

Father, Leader, Founder

St. Arnold Janssen exemplifies them all

By Father Stanley Plutz SVD

Someone characterized St. Arnold Janssen as a father, leader and founder. Can we justify giving him these titles? In my estimation, the answer is yes.

St. Arnold Janssen did his best to respect each of the members of the Society of the Divine Word as a person, made in the image of God, and as a temple of the Holy Spirit. He welcomed each and tried to form each one into a true missionary—as a partner of the Divine Word and as a person filled and led by the Holy Spirit. He tried to lead each to holiness by helping that person to be a true missionary, priest, brother, or sister, by a life of holiness, proclaiming Jesus by word and example. He established his members firmly in their missionary vocation by devising a constitution directing them how to live a life of holiness in giving missionary service by proclaiming the Gospel either through principally preaching or principally praying.

Arnold Composed a Set of Evening Prayers

In the minor seminary, Arnold and his fellow seminarians prayed evening prayers. He liked to pray these prayers. He wanted his family at home to have similar prayers, so as a young seminarian he composed a set of evening prayers for them. His parents, brothers and sisters prayed these evening prayers and shared them with their relatives, friends and neighbors.

Quarter-Hour Prayer

St. Arnold likewise in his youth invented a means of personally keeping in contact with God. To do so he prayed the acts of faith, hope and charity every quarter hour at the signal of the church tower clock or the chime of the clock at home or in school. He would pray:

O God, eternal truth, I believe in you.

O God, our strength and salvation, I trust in you.

O God, infinite goodness, I love you with my whole heart.

Studies

Father Janssen graduated from the minor seminary with an *Abitur* degree (the German equivalent of an associate of arts degree). Since he was too young to enter the major seminary, he asked the bishop for permission to study at a university and become a qualified teacher. After he succeeded in passing all the exams, he was offered a teaching position in a Berlin school at an attractive starting salary, but he chose to enter the major seminary and become a priest.

As a student in the university, Father Janssen had entered a mathematics contest. He was the only one to correctly solve the problem, by following a correct procedure. He distinguished carefully filling 90 columns in a regulation notebook and used many diagrams and illustrations. He used the prize money to treat his dad to a trip to the university and down the Rhine River; his mother was too sickly to make the trip.

Teacher-Priest

Arnold became a priest and took upon himself the service of the Church in proclaiming the Gospel and administering the sacraments to persons by word and example, especially to persons in the local parish and most especially by teaching the boys in the high school, where the bishop had assigned him.

As a teacher, he prepared his lessons well and taught the lessons clearly. He acquired equipment for teaching science, bought books for the library. He corrected the students' test papers and compositions and gave fair grades. He gave scientific lectures to the people of the area for which he charged a small entrance fee to raise money to buy scientific equipment and library books.

Apostleship of Prayer Promoter

When the organization called the "Apostleship of Prayer" arrived in Germany from France, Father Janssen read about it, liked its devotion to the Sacred Heart of

Jesus, the morning offering, the rosary, and prayer for the intentions of our Holy Father.

He signed up to become a member and campaigned for others to become members. He likewise wrote a booklet explaining the organization. So zealous was he that the director of the organization had him appointed as diocesan director. Over the next several years, during the longer vacations, Father Janssen walked from parish to parish until he had established units of the apostleship in 300 of the 350 parishes of the diocese.

Knight of Our Lady

For 12 years, Father Janssen promoted the Kingdom of God by his teaching, his helping in the parish, his promoting the apostleship, until God in his Divine Providence took him out of his teaching position in a high school to greater works for God's kingdom. It happened in this way: Father Janssen and the other priest who was teaching in the school took turns giving religious instructions in the hall on Sundays to out-of-school youth.

Father Janssen noticed that the bare hall lacked a proper atmosphere for religious instructions, so he got the idea of giving a few lectures on some scientific topics, charging a small entrance fee and thus raising enough money to have a statue of our Blessed Mother made for the hall.

