28January 1908”. “*Infatigabilis Evangelii praeco, verbo et opere clarus*”! Dear confreres and sisters, let us pray today that, as younger sisters and brothers of St. Joseph in the same religious missionary family, we may, by following his footsteps, be truly “*infatigabiles Evangelii praecones, verbo et opere clari*”; that is, “tireless preachers of the Gospel, outstanding in words and deeds.”

[Homily, Eucharistic Celebration, Rome, January 29, 2008;
published in *Arnoldus Nota*, February 2008]

The Relevance of Freinademetz in the Asian Context

Anthony Poruthur, SVD

Introduction

When the Communists took over the reins of China around six decades ago, in their revolutionary zeal they wanted to obliterate as many memories of the past as possible. Incidentally in Taikia they discovered the grave of Joseph Freinademetz. At once they exhumed it and found that his mortal remains, even after four decades, were intact. They put kerosene on it and burned it.¹ Members of the Society of the Divine Word, by and large, have always considered Joseph a saintly person and a zealous missionary. It is quite appropriate that a close look is taken again at his life and work.

There are already many writings² about Fu Shen-fu, as he was called in Chinese. Hence in the present article those details about his checkered life would not be presented hew. Instead, the relevance of Freinademetz's life and work will be viewed from a missionary point of view. Therefore the emphasis here, by choice, is more on analytical and interpretative aspects than on the descriptive dimension.

1 From the Address of a South American Missionary during ASPAC Assembly, 2005, in Taipei.

2 Fritz Bornemann, *As Wine Poured out, Blessed Joseph Freinademetz SVD, Missionary in China 1879-1908*, Rome, 1984. This is the best authoritative biography so far available. Hereafter all the references to this book will be as *AWP*.

I. Person and Mission

1. A Brief Biographical Note

Joseph Freinademetz was born on 15th April 1852 at Oies/Brixen; studied at Brixen; was ordained priest in 1875; and served as parish curate for two years.³ Besides knowing classical European languages he spoke German, Italian and French.⁴ He knew about the starting of a mission seminary in Steyl from an article of Arnold Janssen written in *Kirchenblatt* published in Brixen. He joined the Steyl missionary group in 1878.⁵ He left for China with J. B. Anzer in 1879, and held positions of responsibility like Provincial Superior and Administrator. He died on 28th Jan. 1908 at Taikia, China. He was beatified on 19th October 1975. and was canonised as saint of the universal church on 5th October 2003.

2. Personal Traits

Freinademetz's personality was oozing with self-effacing humility. He would not hesitate to be self-critical when necessary and had the inner freedom to own his limitations. When he was asked to head the new foundation of the society in Austria he wrote in response to Arnold Janssen: "Do not be shocked, I beg you, but pray much for me, a poor sinner. I have many temptations against chastity... and cannot testify that I have fought them properly. I am frightfully vain and anxious to please. I am peevish and morose when things don't go my way. I am easily impatient and stubborn, and many times scandalize the catechumens by my bad example. On no point do I have myself under control."⁶

3 Cf. Josef Alt., *Journey in Faith, The Missionary Life of Arnold Janssen* (Analecta SVD 85), Rome 2002, p. 1034.

4 Cf. *AWP*, p. 13.

5 Cf. *AWP*, p. 30.

6 *AWP*, p. 94.

Freinademetz had an ascetical bend of mind and he lived an austere way of life. But he never demanded the same from others, his missionary companions, neither as their religious superior and nor as Administrator of the diocese. It is often said that this is the secret of his popularity among fellow SVDs. For the confreres who came to the mission after him he was quite edifying in the way he lived. His actions were more eloquent than his words. In fact he was both a master and model.⁷

His simplicity of heart is reflected in a sense of humour which used to be demonstrated now and then. He once made a very hilarious observation about one of his own catechumens in the following manner: “Many have already learned their prayers by heart. One old gray-beard always carries his prayer book under his hat since his clothes have no pocket.”⁸

His simplicity was quite outstanding and others too took note of it easily. Fr. Leopold Gain, S.J, a contemporary missionary from the neighbouring mission territory had the following to say in this regard: “He is a true Tyroler. I was overwhelmed by his great simplicity, his virtue, his prudence, keep his knowledge and zeal.”⁹

3. Life in Steyl

For the training of future missionaries there should be solid spiritual foundation. “Life at its source must be pure and strong.” That was the contention of Arnold Janssen, the Rector of the mission house.¹⁰ The young priest, Freinademetz discovered the very same thing on his arrival at Steyl. He wrote to his parents that the mission seminary is truly a house of God. “Here the

7 Cf. *AWP*, p. 95.

8 *AWP*, p. 72.

9 *AWP*, p. 137.

10 Cf. F. Bornemann and Others, *A History of Our Society* (Analecta SVD 54/1), Rome, 1981, p. 17.

spirit of piety and fear of God reigns... I have never seen anything like it, neither at Cassianum nor at the Brixen seminary. The zeal, the diligence, the simplicity of the students is something quite new to me... So I am most happy to be here and thank the Lord for allowing me to come to this place where I can learn many things, above all to live as a Christian should.”¹¹ Also in right earnest he started learning Chinese as a fitting preparation to go to his desired missionary destination.

4. Early Impressions in China

China the land of the great wise man Confucius, has been permeated by his philosophy which is basically guided by *jen* (translated as ‘human-heartedness’). Although founded on humanism, veneration of ancestors is an integral part of Confucianism. This dimension is manifested in their allegiance to rituals. “Human beings are part of a cosmic whole, and every human activity of eating and drinking, walking and talking, marrying and caring for a family, sowing and harvesting, caring for the sick dying, has to be related to the universe to which we all belong and to the power, by whatever name it is known, which ruled the universe.”¹² Confucius was so highly successful in spreading his wisdom that it has gone into the psyche of the Chinese people. They carry the essence of his teaching wherever they go. It is to this socio-cultural and religious milieu that Freinademetz arrived as a missionary.

A traditional Asian village will usually have its local physicians, ritual experts, exorcists, astrologers and healers.¹³ The social fabric of Asian societies is generally very well knit. It is in a sense a self-sufficient system. Any outsider coming in, particularly a white man, is perceived as an intruder. This impression was fed

11 *AWP*, p. 37.

12 Bede Griffiths, *Universal Wisdom*, Indus, New Delhi, 1995, p. 251.

13 Cf. R. De Smet, *Religious Hinduism*, St. Paul’s, Mumbai, 1997, p. 390.

into their minds all the more during the colonial era. A missionary trying to make an entry to such a society would be treading on the toes of many. Such a challenge awaited Freinademetz, although he had taken the trouble of picking up the Chinese language before his arrival on the missionary scene.