He brought the idea up to some fellow teachers at a coffee break. They thought that it was a good idea, so Father Janssen went ahead with the lectures and raised the money. But when a member of the school board, who had not been at the coffee break heard of Father Janssen's plan, he objected strongly. He said Father Janssen could use the money for scientific equipment or some other statue but not one of Mary. He persuaded the other members of the school board to side with him.

Father Janssen, a true champion of Our Lady, a knight of old, insisted that he had

raised the money for a statue of the Blessed Mother. The controversy went on for years. Neither side would give in. Finally, Father Janssen with the bishop's permission tendered his resignation and the school board accepted it. Father Janssen now found himself free to give his time to an apostolate more direct than being a full-time teacher in a particular school.

Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart

Father Janssen, however, needed a place to stay. Since the Ursuline nuns needed a chaplain for themselves and their students, he found a position with them in Kempen. The Ursuline Sisters had a house for the chaplain, so he stayed there, offered Holy Mass for them and their students, taught one or another class to the girls, and helped out in the parishes in town.

Since he still had extra time, he began publishing a monthly magazine, and through it, he promoted prayer in the spirit of the apostleship of prayer. While getting material for articles, he learned more and more about the needs of people living in so-called pagan lands who had never heard of Jesus and the Church that He founded.

Father Janssen gradually became more and more aware that while other countries in Europe had seminaries for training and sending out missionaries, Germany had none. In his magazine he began to campaign for a person to begin a mission seminary, to gather priests and train young men to be missionaries, and for people to contribute money for the enterprise.

He printed 10,000 copies of the first issue of the magazine. Through this publication he animated the German-speaking people to missionary awareness just as he himself had become aware of the missions and their needs through the apostleship of prayer.

Mission Seminary

Father Arnold did not consider himself able to be a missionary and go to the

missions because of age and poor health. But he was trying his best to bring the German people to an awareness of the need of sharing the Gospel with people who had not heard of Jesus and his Church. The same was the case in founding a mission seminary for training persons to become missionaries. He did not consider himself to have the necessary qualities to lead in such an enterprise until Monsignor Raimondi of the China mission brought to his awareness that he had the necessary background and experience with his 12 years of teaching and administration to begin an apostolic school for boys and young men who wanted to become missionaries.

Once Father Janssen saw how God had prepared him to start and manage an apostolic school for boys and young men who wanted to become missionaries, he looked for a property and buildings where a start could be made. He went across the border into Holland because Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and his persecution of the Church in Germany made such an enterprise illegal. There in Holland he came across an inn for sale costing just the amount he had received from benefactors, enough to buy the land and the building with enough left over to make some necessary repairs on the building. Father kept his readers informed of the developments.

A young carpenter applied to become a missionary. Father Janssen accepted him on condition that he would do some needed carpentry work while Father Janssen himself would begin to teach him Latin (necessary for priests in those days.)

Our Blessed Mother's Birthday, 1875

A diocesan priest and two seminarians near ordination to the priesthood joined Father Janssen. He fixed the date of the blessing of the inn and the official beginning of the mission seminary for Sept. 8, the birthday of our Blessed Mother, in this way asking her to take the enterprise under her motherly care and protection.

Father Janssen's Capuchin brother with the permission of his superior joined

Father Janssen to help him get started. He was Brother Juniper, an excellent beggar. He was able to keep food on the table for the small community. Father Janssen soon sent Brother Juniper into a nearby town to buy a chime clock to give the community members a signal each 15 minutes for praying the Quarter Hour Prayer, previously mentioned.

Father Janssen alerted the readers of his Sacred Heart magazine that a new building was needed to accommodate the many boys and young men who wanted to become missionaries. (Money kept coming in, small amounts from poor but generous persons. Father Janssen had entrusted all his financial matters to St. Joseph, who always supplied what was needed, though at times much prayer was needed to get generous people to send it.)

In his magazine, Father Janssen called for volunteer workmen to help put up the new building and to do other tasks; a number of men responded. Eventually, some of them became Divine Word Brothers.

The printer of his monthly magazine served notice that his printing company could no longer print it. What to do? Look for another printer? Or should he do his own printing? He decided on the latter. He bought a small printing press and hired a master printer. At the blessing of the press, the members of the community and some town folk each took a turn at running off a page which that person kept as a souvenir. Father Janssen had explained, before sprinkling the holy water on the machine, the value of the printed word in promoting the Kingdom of God.

The new building when completed began to be used first at the request of a bishop for retreats for his priests. Also groups of lay men on weekends and vacation time began using the building for a retreat.

In the meantime, the few seminarians near completion of their studies were ordained and were on fire to go to the missions. Outstanding among them was

Father Joseph Freinademetz, who had come as a young priest to become a missionary.

Father Janssen traveled to Rome to beg for a mission territory in China for his young missionaries, but he had no success, so he settled for accepting Monsignor Raimondi's invitation to send them to him in Hong Kong, where he was in charge. Meanwhile, Father Janssen continued his negotiations for a mission territory on the China mainland for the Divine Word Missionaries. Father Janssen sent Father Freinademetz and John von Anzer to Monsignor Raimondi in Hong Kong.

Young Ladies Apply

Young ladies, who discerned having a vocation to be missionaries but finding no convent in Germany to enter for becoming a missionary sister, appealed individually to Father Janssen to help them. They reasoned that since he had established a mission seminary for young men, he could also help them to become missionaries. Although Father Arnold had written in the Sacred Heart Messenger about the need of sisters in the missions, it had not entered his mind that he would found a congregation of missionary sisters.

He accepted these young ladies after interviewing them as maids to work in the kitchen with the sisters of a congregation who had volunteered to help out with cooking and laundry in the mission seminary. He in the meanwhile prayed to discern God's will in this matter of establishing a missionary sister congregation.

Among the first maids were Helena Stollenwerk and Hendrina Stenmanns, who were to become co-foundresses (with Father Janssen) of a congregation of missionary sisters.

Development

More and more boys kept coming to the mission seminary. New additions to the building continued to be made to accommodate them. A large double church with twin towers had been constructed. A complete seminary course had been

organized. Father Janssen had acquired a mission territory on mainland China, namely, South Shantung with some 12 million people but only 158 registered Catholics.

Father Janssen had been sending a good number of the newly ordained priests to China but also a few select ones to Rome to become professors for his major seminarians. A constitution had been written by Father Janssen and his advisors.

On this constitution the priests and brothers made their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience thus establishing them a religious missionary society.

1889

The year 1889 proved to be a special one. As mentioned, the mission seminary at Steyl overflowed with persons. The founder had sought to establish another foundation in Austria. He had made some eight trips there and had gone to the officials of church and government, even a few times to the emperor.

He had become an Austrian citizen to receive permission to establish a foundation in Austria. Finally, he had received permission to have an establishment there in Austria as a religious society, as the Society of the Divine Word.

A beautiful church in honor of the Holy Spirit had been built and a seminary building constructed on a property near Vienna. A group of major seminarians led by Father Janssen and some priests and brothers had arrived. After the blessing of the church and residence, classes for the seminarians could continue in Austria from what had been started in Holland.

In the same year, the maids started their novitiate to become sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit. The sisters consider their foundation day as December 8, 1889, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Father Janssen himself was their first novice master since the experienced professed sister he had invited from

another congregation to be novice directress had died.

Father Janssen had worked hard to produce a constitution for the sisters. He could use the knowledge he had gained from producing a constitution for his brothers and priests, but he also gathered a number constitutions from established congregations for women.

He likewise consulted the sister postulants for their comments after giving them each a copy of the proposed rule. The bishop approved this constitution on a temporary basis, so the novitiate could begin.

Teachers' Training College for the Sisters

In the convent of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, soon after they made their first profession of vows, Father Janssen began a study program for them which eventually became a teachers' training college. Several women who had entered were teachers and Father Janssen himself was a teacher. Father Founder reasoned that teachers would be more readily accepted by the people in the missions and thus could have more influence with the people than Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters who were not teachers. Some sisters who were more talented for studies were selected to take the teachers' training program.