When a missionary tries to create a little space in the traditional social setting someone's importance will naturally be reduced or taken away. Any one from the locality who joins the newcomer's company is seen as a turn-coat and would be treated as a traitor. He/she will be ostracized. No wonder, in his early days as missionary, Freinademetz faced a similar hostile situation. "Just today a man came to visit me, a young man who only a month ago had become a Christian. His parents have slammed the door of their house in his face and do not allow him to enter any more."¹⁴ In such an exclusive society where all are knit together well, opposition to mission is a group affair. The system opposes the new entrant with all its vehemence.

A keen observer of the surroundings, he has also recorded his first impression about the place where he had to say mass once: "You should see the hut in which I am obliged to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass... Heating stoves are unknown here; in the winter a fire is simply built on the earth floor; the smoke gradually turns the room black."¹⁵ But he had tremendous capacity to adjust to the situation.

5. Mission Methods

Freinademetz had the ability to establish contact with people easily. Simple folks used to flock to him. His way of dressing in Chinese style served to make him acceptable to them. The flourish with which he made friends with people was a gift that flowed from his closeness with God.¹⁶ Using it to its best he

14 *AWP*, p. 75.

15 *AWP*, p. 72

16 *AWP*, p. 95.

would make direct contact with people. The next step was to begin with catechetical instructions together with teaching prayers. He followed up with visits at regular intervals. In the intervening period, during his absence, catechists would monitor the situation.¹⁷

It did not take him too long to realize that the sheep have to be guarded. He had to be very prudent in his manner of speaking, and his presence with the little flock was very necessary. “When I am with them I seem to be in the very centre of a stormy sea where one ship after another flounders and sinks beneath the waves. A mere triviality, even a single word, can send an entire family back to the worship of the false gods they had already renounced. That is why it is necessary for the missionary to remain with them always.”¹⁸

In spite of fairly good success in his mission Freinademetz would not take any credit for himself. With his trade-mark humility as well as trust he says: “It is clear that not we but God sowed the seed. We missionaries are only the reapers who bring in the harvest of Christians. We plant and we water, but the growth and the increase remain the work of Him who sends us.”¹⁹

Freinademetz was quite realistic in the way he looked at the missionary scene. He was able to assess the motives that prompt people to come to the missionary. Sometimes it had nothing to do with any spiritual quest. Some people used to approach him to derive financial benefit or “the European should teach him how to take revenge on his enemies, or he expects to land a job.... But when his plans evaporate in thin air, the unclean bird also takes to flight.”²⁰ Such circumspection has saved him from a lot of trouble.

17 Cf. *AWP*, p. 136.

18 *AWP*, p. 75.

19 *AWP*, p. 138.

20 *AWP*, p. 72.

The neophytes in faith faced various difficulties within their own community. In the early years, as the new missionary found out for himself, ostracization stared often in their faces. "It is not easy for the poor people here to become Catholics. The catechumens tell me that in the beginning, after their conversion, they no longer dared to go to the market place. When they met other people they blushed crimson for shame. Formerly they were regarded as respectable members of the community or as good neighbours; now they became 'the most despised of the world', 'outcasts of mankind'." ²¹

Teaching catechism to women was very much a priority for Freinademetz in his missionary endeavour. He faced a serious challenge in this regard as there was strict segregation of men and women in the Chinese society. But he would not give up that easily: "The instruction of the women presents some problems since male catechists are not allowed to instruct them, and we do not have any female catechists who can. That slows down the development of the mission very much. In one place I was obliged to appoint as the women's catechist a 10-year old girl, who is still a catechumen herself but has learned the prayers well." ²²

Though Freinademetz was a devout religious and a zealous missionary, life for him was not a cake walk. He had to face his own share of problems. Once he admitted to baptism a clever 'wheeler-dealer' type of man rather quickly which was not his normal practice. This worldly-wise man knew the ropes to move up and he became a catechist soon. He indulged in various nefarious activities including opium trade. Eventually Freinademetz had to dismiss him from service. He was quite upset with this incident as he had misjudged this man who was working against the church there. ²³

21 *AWP*, p. 72.

22 *AWP*, p. 72.

23 Cf. *AWP*, pp. 141-142.

6. Leader of a Persecuted Church

Freinademetz had to face another ordeal in his missionary life in China. When he was the Administrator of the mission two missionaries were brutally murdered. Richard Henle and Francis Nies were doing good work in the mission field. This tragic incident pained him much. On some other occasion Mon. Anzer and Freinademetz too had received maltreatment in the hands of Chinese hooligans.

Besides these there were also other occasions when the local church faced persecution. A church was broken into and the catechist was roughed up. Of course their main target was the priest there who had providentially escaped from the place a little earlier. So the poor lay leader bore the brunt of the attack. Looting and plunder had been part of this incident too, as in the case of many other mission stations.

The Administrator of the diocese did not take these incidents of persecution lying down. He drew up a precise and detailed account of these atrocities and presented a memorandum to the powers-that-be in Germany for necessary action. He also pointed out the indifference and lethargy of Chinese authorities. Though no compensation was received from any quarter, registering protest and raising voice seemed to have some desired effect as the number of attacks on missionaries and mission came down slowly.²⁴

24 Cf. *AWP*, pp. 242-3.

II. Asian Relevance

“Christianity was born in the Middle East as a religion, went to Greece and became a philosophy, migrated to Rome and became a legal system, spread through Europe and became a culture, and finally headed to America, where it became Big Business.”²⁵ Various shades have been added over centuries with the encounter of different cultures. In much of Asia it is seen differently – a colonial hangover, often grudgingly tolerated.

Despite this limitation SVD has been making efforts right from the beginning to make a difference in mission. Its missionary vision originated with Arnold Janssen, was articulated by William Schmidt and was lived by Freinademetz.²⁶ The precedent he set is outstanding and later generations of SVDs look up to their first missionary to China.²⁷ His life is viewed from the angle of its relevance to further promote the mission *ad gentes*.

1. Paradigm of Inculturation

Although the western world-view has dominated the global scene, in recent times it is being increasingly recognized even in academic circles that there are certain traits and characteristics which are typically Asian in nature. “People in the West are dominated by the conscious mind; they go about their business each shut up in their own ego. There is a kind of fixed

25 Gibson David, *The Coming Catholic Church: How the Faithful are Shaping a New American Catholicism*, Harper, San Francisco, 2003, p. 224.

26 From the Key Note Address of Antonio Pernia, SVD Superior General, during the seminar on mission spirituality at Indore, on the occasion of Platinum Jubilee celebrations of SVD presence in India.

27 In India the efforts made in this regard by George Proksch, SVD (1904-1986), are still very much discussed as a model and rated truly as the work of a pioneer.

determination in their minds;... But in the East people live not from the conscious mind but from the unconscious...”²⁸ Freinademetz seems to have captured this piece of wisdom, perhaps without his own knowledge, soon after his arrival in the orient and he imbibed more of ‘Asian-ness’ little by little, day by day.