Argentina

Likewise in that year, Father Janssen accepted a second mission territory, namely, Argentina. German Catholic immigrants in Argentina were in danger losing their faith because of lack of priests. The officials of the Catholic Church in Rome had pleaded with Father Janssen to send a few of his priests to minister to the Catholics. The founder saw Argentina as an alternative mission for some of his priests whom he thought would not do well in China but could do well in Argentina. And in addition, he saw Argentina as a possible mission for his Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters since it was too dangerous at that time to send them to China.

In Demand

It is interesting to notice that in the beginning of the mission seminary, Father Janssen had to beg for a mission territory where he could send his missionaries to proclaim the Gospel, but as time passed and the missionaries with the blessing of God had proved themselves good and capable missionaries, bishops in various dioceses and officials in Rome begged Father Janssen to send his missionaries to help in the mission work of the Church. Father Founder also sent his men to other countries in South America, such as Ecuador, Brazil, and Chile.

He commissioned men for Togo in Africa and likewise for New Guinea. Together with the priests and brothers, he sent his sisters to help with the women and girls.

Adoration Sisters

A strong believer in and lover of prayer, Father Founder realized his desire of founding a congregation of adoration sisters to worship Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament day and night and plead for the blessing of Jesus on his active priests, brothers, and sisters, especially those in the missions.

To do this, he asked for volunteers from among the active missionary sisters to become contemplative adoration missionary sisters. These volunteers moved into a separate part of the active missionary sisters' building.

The adoration sisters likewise kept the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary 1896 as the date of their founding. These sisters were given a pink habit; they were to be roses before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The sisters established earlier wore a pastel blue habit. Eventually, to distinguish the sisters of the two congregations, they became popularly known as the Blue Sisters (Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters) and the Pink Sisters (Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters).

Permission Obtained

The officials of German colonies expressed interest in having German missionaries working in their colonies. Since Father Janssen sent missionaries to Togo and New Guinea, both German colonies, he asked the German government for permission to establish a mission seminary on German soil.

Father Janssen reasoned with the German officials that if the government wanted German missionaries for their colonies, they needed to give permission for establishing a seminary for training those future missionaries.

He eventually received permission for establishing a mission seminary as a school, not as a religious society. From these negotiations arose two minor seminaries, namely Holy Cross and St. Wendelin.

Japan

As God continued to bless the Society of the Divine Word with large ordination classes; Father Janssen started to look for a new mission for his men.

The Holy Spirit led him to consider a mission among the non-Christians in Japan. A bishop who was interested in opening a secondary school in his diocese contacted Father Janssen and offered the project to the Divine Word Missionaries.

Father Janssen saw this development as an opportunity to involve his men in teaching and doing research in the sciences, for he knew that the Japanese were very interested in the sciences, and Father Janssen had trained his seminarians in the sciences according to the second external aim of the Society of the Divine Word, which he had laid down for his members, namely the cultivation of the sciences.

Father Janssen told the bishop that he also had missionaries to do pastoral work among the people in the diocese. A contract was drawn up, and Father Janssen started sending missionaries to Japan.

United States

Brother Wendelin Meyer went to the founder and offered to go to the United States to sell the Steyl publications to German immigrants. Father Janssen thought and prayed this idea over.

He consulted with the priest in charge of the printing press. After some time, he gave permission for Brother Wendelin to go to the United States and sell magazines. While selling the magazines, Father Founder told him to look for a place where a foundation for the Society of the Divine Word could be made.

Brother moved to the United States in 1895 and traveled in the East. Soon thereafter, Father Janssen sent other brothers and priests. One of the priests signed a contract for a place in the East, which Father Janssen refused to sign.

He urged the fathers and brothers to look around more. When they found a place near Chicago, Father Founder, after careful inquiry, approved of a foundation there. A technical school for boys was opened, which was managed mostly by the brothers who were masters in their trades. The priests helped out the surrounding parishes.

African-American Mission

Brother Wendelin heard about the African-Americans in the Southern United States and alerted the founder. Father Janssen realized that such a mission would be in keeping with the aim of Society of the Divine Word and allowed a start to be made.

However because of deep prejudice in the South, the start failed when Father Aloysius Heick had to be smuggled out of the area—in a piano box some say while others say in a coffin—because of the whites who violently opposed starting a school for African-Americans.