The Asian continent has a rich cultural legacy. China and India stand out in this regard. Excavations done around Beijing a few decades ago (1923-27) clearly brought to the notice of the world that the Chinese civilization is very ancient and the people are quite proud of its antiquity. People of Chinese origin are steeped in their tradition and they almost wear it on their sleeves wherever they go. Even in modern cities like Singapore and Hong Kong they maintain their cultural identity.²⁹

Freinademetz learned fast that, if he had to be effective, as a missionary he needed to be one with the people to whom he was sent. He had to show respect for their culture and also adapt to their ways.³⁰ In his case he was also quite aware that the Chinese had no love lost for the white man. In fact he made all-out effort to win their trust and very much wanted to show them that his interest was not in trade, commerce or politics, but he was a missionary. His presence and activity was not intended to subjugate a part of their land as a colony. He consciously projected a different image although in that peculiar historical era the Europeans were annexing more and more of Chinese land as their colonies.

28 Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage between East and West*, Collins, London, 1982, p. 8.

29 Even after Mao Zedong’s great revolution it could only make cosmetic changes in their way of thinking.

30 In India William Wuellner, SVD (1905-1987) who was a pioneer missionary among the Bhilalas, practically followed the example of Freinademetz.

A realization dawned on him that if he maintained his external appearance as a European he would be practically rejected by the very people to whom he had come as a missionary. Mateo Ricci's (1552-1680) efforts in this regard must have been a good reminder as well as a model for him. The great Jesuit missionary had taken pains to learn the language, literature and etiquette of the Chinese to win their hearts.³¹ Of course Fu Shen-fu could not change the colour of his skin. Except for that, he made him himself look like a Chinese in all other respects.³²

Such an approach is very much needed to remove the impression from the minds of the people that Christianity is still alien to this continent. In China many take to studying Christianity in universities as a western religion oblivious of the fact that it is born in the same continent. It is through genuine inculturation that the charge of Christians being agents promoting western culture would gradually disappear. As Paul said, I become all things to all people so that I may win some by whatever means possible. (I Cor. 9: 22).

2. Missionary Facing Religious Phenomena

The Asian continent is known as the cradle of religions. Sotereology has many manifestations and their age-old expressions can not be faced with a rhetoric that might be considered brilliant in certain Christian circles. "We have to open ourselves to the revelation of the divine mystery which took place in Asia, in Hinduism and Buddhism, in Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism."³³ The way so many Christians are flocking to some of these sects and Masters of the orient

31 In India Robert de Nobili SJ (1577-1656) too had made similar efforts of presenting a thoroughly inculturated church.

32 His zeal in immersing himself in the local culture went to the extent of him stating loud and clear "Even in Heaven I would like to be a Chinese."

33 Griffiths, *Marriage between East and West*, p. 202.

should make us look at them and see what is good in their approach to life and reality.³⁴

In many of the Asian countries there is high regard for persons of religiosity whether they are Buddhist monks or Hindu mendicants or Sufi masters.³⁵ Even when one is an active missionary like Freinademetz his model as a deeply devout person is quite inspirational for the people of Asia as a whole.

Renunciation is a value well appreciated as an essential element of religiosity. Unlike in the West wherewith the growth of materialism and rationalism religion is on the verge of dying out, in the Asian context even when there is material progress religious outlook is not totally compromised.³⁶ Freinademetz's genuine ascetical discipline has been instrumental in drawing many people to the fold of Christian faith as it is not an uncommon phenomenon in Asia.³⁷

As Abhishiktananda (Henry le Saux 1910-1973), the Benedictine itinerant monk has said "What the world needs most urgently now is men who have met God in Christ and witness to it with the spontaneity and the liberty of a John or a Paul. Nobody can

34 *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2. The Zen, Yogic and Vipassana methods of meditation, let alone many others, have something different to offer.

35 The efforts of Thomas Merton (1915–1968) to dialogue with the Buddhist monks of Thailand at the level of spirituality, are a case in point of their regard. It is a fact that they held this Cistercian monk from America in high esteem. So also the attempt of a few Benedictine nuns who spent a month with their Buddhist counterparts in India brought to light that both have much common ground.

36 Sunita Williams, an astronaut who recently spent 90 days in space had carried along with her a copy of the Hindu Scripture, *Bhagavad Gita* This gesture indicates that Asian sensibilities are different.

37 For instance take the case of Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997). Her simplicity of life and ascetical discipline drew many Hindus closer to her, as a devout religious, not merely as a social worker.

make the presence of Jesus known to others if already Jesus is not for him a living presence.”³⁸ This is, no doubt, a personal challenge for every missionary.

3. Towards a Broad-based Missionary Praxis

A missionary is most often perceived as a rank outsider. He should be quite conscious of this fact. Initially much opposition to his arrival is expected. But that should not deter him from pursuing his task. It is by building bridges across people that he finds a place in the social milieu where he is placed. Hence there is no substitute for entering into relationships with various types of people. Being a humble learner is one of the best approaches a missionary could adopt at the beginning stage. He has to contend with weird customs and a strange world-view. With much patience he will be able to break new ground and slowly win their hearts. In the case of Freinademetz he has presented himself as a model for a missionary at the grass-roots.

The understanding of reality in some of the Asian cultures is like a ray of light passing through a spectrum. Various shades can co-exist simultaneously without any contradiction.³⁹ It is like Nicholas of Cusa’s (1401-1461) principle of *‘Coincidentia oppositorum’*. He had said: “In God we must not conceive of distinction and indistinction, for example, as two contradictories, but we must conceive of them as antecedently existing in their own most simple beginning, where distinction is not other than indistinction.”⁴⁰ The missionary’s canvas has to be pretty broad in order that he does not get confused.

38 Quoted in D. Bhatt, “An Apostle - a Christian Guru”, in Clarence Srambical, (ed.) *Mission Spirituality*, Divine Word Publications, Indore, 1976, p.145.

39 The Chinese symbol of Yin Yang illustrates it very clearly.

40 <http://integralscience.org/cusa.html>.

Sometimes lethargy and indifference go along with it. Just for the sake of maintaining harmony even deviancy is never condemned.⁴¹ In such situations when Christian missionaries make their entry the passive, static idea of harmony, even if not immediately changed, at least it is challenged. Fatalism which is quite common in Asian cultures too would not go unaffected by his presence and activity.⁴² Naturally it will raise many eyebrows and there will be some tension. To some extent it is to be expected as some dynamic element has entered the lull, dull society. It is to be seen and understood as a sign of positive change as well as healthy growth. The outsider can be quite a catalyst for bringing about transformation in the society. It is truly prophetic dialogue that is in operation in this context.