When news reached Steyl, the councilors of Father Janssen favored giving up such a mission. Father Janssen, however, argued the case by relating that he had a hard time in the beginning to found the Society, and thus Father Heick should try again in another place.

The second attempt succeeded. More parishes were opened, and a St. Augustine Seminary for African-Americans was started. From the seminary, in the era before integration laws, more than a hundred African-American priests were ordained, among whom nine men became bishops.

Anthropos

Father Wilhelm Schmidt, a professor at St. Gabriel Mission Seminary who studied the languages and customs of the people in the missions, started a scientific magazine, which he named *Anthropos*, meaning "man."

In this magazine, Father Schmidt published articles about the languages and customs of various peoples. He received manuscripts from both professors in Europe and missionaries in the missions.

Father Janssen encouraged it. But since the publication was in the name of Wilhelm Schmidt, Father Janssen tried to persuade him to have published in the name of the Society of the Divine Word.

Father Janssen even got down on his knees and begged him. Father Founder foresaw that his successor, as superior, most probably would not fund the publication if it was not a Society publication and thus it would die. Father Janssen was right. His successor, a finance man, would not

Family Feast

Each year, the spiritual sons and daughters of Father Janssen celebrate the name day of their founder, July 18. Father Janssen had been named after a saint of the locality, namely, St. Arnold.

The day was a free day with a special Mass and program in the morning and in the afternoon a hike out into the country. In 1906 during a little speech at the end of the program, Father Janssen declared that in the future the celebration of his name day would be celebrated as Family Feast, a feast of each and every member of the Arnold Janssen spiritual family all over the world.

Thus, Family Feast has become a popular joyful celebration of the communities of Arnold Janssen all over the world.

Partners of the Divine Word

Some difficulties arose in getting the constitution approved by the cardinal in Rome who had charge of approving the constitutions of religious societies.

The cardinal disagreed with the title "Society of the Divine Word." He suggested that it be called "Adorers of the Divine Word." Father Janssen tried to explain to him that such a change would defeat the purpose of the title.

He wanted his priests and brothers to be not only adorers of the Divine Word but partners in the work of saving people. Having no success with the cardinal, Father Janssen took the matter to the Holy Father, who gave the case to a commission of theologians to study.

The commission after reflecting on the matter said that the title was theologically acceptable. So the pope said, "Let the title stand as it is."

From Technical School to Mission Seminary

With Father Janssen's approval, the technical school at Techny, Illinois, became a mission seminary. Father Founder's approval for the missionary seminary was one of the last official acts of his life.

The Philippines

The last mission that our founder accepted was the Philippine mission. What was the situation? Spanish missionaries, by the grace God, had converted the majority of Filipino people. When most of these missionaries left after America defeated Spain, the nation was almost completely without priests.

A group of Protestant teachers had come and were teaching in public schools. A Filipino priest tried to establish a Filipino church. Father Janssen had been negotiating with an American archbishop of the region in the northern part of the country.

Father Arnold agreed to send his missionaries to minister to the Catholics in eight parishes of the Province of Abra and to evangelize the non-Christians in the mountains of those parishes. But, since Father Arnold died before he could send the missionaries, his successor, Father Nicholas Blum, sent the first two priests.

After a stroke, which weakened and partially paralyzed Father Janssen, he resigned his position as superior general and handed over his responsibilities to his assistant, Father Blum. Father Janssen's last word was "Jesus," Jesus whom he had served so well.

Was St. Arnold Janssen truly a father, leader, and founder, as someone characterized him? He surely was!

Editor's Note: Father Stanley Plutz served as vice postulator for the Cause of the Canonization of St. Arnold Janssen. A native of Wisconsin and a missionary in the Philippines for decades, Father Plutz is the author of four books: "Our Founder: A glimpse into the Inner Working of Our Founder's Mind" (2002), "The Sacred Heart of Jesus, Arnold Janssen Ardent Devotee" (2002), "Spirituality of Saint Arnold" (2004) and "St. Arnold Janssen Memories" (2004).