4. Advocacy for the Little Flock

In the Asian context the Church is a small minority, truly 'a little flock' (less than 3% of the vast multitudes of Asia). In such a situation mutual encouragement is constantly needed and appreciated.⁴³ This is all the more necessary when incidents of persecution occur, every now and then in India, Indonesia, China and some of the Arabian countries. Many have become martyrs in the recent past. Everything should not be taken lying down. The consequences then could be disastrous. There is need for promoting advocacy about the situation at various national and international fora. Awareness should be raised that there are various ways of registering protest. Sometimes immediate results may not be forthcoming. Yet as it is a matter of survival for the

41 For instance, in India those who practice the cult of tantrism still make sacrifice of children. Hardly anyone raises voice against it.

42 The Hindu Reformers in 19th and 20th century under Christian missionary influence fought against the practice of sati – the wife jumping into the funeral pyre of the husband.

43 Cf. James M. Kroeger, M. M., "Mission Congress Reflection: God's Asian Tapestry", *Mission Today*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Apr. - June 2007, Shillong, p. 126.

'little flock', Church leadership at the local level can not afford to ignore this vital responsibility.

In this regard violent means should be totally excluded. Temptation could be pretty strong to take revenge with counter attacks and there could be some short-term gains. But violence only begets more violence. Such an approach will create more problems than solutions. History is replete with such lessons. Taking the cue from the New Testament, Gandhi had developed non-violent methods of registering protest as well as fighting injustice. If physical violence is faced with fortitude, courage and patience, without fleeing from the situation, there is going to be positive result in the long run.

5. Spiritual Back-up for Mission

In this era of crass materialism and consumerism affecting the lives of even religious and missionaries, the life of Freinademetz is worthy of admiration as well as emulation. Once he left his homeland in 1879 there was no turning back; he never returned to Europe even once. His life has been marked by a sense of detachment, ascetical discipline and austere living. It was seen as an integral dimension of incarnational spirituality and all these traits enhanced his missionary profile.

While on the one hand there is a tendency today to play down the importance of these elements and substitute them with a kind of activism these are the very factors that keep the missionary on a steady track, without faltering. These are the genuine ingredients of his unflagging zeal. The edifice called mission is built on the foundation of simple living. That is the message from the life of humble Fu Shen-fu.

Conclusion

Freinademetz was not a brilliant student nor was he very extraordinarily gifted. But he as an average man was quite focused in what he was doing, and marshalling all the resources

he had at his disposal, achieved great things in the mission land. His life epitomizes the laying of the foundation for a genuinely Chinese, nay, Asian Church. He has provided a vision of a truly incarnated, inculturated Church without the usual trappings of the West.

As Asian Synod Document (1999) says “In the process of encountering the world’s different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them. This is the obligatory path for evangelizers in presenting the Christian faith and making it part of a peoples’ cultural heritage.”⁴⁴ This is exactly what Freinademetz lived for and his life has in some way foreshadowed in the above statement. Even though 100 years have gone by after his death, his life and ways of mission have not become irrelevant.

III. Epilogue

China is currently going through a phase of great economic boom. Industry, trade and commerce are taking unprecedented strides. Life behind the bamboo curtain is fast changing. Globally this country is positioning itself as a super power and as it looks nothing can stop this march forward. As for the Church in China she has faced many obstacles. Confucian philosophy of naturalism makes them indifferent to other religions. Even when some accept Christianity temptations of making it a kind of syncretism still persists. Polygamy is yet another obstacle the church has to contend with.

Despite these problems there would have been a more inculturated Church there, but for the Communist revolution. Yet everything does not seem to be lost. There is a silver lining in the cloud. “Christianity in China today evidences an heroic

⁴⁴ *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 21.

spirit. Tens of thousands have persevered ... without priests and sacraments. The faith, hope and love are undaunted and carry them through. Many have endured forced labour, imprisonment and even martyrdom.”⁴⁵ In the land of Confucius the words of Tertullian, viz., the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christian faith, could have a some telling effect in the not so distant future.

The confession of Lou Tseng Tsiang, once the Prime Minister of Chinese Republic who later became a Catholic monk, is perhaps a harbinger of the days to come:

“I am a Christian and a Catholic because Holy Church, prepared from the beginning of mankind, founded by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, divinely enlightens and sustains the soul of man and gives the exclusive response to all our highest desires, to all our aspirations to all our needs.”⁴⁶

[Published in *Verbum SVD*, Vol. 48-4,2007; pp. 373-385]

45 F. Bornemann and Others, *A History of Our Society*, p. 320.

46 Dom Lou, *The Way of Confucius and of Christ*, Burns and Oats, London, 1948, p. 64. Quoted in H. Staffner, *The Significance of Jesus Christ in Asia*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1985, p. 178.

Joseph Freinademetz: His “Conversion”

Arnold Sprenger, SVD

I assume that by now St. Joseph Freinademetz is well known to all of us. Is there anything new to say about him? Yes! In a few strokes I'll try to communicate what he means to me.

During my first years in our Society I did not know him very well. Yes, he was one of our very first missionaries, our first missionaries to China. But, there were greater and much better known missionaries in the history of the Church: St. Paul, St. Francis Xavier and many others. In addition, there was our founder, St. Arnold Janssen! He had made a great impression on me. For various reasons he was even very close to my family. Fr. Joseph Freinademetz? No special relationship!

But in recent years great changes have taken place in this relationship. My forty-four years in China (23 in Taiwan, 21 on the Mainland) have opened my eyes. Visiting the place where he lived and died, reading the letters and reports which he wrote and those which others wrote about him was a revelation for me: his life, his development from an ideal and zealous young priest to a frustrated missionary in Hong Kong and Shandong, and the marvelous change or conversion to the missionary who learned to speak the language of love! Truly, the story of the making of a saint!

When the son of the Tyrolen mountains left ship in Hong Kong in April 1879 he was sure that from then on he would save poor pagans and root out idolatry and unbelief. In St. Martin's Parish in South Tyrol, he had told his parishioners: "If I think of those unfortunate countries and peoples where the true religion is not known, and think of those people who are also our brothers and sisters, my heart beats strongly, my eyes begin to fill with tears." In his farewell sermon he had said: "I know the deep

misery of our brothers and sisters beyond the ocean, who, their eyes filled with tears, stretch out their arms and ask us for help.”

Disappointment

He had left his home parish in order to save people, to baptize, to fight the devils and demons. But in his mission no one was interested in him; no one wanted to see him, no one ever called on him, no one wanted to be baptized, no one was interested in his message. Sure, they wanted to see the foreigner with his long nose; they even called him “a foreign devil”. They laughed at him when he tried to say something in the new language.

Back home he had been highly esteemed and honored as a priest and had been well accepted as a person. But here in China, no one seemed to be interested in knowing why he was there. Looking back on those days he wrote: “What I saw, heard and experienced day after day, was often diametrically opposed to the convictions I held hitherto.”

What was totally incomprehensible to him and what he felt most bitterly was the religious indifference he noticed everywhere. Nobody seemed to hunger for the bread of truth and grace as he had expected. Being a man of his time with his European background there was no room in him for understanding the foreign culture and way of life. “The air one breathes here is thoroughly pagan; no inspiration coming from the outside; any encouraging word or inspiring good example is absent. No sound of a church bell, no religious feast, no solemn procession speaks to the heart; in most cases the chapel has the same decoration on Good Friday as on Easter Sunday. Externally, there is no difference between Christmas and Ash Wednesday.” — Moments of despair!

Where was God who had called him, who had sent him to the mission field? There were moments when he tried to share his great frustration in letters to his family and friends, moments when he put the blame for his frustration on the Chinese people

whom he had come to save. In letters of those early years we read sentences like the following, full of prejudices: “The Chinese character has for Europeans little attraction. The creator has not equipped the Chinese with the same abilities as the Europeans. ... The Chinese are unable to deal with higher thought.”

In his letters we read also about his questionable concept of a missionary: “And this is what the young missionary feels with great bitterness: he came full of fervor from Europe. He had hoped that he could preach and baptize every day so many Chinese that his arms would be tired in the evening.” Joseph was a man of his time. There was no place for other religions. To be a missionary meant to win souls for the Catholic faith. Since he had failed to reach this goal, he was disappointed and frustrated.

Conversion

His personal disappointments, his lack of success forced him to reflect about his vocation. What had gone wrong? What kind of mission approach had he applied so far? He realized that the wearing of Chinese clothes had not made him into a new man. He began to understand what had to be done: there had to be a change of the inner man. In Shandong he tried to do what in Hong Kong he had failed to do: get to know the Chinese, their customs and habits, their way of looking at things, their language and culture. The result? The more he got to know the Chinese, their language and their culture, the more he appreciated them. He admired them more and began to truly love them.

Of course, he knew that the process would be painful. But soon Joseph was on the road to success. He was able to look at the Chinese and his work in China in a new way and thus became the great missionary we know. From many of his letters we can gather that he had fallen in love with his beloved Chinese. While preparing for his perpetual vows, he wrote to his relatives: “Now, as the language is no longer so difficult for me and I know the people and their ways of living, China has become my home. I want to live and die with my Chinese.”

Joseph's main problem in his first years as a missionary among the Chinese was that his mission approach did not start from the Chinese: their language, their living conditions, their needs, their religious thinking and practices, their way of life. And he came to realize that he had to use a different approach. He had to pray; he had to live with the Chinese to get to know them, love them, and befriend them.

Joseph realized that it was not the Chinese who had to change; he had to change; he had to be converted! And he did come to this conversion. Joseph won the hearts of the Chinese. They began to trust him, wanted to be with him, and accepted his new message which he himself lived. He had learned the language of love and together with his Chinese friends he went on the road to eternity where - he wanted to be forever with his beloved Chinese. What a conversion!

Joseph's conversion helped him to come close to the people he was serving and thus come closer to God. He found himself on the road to sanctity. He became a model for his contemporary confreres and for all future missionaries in China.

We have seen how, especially in the early years, Joseph faced many dangers, problems and difficulties, creating for him a great amount of sadness and suffering. But when he realized that many of these phenomena were self-made problems, caused by misunderstanding and lack of knowledge, he began to look in a different way at situations and people. He communicated with the people using the language everybody understands. And people began to trust him; they saw the good he did and were ready to work with him.

The situation in China is different today than in Joseph's time. But basic human relationships in China are still the same. Officially, many things can't be done. Unofficially, many things are done. Mutual trust and friendship make many things possible. The language of love is truly the language that everybody understands. Also today!

[Arnold Janssen Spirituality Center, Steyl, *Bimonthly Reflections*, No. 8]

V.

AIDS FOR PRAYER AND CELEBRATIONS



Centennial Prayer of Sts. Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz

(29th January 2008 - 15th January 2009)

“Precious is the life given for Mission”

Holy Triune God, we thank and praise you for the gifts of Sts. Arnold and Joseph. You chose St. Arnold to establish three missionary congregations and inspired St. Joseph to transform the people of China through the proclamation of the Good News. They responded to the needs of the time with great courage and fidelity.

Through their intercession, may we, the children of the Arnoldus family, continue to discern God’s Will. May their prayers help us to read the signs of the times and to respond to the needs of our people with courage and dedication - through prophetic dialogue and life-giving relationships.

Help us Lord, to seek the values that will bring us lasting peace in this changing world. Make us one in mind and heart, and may the heart of Jesus live in our hearts and in the hearts of all people.

We make this prayer through the intercession of Sts. Arnold and Joseph, Blessed Maria Helena and Josefa, and our Blessed Martyrs. Amen.

[Prepared by the Arnold Jansen Secretariat in Steyl.]

Litany of Thanksgiving for Arnold and Joseph

Alleluia!

Alleluia!

We give you thanks, Lord, for you are good,

Your love is everlasting!

We give thanks to you, God of gods,

Your love is everlasting!

You alone do great wonders,

Your love is everlasting!

Your wisdom made the heavens,

Your love is everlasting!

You spread out the earth on the waters,

Your love is everlasting!

You chose St. Arnold to found three Steyl Congregations,

Your love is everlasting!

You sent St. Joseph Freinademetz to China
to evangelize its people,

Your love is everlasting!

You sent SVD Brothers and Fathers to (country/continent)
to open missions here,

Your love is everlasting!

You sent Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters to (country/continent)
to proclaim the good News,

Your love is everlasting!

You inspired bishops to invite
the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters into their dioceses,

Your love is everlasting!

You call members of St. Arnold's Three Congregations to
celebrate and emulate the dedicated lives of Sts. Arnold and
Joseph,

Your love is everlasting!

Amen, Alleluia!

[Adapted, Closing of the Centennial Year of Arnold and Joseph,
SSpS USA Province,]

Novena to Arnold Janssen and Joseph Freinademetz

“Precious is the life given for Mission”

Readings for Morning Praise or Evening Praise
nine days preceding the opening of
the Arnold-Joseph Centennial Year

Introductory Note

Our celebrations of St. Arnold and Joseph are to have the following objectives:

- To deepen our knowledge of the two saints
- To grow together as one family
- To make the two saints more known in the local churches
- To reach out more to our lay partners.

The following principles should characterize our celebrations:

- The two events should be celebrated together, since the two saints have always been closely linked together.
- The focus should be on the cause for which they lived and the values for which they stood. We want to highlight their relevance for us today.
- The objective is to make the two saints and their relevance for today known in our countries, parishes, missions and institutions.
- The celebrations need to be kept simple, reflecting the lives of St. Arnold and St. Joseph.

Day 1

St. Arnold, A Man of God, A Man of Prayer

Arnold was in the best sense, a man of God, a man of prayer. With an unshakable faith, he lived consciously in the presence of God and was aware that he was responsible to God. His search to fulfill his God-given task urged him to put in all his energy, taught him unexpected prudence, gave him a worldwide vision and provided him with courage, strength and perseverance. Animated with a passion for the honor of God and the salvation of peoples, he accomplished much more than his capabilities would suggest.

Arnold was deeply convinced that the success of his work was God's doing, not his. He wrote the Brothers in China:

The hand of the Lord has founded this vineyard and fostered it. From him comes the light of the sun, the rain and the success. I cannot ascribe anything to myself, but a tiny portion of cooperation, and not even that is of my own self. ... The foundation and the continuation of our Society has no other cause than the One who is in heaven and guides all the things here below.

At the age of 68 years Arnold wrote:

Happy the person whose eyes of the spirit God opened so that he/she recognizes: I have a master above me. I have to serve him and I will serve him , and then arranges his/her life accordingly.

This Arnold Janssen did and by doing it gave us, his sons and daughters, an example.

[Jakob Reuter, *Proclaiming the Word in the Power of the Spirit*, Steyl, 1993]

Day 2

St. Arnold: He did Ordinary Things in an Extraordinary Manner

God speaks to us in the lives of the saints in very diverse and often unexpected ways. It was so with Saint Arnold: through his unspectacular life God wrought the extraordinary. Arnold was in no way a charismatic person, yet he became the founder of a religious family that today numbers 10,000 women and men from every continent and many cultures. Father Arnold told his spiritual daughters in the cloister on Christmas Day in 1898: Saints are not born, but gradually are formed by grace. This piece of wisdom is typical of Arnold's basic spiritual orientation and conviction. Cooperation with divine grace given daily in small measures is of great significance. In the life and work of Saint Arnold, God reveals himself as the God of life for all, as God who is Good News for all people. To live that message and pass it on in word and deed was Saint Arnold's passionate desire and enduring legacy. May we in the Arnoldus family live like our Founder, alert to the God of life who disperses his grace as we thread the path of our ordinary mission life.

[Arnold Janssen: Serving the universal Church, Rome, 2003.]

Day 2

St. Arnold: Ahead in His Thinking in Effective Proclamation of the Good News

Arnold considered a thorough knowledge of other religions, cultures and languages an indispensable prerequisite for an effective proclamation of the Good News. At his time that was an exception among missionary congregations. Today, these studies are considered essential by all missionary institutes for the inculturation of the Gospel and for dialogue with other religions.

For Arnold Janssen, Christian unity was of special concern. He considered this unity, as Jesus did in his farewell prayer (Jn. 17:21), the condition for a convincing proclamation of the Good News. This concern has not lost its relevance today.

[Henry Heekeren, SVD]

Day 3

The Significance of St. Arnold's Life and Work for Today

In Steyl and in the three Congregations founded by Arnold, the members lived a life of poverty and solidarity with the still poorer people of China, New Guinea, Togo, etc. Long before all the talk about development, Arnold Janssen encouraged his missionaries to deal with social projects. Thus the universal Church's option for the poor finds in Arnold Janssen an enduring model.

Arnold Janssen's solidarity with the abandoned and marginalized in the world repeatedly brought him into conflict with the German colonial authorities. Hence, he had to put up with the superiors in the Togo mission being accused and thrown out, because they had defended the local Togolese against unjust treatment by the colonial officials there. In 1898, he succeeded in calling a meeting of superiors of mission-sending societies in Germany so that together they could put more pressure on the policies of the Colonial Office in Berlin. This was the first of more than one hundred national meetings of religious superiors in Germany. Courageous opposition to political and industrial oppression of the poor remains relevant today.

[Henry Heekeren, SVD]

Day 3

St. Arnold: Ahead in Multicultural Thinking in Effective Witness

From the beginning Arnold was open to accepting candidates from all nationalities and he wanted them to live in communities made up of different nationalities, which was unusual in his day. Today, in an ever growing multicultural world filled with numerous ethnic conflicts in many countries, international teams of missionaries, who live and work together in harmony, can be a powerful response to today's tensions and conflicts between different nationalities and ethnic groups.

[Henry Heekeren, SVD]

Day 4

St. Arnold: Ahead in His Thinking in Many Aspects

Other aspects of the relevance of the life and work of Arnold Janssen for today include his effective use of the media, his deep appreciation for the contribution of the laity in missionary activity, his promotion of retreats, especially for lay people, and his firm conviction that all missionaries must first live by the Word of God in order to preach it effectively.

Day 4

St. Arnold's Last Day

On Friday, January 15, 1909, at one o'clock in the morning, Arnold Janssen passed peacefully to his eternal reward. He was 71 years old, had been a priest for 48 years, the Founder of three Congregations, and Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word for 33 years.

One hundred years have passed since the mathematician died in Steyl. What he established proved to be solid and innerly sound after his death. The 3 Congregations (the SVD, SSpS and the SSpSAP) founded by Father Arnold achieve a common goal and “go into the whole world and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

[Fritz Bornemann (trl. J. Vogelgesang), *Arnold Janssen: Founder of Three Missionary Congregations*, Manila 1975.]

Day 5

St. Joseph: Saying Good-bye

In summer 1878 it was time for Joseph Freinademetz to say good bye: good bye to the familiar surroundings, to parents, relatives and friends; to the flow of life he had grown used to; good bye also to the kind of life for which he had prepared himself for so long: to the security and warmth of the parish house, the work as assistant parish priest which he had come to like very much. To say good bye means to go away; it means to leave behind what had been important until now, that which had filled the life of Joseph Freinademetz and given meaning to it. On Sunday, August 11, 1878, he said good bye to the parish of St. Martin in Thum, where he served as assistant parish priest and elementary school teacher:

The divine good shepherd in his unfathomable goodness has invited me to go out together with him into the desert in order to help him in his search for the lost sheep. What else should I do but kiss his hand full of joy and gratitude and say with the Scriptures “Behold I come” and with Abraham leave my father’s house, native land and you, my dear ones, and go to the land which the Lord will show me.

His inner sentiments are laid bare in a letter which he wrote to Franz Thaler, his friend and benefactor in Sottru, a small village

next to Oies, February 18, 1879, a few days before his departure ceremony in Steyl:

Dear Friend, at times I find it hard to live far away from those whom I have loved so much; to leave my native place, which has given me so many friends and joys; and to look for another home where one has to start from the very beginning like a child beginning life anew, where one has to learn new and very difficult languages and get to know people who have completely different interests and customs. ... It is hard to begin such a life after I have been so happy among you Ladins. And I say it to you with all honesty: I would never do this for anything in this world, not even for millions of worlds. But I am very happy and content that I can do this for the good Lord up there, even if I would encounter death a thousand times. And I know his grace will never abandon me.

[Pietro Irsara, *Reflections on St. Joseph Freinademetz SVD*]

Day 6

St. Joseph: Inculturation

Joseph Freinademetz once wrote: “Not even for 3000 coronas am I prepared to leave country and friends so as to relocate myself in a new world.” But love for Jesus and for all of God’s people motivated him to do exactly that. He left country, family, friends, culture and language, to go to China, a world that was totally new to him. It was a difficult challenge. Struggles with the language and the new way of life provoked in him a ***culture shock*** where everything seemed dark and depressing. This same experience afflicts almost all those who have to emigrate and put down roots in a new reality. But he was able to respond to the challenge. Though he never forgot the mountains that

surrounded his native valley, he opted to become Chinese among the Chinese, even writing: “I love China and the Chinese; I want to die among them and to be laid to rest among them. ... I want to continue being Chinese even in heaven.” And so it turned out. ... There is a certain irony in the fact that the vicissitudes of history erased all trace of his tomb. It is now entirely impossible to separate him from China.

[Arnold Janssen Secretariat - Steyl]

Day 7

St. Joseph: His Style in Proclaiming the Word

Joseph Freinademetz would travel in China by canal, by mule or on foot from place to place where he knew he was neither known nor wanted. Except when anti-European bias blinded them, the peasants were favorably impressed by Joseph’s sunny disposition. Joseph would take his place in the village market where he would entertain a fast gathering crowd with stories or sleight-of-hand tricks, while the music box he set beside him turned out a tinkling version of some old German tune. From music and wizardry, to story-telling, to the basic truths of Christianity—Joseph would lead his enthralled listeners to the Word of God.

[*Joseph Freinademetz: With Thy Whole Strength*, Techny 1952]

Day 8

St. Joseph: True to the End

From Steyl to Rome to Chinese mission centers Joseph Freinademetz proved himself to be adaptive, flexible and energetic in nature, enabling him to efficiently fill diverse positions: head of a catechist school, procurator, rector, pro-vicar (i.e. acting vicar apostolic), provincial superior. Twice heavy blows fell upon Joseph by anti-clerical factions. None broke his

enduring persistence and unalterable faith in God. It was only the fatal blow of typhus fever that debilitated Joseph. With a crucifix near his pillow and a rosary between his fingers, Father Provincial Freinademetz slipped into semi-coma and quietly went into the hands of his God.

[*Joseph Freinademetz: With Thy Whole Strength*, Techny 1952]

Day 9

Saints Arnold and Joseph: Our Models

In both Arnold and Joseph one finds a deep love for the Word of God. In both there was an intense passion to be instruments of God's will. And in both, one finds a living testimony that the Kingdom is open to all, no matter what the race, culture or language or way of life... their openness was also able to include all, seeing in legitimate differences a source of enrichment, even in spite of the difficulties that can sometimes result.

Their lives do have something to say to us today. We live in a multicultural and multireligious world that compels people from the farthest ends of the earth to learn to live together side-by-side. If Arnold and Joseph were able to do it, why can't we?

[Arnold Janssen Secretariat - Steyl]

Of both we could say, their real worth is in:

- their unshakable faith in God,
- their persistence and endurance
- in their love of God
- and above all in God's love and faithfulness to them.

[Opening of the Centennial Year of Arnold and Joseph,
SSpS USA Province]

Sayings of St. Arnold Janssen

The sayings given here are in the English version as found in a variety of publications of the Arnoldus Family. No effort was made to check them with the exact wording of the original documents.

1. Everything is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit's grace.
2. Never will we understand the value of time better than when our last hour is at hand.
3. True love and real trust form the basis of all good teamwork.
4. May you trust in God all the more, the more adverse a matter is.
5. It is not lengthy prayers but generous deeds that touch God's heart.
6. Announcing the gospel is the first and greatest act of charity.
7. Sufferings and crosses are a hard shell containing a sweet fruit.
8. Even when God's will does not correspond to your own desires, it is always beneficial for you.
9. The missionary is not the light but reveals the light — Christ.
10. God loves those who thank him even in suffering.
11. Since love completes all, makes hard things soft, and the difficult easy, let us strive to make all our acts proceed from love.
12. If after mature consideration you do what you recognize to be God's holy will — what does it matter if others find fault with it?
13. May your heart be like an altar, from which the sacrifice of thanksgiving incessantly rises up to God.

14. Ask God for the grace to remain calm even when you are treated unfairly, and never to allow a harsh or contemptuous word to pass your lips.
15. The most important thing in meditation is not reflection but communion with God, above all in love.
16. A servant of the Lord must be prepared to have much vinegar poured into the wine of his or her life.
17. Let us continue, then, with unabated zeal to labor everywhere in the world for the many intentions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for the sublime tasks entrusted to us. ... Let us center all of our efforts.
18. Pray particularly to the Holy Spirit to grant you prudence, courage, patience and great confidence. Armed with these virtues, you can confidently face the future, undisturbed by the many difficulties that may arise now or later, and for which you must be prepared.

[Compiled for Faith Sharing on the closing of the Arnold-Joseph Centennial Year, SSps USA Province]

Sayings of Saint Joseph Freinademetz

The sayings given here are in the English version as found in a variety of publications of the Arnoldus Family. No effort was made to check them with the exact wording of the original documents.

1. Let us pray that no matter what happens to us in this world, our eternity may be a happy one.
2. May the will of God, supreme and almighty, be done.
3. Prayers are the best help you can give a missionary.
4. To suffer with joy is the most beautiful thing in the world and the saints in heaven envy us because of it.
5. The language of love is the only language everyone understands.
6. Do not refuse anything to others, and claim nothing for yourself.
7. Roses grow in the midst of thorns and virtues in the midst of desolation.
8. The most beautiful fortune in life is to be a missionary.
9. The more the Lord blesses us, the more we should work for him.
10. As certain as we are of the truth that God is God, we can be certain that everything happens for our good.
11. I am happy to be where there is the cross and suffering, for God is there.

12. The true faith is the resplendent star that lights up the dark night of this world
13. People are converted only through the grace of God and — may we add — by our love.
14. May fraternal unity strike deep roots in this place so that no storm wind may be strong enough to uproot this tree.
15. Let us all reach out helping hands, assisting one another sincerely.
16. I do not consider the missionary life as a sacrifice that I offer to God, but as the greatest grace that God could have ever given to me.
17. With the grace of the Holy Spirit no effort is ever too late!
18. There is nothing more exhilarating on earth than to work as a zealous religious for the glory of God and the salvation of all.

[Compiled for Faith Sharing on the closing of the Arnold-Joseph Centennial Year, SSs USA Province]

Arnold's Top Ten Bible Passages

Romans 5:5 is one of the five Scripture texts most quoted by the Founder. Some have wondered what are the other texts. Albert Rohner published two volumes of the Founder's notes for his retreat conferences and sermons (Analecta SVD 30 + 31) with an index of all the Scripture references in these two volumes. So it would appear to be an easy task simply to count which texts in the index have the most references. But one also needs to check each reference because sometimes a text is referred to twice in the same talk or is one given in the notes by Rohner. In addition the Founder occasionally adds a simple list of text references relevant to the theme of his talk but without using any of the texts. With this in mind we can set out the following as the ten texts most often quoted by Arnold Janssen:

- 1) **Heb 10:4-7** On coming into the world he said, 'You wanted no sacrifice ...but (cf. **Ps 40:6-8**) you gave me a body... Here I am, I am coming to do your will, God.'
- 2) **Lk 4:18** The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring (cf. **Is 61:1**) the good news to the afflicted.
- 3) **Rom 8:14-17** All who are guided by the Spirit are sons and daughters of God. What you received is the Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry out, 'Abba, Father.' ... And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint - heirs with Christ.
- 4) **1 Cor 3,16** You are a temple of God with the Spirit living in you.
- 5) **Rom 5:5** The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- 6) **Rev 21:3** Here God lives among human beings. He will make his home among them; they will be his people and he will be their God, God-with-them.
- 7) **Jn 3:16** God loved the world so much that he gave his Son that those who believe in him may have eternal life.
- 8) **Jn 15:16** You did not choose me, no, I chose you.
- 9) **2 Cor 11:2** I gave you all in marriage to a single husband, a virgin pure for presentation to Christ.
- 10) **Eph 1:4** He chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love.

The OT text most quoted is **Jer 31:3**: I have loved you with an everlasting love.

Some of the above are actually multiple verses on a theme. So if you ask about the single verses most quoted, the order would be: **Lk 4:18**; **1 Cor 3:16**; **Rom 5:5**; **Rev 21:3**; **Jn 3:16**. Sometimes the content of a Scripture verse is quoted but without giving the reference. **Jn 3:16** (For God so loved the world...), for example, is one used several times in this way in his talks and also in his prayers. The first line of the Prologue to the SVD Constitutions, by the way, does the same.

Not surprisingly, the ten texts reflect those aspects of the Christian mystery that were central to Arnold's spirituality.

[Peter McHugh, SVD
AJSC Newsletter, No. 8, Steyl, February 2008]

We praise You, Blessed One in Three

We praise you, blessed **One in Three**,
who draws us to fullness of life.

We thank you for this Centennial Year
- a year to look back
and to recognize with gratitude
the design of your love,
woven in all our **YESTERDAYS**.

*A year to celebrate
your blessings and wonders
and listen to your voice
speaking through the challenges
of our realities **TODAY**.*

A year to look forward to your promise of **TOMORROW**
knowing that whatever lies ahead,
You are there ahead of us,
You walk with us,
You are the power within us,
Faithful God.

*Call us anew,
as you called Arnold Janssen
and Joseph Freinademetz,
to be living signs of your **WORD**
and true Servants of your **HOLY SPIRIT**.*

As Fr. Arnold pushed back horizons
and took upon his ordinariness
extraordinary tasks,
armed with naked faith, vision, daring,
and a lot of stubborn persistence,
rooted in His love for you, Triune God,
give us the courage to let go of our fears and tepidity.

*Make us bold in following your will
no matter where and how you lead us.
in mission, for mission.*

As Fr. Joseph Freinademetz
heeded the call to leave ALL
only to face suspicion, unbelief,
hostility and persecution in China,
yet turned his suffering into fertile soil
for loving God's flock unto the end,
widen our minds and hearts
to recognize you in the faces
of peoples of all cultures and beliefs.
May we experience your love in our mutual embrace.

*As they took for their only guide
Your holy will
discerned in prayer
and contemplative listening;
and allowed themselves
to be led,
to be shaped,
to be used,
totally trusting you and your oft-mysterious designs,
never asking "How much?"
nor "How long?"
empower us with your Spirit
to follow in their footsteps.*

O Blessed One in Three grant that
like our two saints,
our lives may become living
proclamations of YOUR LOVE,
HOLY TRIUNE GOD, AMEN.

[Lourdes Anne Berbano, SSpS;
published in *PULA –SSpS Botswana-Zambia-South Africa Newsletter*,
January 2008]

Arnold Janssen: Who is this Man?

He was a man of humble origin,
insignificant beginnings,
never considered brilliant,
not famous as Nelson Mandela,
Martin Luther King, or Mahatma Gandhi would be.
He was ordinary.

His grades were “satisfactory,”
“less satisfactory,” sometimes “good.”
He got through to priesthood
by simply working hard and diligently,
becoming a Math teacher, and a strict one at that.

He was the man least likely to succeed
in starting a missionary society,
much less to establish three.
But incredibly, this he did, at a time when there was
religious persecution and church suppression in Germany.
He simply thought that if priests and religious
could not work in their own land,
they should think of the millions of people in the world
who have not heard the Good News
and reach out to them.
His dream: Let us send missionaries to the ends of the earth!
People laughed at him and called him a fool.
He did not have any money.

However, Arnold Janssen had FAITH,
vision, a daring spirit to try the untried,
stubborn persistence.

Anchored in deep faith and prayer,
he had the courage to meet great odds,
shaping a dream to reach out to faraway lands,
rooted in the Trinity, whose love he yearned to make known
to all people of all nations. . .

And so he dared the untried:
with no money in his pocket,
but trusting in the generosity of people,
he founded the Mission Society of the Divine Word,
the Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit,
and Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration.

He never asked the Lord, "How much?" or "How long?"
Taking as his only guide God's holy will
as he learned in prayer,
he looked straight ahead, saying again and again,
"Lord, at your Word, I will lower the net."

Arnold Janssen did not have much.
But what he was, ALL that he was,
he placed totally at God's disposal -
including his faults and his personality weaknesses.
Humbly, he was willing to be shaped,
and to be used for God's design
in God's own way,
in God's own time.

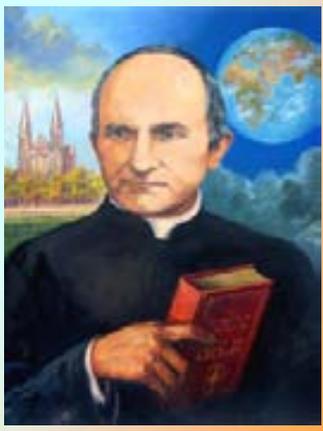
In total love and faithful commitment,
Arnold Janssen lowered his net, and God did the rest!

Reflection:

St. Arnold Janssen is the man we speak of, the man who did ordinary things in an extraordinary way (attested by Cardinal Rossi in connection with the process of beatification). This is the man who became the head of more than 10,000 men and women religious and lay partners from every corner of the world in carrying out the great mission of spreading the Good News.

As a missionary committed to the WORD, do I nurture and pass on St. Arnold's passion for the WORD?

[Lourdes Anne Berbano, SSpS;
published in *Echoes - Newsletter of the Philippines North*,
Vol. LIV, No. 1, January 2009]



Saint Arnold Janssen

(1837-1909)

Founder:

- SVD
- SSpS
- SSpSAP

Saint Joseph Freinademetz

(1852-1908)

**Pioneer Missionary
in China**

